

**Notes on birds in the Severn and Avon Vales (the “Severn Hams”)
mainly Gloucestershire
October – December 2005**

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 (rather few records in this period).
- 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 Upham Meadow and Summer Leasow, sometimes called the “Great Hay Meadow” at Twyning (Glos) (this site was watched regularly from Bredon, but no swans, geese or ducks were observed); further the north along the Avon is Gwen Finch Reserve near Nafford (Worcs), an area of shallow lakes along the Avon. 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” proper, between Tewkesbury and Gloucester, in which the main wetland areas are Ashleworth and Hasfield Hams, Coombe Hill Meadows, and the Leigh Meadows between the River Chelt and Leigh Brook above Wainlodes. This area also includes Severn Ham at Tewkesbury, the Severn between Lower Lode and Haw Bridge, and the Severn from Wainlodes, past Ashleworth Quay and Sandhurst, to Gloucester.
- Sudmeadow and the Gloucester Landfill Site (GLS) and Port Ham, the urban south of Gloucester, once a flood meadow, now occupied by the Landfill site, which attracts large numbers of gulls, and has a pond attractive to passage and some resident waterbirds.
- Minsterworth Ham, on the west bank of the Severn below Gloucester, opposite Sudmeadow; (few records in this period).
- 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; (few records in this period).

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. When the Severn and Avon flood, there may be extensive floods over the whole floodplain area. The River Chelt carries running water, and is small enough to have muddy edges and mud banks. Coombe Hill Canal is a long disused and overgrown canal, which runs through the centre of Coombe Hill Meadows. Bredon’s Hardwick gravel pits (by the Avon), Ryall gravel pits near Upton (still operational) are all artificial excavations in the floodplain, as are the overgrown Sandhurst and Maisemore brick pits and Walham Pools (all by the Severn). Barrow Ponds have open water, created by the artificial damming of a small tributary of the Chelt.

Weather and flooding: general

Dry, with high pressure in first ten days of October, some rain on 9 October. Some rain in the week of 13 October raised water levels a little. Autumn arrived with a vengeance on 23/24 October, with heavy rain in north Wales (four inches in 24 hours), and raised the level of the Severn considerably (9.30m at Haw Bridge on 27 October was the highest level since the floods in early April), and caused light flooding at Ashleworth Ham and Walmore Common. Further rain locally and higher up the catchment caused a further increase in water levels from 2/3 November, with fairly extensive flooding in mid-November. There was a cold snap from 14 November, with overnight temperatures dropping to -5°C, and freezing fog on 19 & 23 November; light overnight snowfall on 24/25 and 28/29 November, mild weather again with southwesterlies from 30 November. Heavy rain locally on 1/2 December, at a time of high tides in the Severn, caused water levels to rise again in the first few days of December, but they dropped again by 10 December and continued to decrease till the end of the year. Early and mid-December was otherwise generally mild, despite light winds mainly from northeast and northwest; rather colder on 17 December, then mild till 26 December, when a cold spell set in, with very small amounts of snow on 26 December, ice and freezing fog on following days, thaw from 30 December.

Conditions at the main sites

Ashleworth/Hasfield: Water levels were low in early October, but rose fast from 25-29 October, with water pouring back into the reserve over the southern sluice, and some water on field 23 at Hasfield where the main ditch flooded surrounding fields; as a result there was a small flood in late October, then a higher one in the first few days of November, with quite extensive flooding in mid-November, dropping quite fast by 19 November, and back to normal by 26 November. Water levels rose again, both on the reserve and at Hasfield Ham, in the days after 2 December, but dropped again on 10 December, and continued to drop until the end of the year. Reserve iced over on 29 December, but thawed rapidly.

Coombe Hill: There was only a little water in the scrapes in early October, but they filled by the end of the month, but there were no floods originating from the Chelt in late October. Shallow flooding in the first few days of November created excellent feeding conditions for geese and ducks, floods increasing in mid November, with Grundon Hide still inaccessible on 17-19 November, though water levels were beginning to drop; hide just accessible by 23 November, water levels decreasing fast on 26 November, little floodwater left on 29 November. Levels rose again in early December, the Grundon Hide being accessible only with difficulty from about 2-7 December; from 14 December both Grundon and Long Pool Hides were easily accessible, and all floodwater had disappeared by the end of the month.

Leigh Meadows: No surface water in early October; high Severn levels at the end of the month and in early November did not cause the Chelt or local brooks to overflow before 6 November, but the Chelt did overflow its banks about 14/15 November, subsiding again by 17 November. No flooding in December.

Walmore Common: Unusually for recent years, there were two floods, one in November and one in December. Extensive flooding by 25 October, as ditches overflowed, still there on 29 October. Another flood in late November/early December, which had subsided by 12 December.

Bird records

Grebes

Little Grebe: Odd records of this species, a few of which breed locally, though it never occurs in large numbers. One at Walham Pools 4 October. At GLS pond, a juvenile (probably from the pair that bred there) still present on 4 October and 7 November. At Gwen Finch Reserve, Nafford (Worcs), two on 16 October, one on 19 December. At Ashleworth, one on 7 December. At Coombe Hill, one on floodwater on 10 December. At Bredon's Hardwick (Worcs) one on 19 December. Great Crested Grebe was recorded only at Bredon's Hardwick, where up to seven birds were present throughout the period.

Cormorant: The main winter loafing site remained Bredon's Hardwick Pits on the Avon, where the species was recorded throughout the period in relatively low numbers, varying from 10 to 21; birds were also occasionally seen perching on riverside trees, notably one by GLS and one by the Deerhurst Parish Drain outlet at Wainlodes (one or two seen perched on the latter in December). A single at Nafford on 21 October. Other birds occasionally seen in flight over the river: one flying upriver at Ashleworth on 7 December; three over Coombe Hill on 10 December. One unusual record was a Shag at Ryall's Pits (Worcs) in early October.

Bittern: One record of this species, very rarely recorded in the area; one disturbed from its perch high in the Broad Mere withy bed, very close to the boardwalk, at Coombe Hill on 29 November, probably a new arrival, following overnight snow from east (one, almost certainly a different bird, was noted on the same day at Slimbridge); the Broad Mere bird was seen again several times until 3 December; it may conceivably have stayed longer, as the species is very secretive and hard to observe.

Little Egret: None at Coombe Hill where up to ten had been noted in summer, but one at Nafford (Worcs) on 7 November, and several at Walmore (nearer the estuary from where most birds probably originate): one on 23 November, two on 27 November and one on 11 & 23 December.

Grey Heron: As usual, small numbers (normally not more than up to three or four) throughout the period at Nafford, Bredon's Hardwick, Ashleworth, Hasfield, Coombe Hill, Leigh Meadows, Port Ham and Walmore, but seven at Hasfield on 27 October.

Swans

Mute Swan: Several of the local nesters remained in the area with their cygnets throughout the period, notably: the pair that had nested by the Wharf at Coombe Hill (female ringed P24) with four cygnets; the pair that nested near the Red Lion (male 3OJ) with four cygnets; the unringed pair with five cygnets that nested at Ashleworth; and the pair at Handkerchief Pool that failed to produce any cygnets. Several other unattached cygnets appeared, no doubt birds chased away by their parents; at Coombe Hill two tried to attach themselves to P 24 family but the male repulsed them angrily. In addition there was an assortment of birds from elsewhere, both adults and immatures, many of which went to graze on the Leigh Meadows from early December (up to 18 on 24 December); in the evening they went to roost on open water, at Coombe Hill when water levels there were high, at Ashleworth when water levels dropped at Coombe Hill. There was a total of nearly 40 in the Coombe Hill/Ashleworth area on 24 December. On 6 December a group of five was flying from Coombe Hill to Ashleworth; one of the birds was seen to hit the overhead power-line, apparently striking the cable with its wing; it dropped like a stone to the ground; these power-lines, which have no signs like balls to make them obvious to flying birds, continue to present a major hazard to birds in the area, especially large water birds.

Whooper Swan: A welcome return of wintering Whoopers, one of the highlights of the area, which had been absent for the last two winters. From 1990 to 2002/03, a small group of Whooper Swans (up to 12 birds) wintered in the area, generally roosting on the water at Ashleworth Ham and flying to feed by day in the Leigh Meadows. They did not reappear in autumn 2003 which was unusually dry, nor in autumn 2004. None were seen this year in the light floods of early November (which appeared to provide suitable habitat), but a family party of five (two adults and three cygnets) was reported on Cobney Meadows on 23 November and at Ashleworth in evening of 26 November. These birds appeared to have been passing through, and there was no sign of them staying and adopting the old roosting and feeding behaviour.

On 14 December, a party of three adults flew into Coombe Hill (one of them, a very nervous bird, had been marked with a large plastic coded ring at WWT Martin Mere in Lancashire in January 2003 and had wintered there in 2002/03, 2003/04 and 2004/05); all three flew off, but the two unringed birds, apparently a pair, were seen later in the day grazing with Mute Swans on the Leigh Meadows. The pair was clearly roosting at Ashleworth, where it was seen again at first light on 15 & 17 December; on both days they flew soon after first light to graze on Leigh Meadows; this familiarity with local conditions suggests they may perhaps have been here in a previous winter. On 20 December the pair roosted with some Mute Swans at Coombe Hill instead of Ashleworth, flying off soon after first light towards Leigh Meadows, where they were found grazing with Mutes later in the day. The transfer of roosting site to Coombe Hill was short lived; by 22 December they were once more roosting at Ashleworth (probably because the drop in water levels at Coombe Hill meant the site was no longer safe from foxes at night). They were regularly seen grazing on the Leigh Meadows until the end of the month.

Bewick's Swan: The first arrivals at Slimbridge were three on 20 October; 17 different individuals had been recorded by 17 November; an influx on 19/20 November brought numbers to 85 on 21 November and 107 by 24 November; 130 (22 cygnets) were seen on 8 December; maximum of 208 (41 cygnets) on 27 December, by which time at least 222 different individuals had been recorded by ring and bill pattern. The proportion of cygnets is the highest for several years, indicating a good breeding season in the Russian tundra. As usual, some of the early arrivals went to reconnoitre at Walmore, where three were seen on 25 October, two on 28 October, two briefly on 29 October and 6 November, with five at Rodley on 13 November. More appeared at Walmore during flooding in November and early December: 10 on 23 November, 13 on 25 November, 16 on 2 December, two (unringed) on 4 December, three on 12 December (one of them a yearling, ringed as a one year old in August 2005 on the Petchora Delta north of the Arctic Circle), 13 (a family with three cygnets, five adults and three yearlings, including the Petchora ringed bird) on 16 December, four on 23 December; numbers up to 33 on 28 December (ten cygnets), and 26 (ten cygnets) on 29 December when the Petchora bird and three other rings were read - all adults which had visited Slimbridge in recent winters (one since 1999 and a pair since 2001) and have over the years been regular visitors to Walmore. It would seem that swans which once get used to visiting Walmore return in following years, with their cygnets, thus getting them used to visiting Walmore. None were seen at Coombe Hill or Ashleworth during floods in late October and early November, but there were occasional sightings at Coombe Hill, no doubt of birds from Slimbridge, in the mid November flood: two flew in from SW on 9 November, two on 12 November, six on 20 November, ten (four cygnets) on 23 November; also seven flew over on 27 December.

Geese

From November, as soon as water levels rose, a goodly number of Canadas and Greylags, no doubt feral, began to roost at Coombe Hill; they often flew out fairly early in the morning to feed at other sites (some at Ashleworth, some perhaps on the Avon around Tewkesbury, some perhaps to Barrow Ponds?), but sometimes stayed all day in the Coombe Hill area. When water levels dropped at Coombe Hill in mid December, the number of geese decreased sharply.

Greylag Goose: A flock of about 70, seen mainly at Bredon's Hardwick and Coombe Hill, probably the same birds moving to and fro, preferring Coombe Hill in time of flood? At Bredon's Hardwick, 13 on 9 October, 10 on 7 November, 27 on 28 November and 74 on 19 December. 32 flew over Coombe Hill on 1 October (so occurred there before the floods rose); during the floods, 66 on 22 October, at least 20 on 6 November, 54 on 26 November, 67 on 6 December, only three on 14 December, none on 20 December.

White-fronted Goose: One adult, apparently wild, with Greylags at Coombe Hill on 6 & 10 December. A flock of 25 flew over Castle Meads, Gloucester, going south, no doubt to the estuary, on 20 December.

Canada Goose: At Bredon's Hardwick: 35 on 9 October, 55 on 7 November, 200 on 13 November, 25 on 28 November, 105 on 19 December. Some at Coombe Hill in October: 95 on 18 October, 19 on 22 October. Numbers increased (as in previous years) when the floods rose, at Coombe Hill, which seemed the preferred roosting spot, though some spent the night at Ashleworth: at Coombe Hill 370 on 2 November, at least 350 on 6 November, 570 on 17 November, at least 300 roosting on 26 & 29 November; these roosting birds mainly flew off about an hour after first light, some in the direction of Ashleworth, others of Tewkesbury; 620 feeding and not flying out to feed elsewhere on 6 December, 470 on 10 December, only 180 on 14 December, none on 20 December. At Ashleworth, 320 on 26 November; none roosting on 1 December but about 120 flew in mid-morning; about 150 on 10 December; 30 roosted on 15 December, 260 on 17 December, none in late December. About 150 at Tirley Court (where they are fed and some breed) on 17 December. Where did the big numbers of November go when the water levels dropped? Some at Bredon's Hardwick, some Tirley Court, some Barrow Ponds?

Canada x Greylag hybrid: One at Coombe Hill on 6 November and 10 December, probably the bird seen at Twynning on 3 March 2004.

Barnacle Goose: At Coombe Hill, two with Canada Geese on 6 December.

Ducks

Shelduck: This species often appears in the Severn Hams from December onwards, especially when there is light flooding: one at Nafford on 19 December; three on floodwater at Hasfield on 7 December; one at Coombe Hill and Ashleworth (maybe the same bird) on 24 December.

Surface-feeding ducks: In late November and early December, it appeared that there were 2,000 to 2,500 ducks in the Coombe Hill/Ashleworth area; when water levels were high they appeared to prefer Coombe Hill, because even with high water there were edges for Wigeon to graze; when levels dropped most of them moved to the open water area at Ashleworth; there was clearly much movement to and fro between the two sites. An increase by 10 December when there were 2100 at Coombe Hill and 1500 at Ashleworth. During the cold spell after Christmas, excellent detailed counts were possible on the ice at Ashleworth (total 1800); in icy conditions at Ashleworth, the birds kept round small gaps in the ice at night and Wigeon seemed disinclined to graze round the edges at first light, but came to graze in mid morning, presumably because they were no longer apprehensive of being surprised by foxes or other predators. When the ice melted, they seemed less anxious to graze around the edges. No attempts at cannon-netting were made, though conditions would have been excellent.

Very often, Wigeon, Teal, Pintail and Gadwall were courting, generally in small noisy parties, in which up to ten males, calling loudly, pursued a single female, trying at the same time to keep rivals at a distance.

Wigeon: As usual the most numerous duck, grazing round the edges of the water; undoubtedly much interchange between Coombe Hill and Ashleworth, perhaps also with Bredon's Hardwick. At Nafford

100 on 4 December. At Bredon's Hardwick: 45 on 2 October, 140 on 9 October; 300 on 13 November, 430 on 28 November; as many as 700 on 19 December. At Ashleworth, 70 on 18 October, 250 on Hasfield side on 27 October, 1500 on 13 November, 600 on 7 December, 1300 on 10 December, 700 on 17 December, 800 on 20 December, 1250 on 29 December. At Coombe Hill, 36 on 15 October, 150 on 22 October, 645 on 6 November, 1000 on 9 November, 1300 on 25 November, 1600 on 26 November, only 550 left on 29 November as floods dropped, but 1000 on 1 December, some pairing, 1900 on 10 December with flood up again, but only 700 on 14 December as floods dropped, and 200 on 20 December, 150 on 24 December. At Walmore fair numbers while the floods lasted: 50 on 27 October, 100 on 29 October, 150 on 6 November, 400 on 13 & 23 November, only two left on 12 December.

Gadwall: Small but respectable numbers of this scarcer species: at Bredon's Hardwick, five on 7 November. At Ashleworth two on 29 October, 15 on 29 November, ten in courting parties on 6 December, eight on 24 December; as many as 30 on 29 December. At Coombe Hill, 5 on 6 November, ten on 6 December, five on 14 December. At Leigh Meadows, two on 6 November. At Walmore, two on floodwater on 27 October, five on 6 November, 20 on 23 November.

Teal: Teal are the most difficult duck species to count, as they often hide in thick vegetation where they may be overlooked especially when these areas are inaccessible, but there were generally several hundred in the Long Pool at Coombe Hill, or in the thicker vegetation at Ashleworth; the high numbers at Walmore were quite unprecedented. There must be movement between the sites. At GLS five on 5 October. At Nafford, 15 on 9 October, 70 on 13 November, 140 on 19 December. At Longdon 80 on 4 December. At Ashleworth, 30 on 18 October, 85 on 27 October, 190 on 29 November, 200 on 1 December, 150 on 20 December, 375 on 29 December. At Coombe Hill, 68 on 15 October, 300 on 29 October, 425 on 6 November, 580 on 25 November, at least 200 on 6 December, 300 on 20 December in Short Pool, 250 on 24 December. At Walmore, 80 on floodwater on 27 October, 100 on 29 October, 150 on 6 November, 350 on 13 November, 450 on 23 November, massive flock of 950 on the Common on 12 December with floods dropped elsewhere in the area, still 350 on 16 December, but only 50 on 29 December.

Mallard: Several counts of a hundred or more, higher than in recent years: maximum at Bredon's Hardwick 60 on 28 November; at Ashleworth, 120 on 14 October, 110 on 15 November; at Coombe Hill, 100 on 29 October, with 130 (including some call ducks and hybrids) on 6 November; at Walmore 100 on 27 October, 150 on 13 November, 220 on 23 November.

Pintail: Numbers remained fairly low, with no sign of the high numbers that have occurred in some years of autumn flooding. At Longdon, 70 on 4 December. At Ashleworth, 56 on 29 November, 50 on 10 December. Recorded at Coombe Hill from mid October: 37 on 9 November, 85 on 15 November, 60 on 6 December; and 80, mainly males, on 10 December, often in small courting parties with eight or nine males courting a single female. At Walmore ten on 2 October and 6 November, but 104 on 13 November, 60 on 23 November.

Shoveler: Numbers of up to 90 on the permanent water surface at Ashleworth, usually less at Coombe Hill, up to ten at Bredon's Hardwick and Nafford. At Ashleworth, 12 on 27 October, 10 on 17 November but 89 on 29 November, up to 60 throughout December with 90 on 29 December. At Coombe Hill, three on 29 October, five on 6 November, 12 on 17 November, 20 on 10 December, but 50 on 20 December. At Walmore 5 on 27 October, 12 on 6 November, 54 on 13 November, 40 on 23 November, 10 on 12 December.

Diving ducks: This group is always less numerous on the shallow waters than surface feeders.

Pochard: Three at Bredon's Hardwick on 9 October. Four on floodwater at Coombe Hill on 19 November.

Tufted Duck: Up to 25 at Bredon's Hardwick. One at Walmore on 13 November. One on Coombe Hill floodwater on 14 December. One at Ashleworth several dates from 3 to 14 December.

Goldeneye: A female on the GLS pond from 22 to 25 November. One at Coombe Hill on 17 December.

Ruddy Duck: An unusual record of an immature male from the Long Pool hide at Coombe Hill on 14 December; this may have been the first for the reserve.

Raptors

Sparrowhawk: Regularly seen in ones and twos throughout the period. At Ashleworth, two on 1 December, one on 10 December. At Coombe Hill, two on 9 October, one on 17 November, two on 26 November, singles several dates in December. At Leigh Meadows, singles in October and November. At Walmore one on 16 December.

Goshawk: At Walmore, one on 11 December.

Buzzard: There were signs of signs of visible movement in early October: six together over Ashleworth on 1 October, and at Coombe Hill, Leigh Meadows and Ashleworth, presumed young birds giving high-pitched cries from high up in trees. At Port Ham, bird giving the high pitched calls on 3 & 4 October, again at Ashleworth on 4 October. Otherwise recorded very often at all sites in ones and twos with eight at Ashleworth on 13 November, four on 17 November and three on 1 December

Kestrel: Some signs of visible movement on 1 October with three at Coombe Hill. Otherwise recorded in ones and twos throughout the period at all sites.

Merlin: A female at Leigh Meadows, going south on 1 October; and another on 12 November. One at Sudmeadow on 27 October. One hunting at Coombe Hill on 31 December.

Peregrine: One or two recorded very regularly from mid October to the end of December, often resting on the line of pylons linking Ashleworth and Leigh Meadows. A female with prey on a pylon at Port Ham, Gloucester on 3 October. At Coombe Hill, a female on 16 October and one on 6 and 31 December. At Sudmeadow, one on 15 December. May have been the same birds at all sites. At Walmore one on 6 November.

Game birds and Rails

Water Rail: This species seems to have been particularly well recorded (usually by call) this autumn, mainly in the Broad Mere at Coombe Hill, where two or three have been heard on practically every visit from October onwards. Likewise at Ashleworth, especially in December. One at GLS pond on 23 November. At Walmore two on 11 December, and one seen on 29 December.

Moorhen: Regular in ditches at Coombe Hill and Ashleworth.

Coot: Numbers are usually low in autumn, then build up in late winter and early spring, as breeders take up territory. But this year, there have been birds present from late November at Ashleworth (eight on 26 November, 10 on 1 December, 15 on 20 December) and there were two or three in the Long Pool at Coombe Hill from mid-December. At Tirley Court, one on 17 December.

Waders

In general rather few resident flocks, except during flood episodes at Coombe Hill, when Lapwing were joined by other species. Snipe were generally recorded in the largest numbers (up to 50 often with one or two Jack Snipes) at two favoured sites: the Short Pool a Coombe Hill and two unmown fields at Ashleworth. The odd Green Sandpiper winters, generally on streams and ditches. The highlight was the record of two species of Phalarope, highly unusual.

Golden Plover: One going south, calling, over GLS on 5 October. Occasional flocks at Coombe Hill, not generally staying: 17 on 28 November, a flock of 28 flew over on 29 November, nine on 7 December. None at former favourite haunt of Great Hay Meadow.

Lapwing: Some visible movement early in the period at Coombe Hill, with 24 going over to SE and 55 to SW on 9 October; ten to NW on 13 October. At Nafford 180 on 4 December. At Bredon's Hardwick, 320 on 13 November. When floods rose in November and December, fair numbers gathered at Coombe Hill: 230 on 17 November, 120 on 26 November, 220 on 29 November, 215 on 6 December, 95 on 10 December, 300 on 14 December. These flocks may have wandered at times, accounting for observations at Ashleworth of 250 on 1 December, 70 on 7 December, and 200 on 17 December; and at Leigh Meadows of 18 on 17 November and 30 on 26 November. At Walmore too,

there were fair numbers in periods of high water: 50 on 29 October, 130 on 6 November, 130 on 12 December; also 300 on 29 December.

Dunlin: Odd ones with Lapwing flocks at Coombe Hill (two on 25, three on 26 November, one on 10 & 14 December) and at Ashleworth (one on 17 November).

Little Stint: At Coombe Hill, five with Lapwings on 17 November, a most unusual record.

Ruff: At Coombe Hill, three (two males and a female) with Lapwings on 25 & 26 November, two on 29 November.

Jack Snipe: As usual, regular in small numbers at sites where Common Snipe gather; undoubtedly under-recorded, since it is necessary to wade through marshy areas to flush them. At Ashleworth, up to three throughout December. At Coombe Hill, one on 11 October. On the pond at GLS, one on 4 October (the first there for many years).

Snipe: At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, four on 7 October. At Ashleworth, particularly numerous in two fields not mown last summer, with shallow water and stands of last year's canary-grass and sedges: three on 27 October, at least 50 on several dates in December. At Coombe Hill, probably under-recorded because their preferred fields around the Long Pool (also with canary grass and sedges) are largely inaccessible: four on 1 October, 14 on 29 October, two on 17 November, 20 on 29 November, five on 14 December, four on 20 December. At GLS pond, one on 4 October, and two or three at Port Ham and Sudmeadow at the end of December. At Walmore 26 on 11 December, at least five on 12 December, 20 on 16 December.

Black-tailed Godwit: At Coombe Hill, one feeding with Lapwings on 10 December.

Redshank: At Coombe Hill, singles on 15 and 17 November and 9 December, unusual winter records.

Green Sandpiper: Still some migrants early in the period: two at Coombe Hill on 13 October, four on 29 October. But from November onwards, only singles recorded, possibly the same individual moving between Coombe Hill, Leigh Meadows and Wotton Brook, Longford. Noted a couple of times on the muddy banks of the Severn when river levels were low or when water on meadows was iced over: one on the banks of the strongly-flowing Severn near Ashleworth on 7 December, when most floodwater was frozen over; on Severn bank near Wainlodes on 17 December.

Red-necked Phalarope: A juvenile briefly seen on floodwater at Walmore on 29 October, thought by Andy Jayne to be different from the one seen a few days earlier at Slimbridge. An exceptional record.

Grey Phalarope: A first-winter bird at Coombe Hill on 9 November, still present early morning of 10 November. Two phalaropes in one autumn!!

Gulls and Terns

Rather poorly recorded; generally seen flying over between the estuary and inland rubbish tips, occasionally landing on water to wash and drink. Numbers much lower than usual at Bredon's Hardwick.

Lesser Black-backed Gull: At Longdon, 250 on 4 December. At Walmore, 200 on floodwater on 29 October. Yellow-legged Gull: One at Coombe Hill on 25 November; rarely recorded inland. Herring Gull: At Walmore, 20 on floodwater on 29 October. Black-headed Gull: At Longdon, 500 on 4 December. At Ashleworth, 75 on floodwater on 27 October, 50 on 10 December. At Coombe Hill, 20 on floodwater on 6 November, 100 on 10 December. At Walmore, 300 on floodwater on 29 October.

Black Tern: A first ever record from Walmore of a first winter bird that stayed for 40 minutes over the floodwater on 27 October.

Pigeons

Stock Dove: Widespread, often seen, normally in small numbers, but 50 at Longdon on 4 December.

Owls

Barn Owl: One hunting near Apperley at night on 15 October. One at Ashleworth at first light on 17 December. Reported to be more numerous than in previous years around farms in the Ashleworth area. Long-eared Owl: None recorded in any of the traditional winter roosts, despite searches from November onwards. Little Owl: Very few records, but two calling at first light at Ashleworth on 15 December suggests you may need to get up early to record them. Tawny Owl: Two calling at Ashleworth at first light on 17 December, two calling at Tirley at dusk on 27 December.

Kingfisher: Two at Leigh Meadows and one at Coombe Hill on 15 October. One at Wainlodes on 17 December. One at Walmore from October to December.

Woodpeckers

Green Woodpecker: Recorded regularly throughout the period at Ashleworth and Coombe Hill. Singles yaffling at Coombe Hill on 6 December and Ashleworth on 7 December – early for this call? Great Spotted Woodpecker: seen regularly at all sites; one drumming at Coombe Hill as early as 24 December.

Passerines

Skylark: Some southward visible movement in early October, notably 250+ over Coombe Hill on 9 October, 17 on 13 October, and some going over Ashleworth on 27 October. Small flocks, generally in single figures, until end of year at most sites.

Swallow: Southward visible movement on 1 October: 20 at Coombe Hill, 50 Ashleworth, 40 Leigh Meadows. Eight over Ashleworth on 2 October. Two over Port Ham on 3 October. 18 to SW at Coombe Hill on 9 October.

House Martin: Some southward visible movement with Swallows on 1 October, 20-30 birds. 22 over Ashleworth on 2 October.

Meadow Pipit: Considerable visible movement in October: fair numbers, 100 or so, moving south on 1 October, flock of 30 at Leigh Meadows. At Ashleworth on 2 October, 60 in fields, 40+ over to south; at least 50 on 27 October. Constant stream of migrants going over Coombe Hill on 9 October; 30 on 29 October. At the Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, 30 on 7 October. Only small numbers, rarely reaching double figures, at Ashleworth, Coombe Hill and Leigh Meadows throughout November and December.

Grey Wagtail: One at Coombe Hill on 27 November, one at Ashleworth on 1 & 17 December.

Pied Wagtail: Regularly arriving at Coombe Hill, from direction of Gloucester, where they must have roosted; about fifteen feeding on ice there on 29 November.

Whinchat: Migrants: one at Coombe Hill and another at Sudmeadow on 1 October, one at Coombe Hill on 15 October, a late date.

Stonechat: Very much in evidence, more so than in recent years, widespread: up to three or four wintering, often in pairs, from early October onwards, at Nafford, Coombe Hill, Ashleworth, Leigh Meadows, Port Ham, GLS, Sudmeadow and Walmore.

Wheatear: One late migrant at Leigh Meadows on 1 October.

Fieldfare and Redwing: As usual the first birds appeared in early October: six Redwings at GLS on 5 October; at Coombe Hill, 30 Fieldfares on 16 October; several hundred on 29 October, in hedges and moving south on SE wind at Coombe Hill, Leigh Meadows, Ashleworth and Walmore. After this date recorded regularly, usually in smallish flocks of not more than fifty each, at most sites. Notable concentrations of 300+ Fieldfares at Coombe Hill on 25 November, and at least 400 Fieldfares at Wainlodes on 6 December.

Blackbird and Song Thrush: Some in vegetation along Chelt on 17 November; migrants about at Coombe Hill on 19 November.

Cetti's Warbler: One heard calling at Coombe Hill on 25 November.

Blackcap: One at on 25 October, a female there on 9 November and a male on 29 November; one female at GLS on 5 October, a female at Sudmeadow on 27 December.

Chiffchaff: Fair numbers in early October, presumably migrants, often with tit flocks, some singing: on 1 October, half a dozen at Coombe Hill and Leigh Meadows, one singing at Tirley on 2 October, at least four at Sudmeadow on 6 October, song at Coombe Hill on 13 October. A lot less by late October, but there seemed to be more wintering than usual: ones and twos seen regularly at Ashleworth (often feeding in ivy), Coombe Hill (generally in osier beds, but also in dead Phalaris), Sudmeadow (several trapped) till the end of December; one of *abietinus* race at Llanthony on 25 December.

Goldcrest: Seen regularly in hedges, often with tit flocks, from November onwards, at Ashleworth and Coombe Hill.

Long-tailed Tit: Small flocks of up to 20 regularly at Ashleworth, Coombe Hill, and Leigh Meadows throughout the period.

Nuthatch: Only record is of one calling at Rimes Place Farm near Newent on 23 December.

Treecreeper: A few records of this unobtrusive bird, at Ashleworth and Coombe Hill in December.

Jay: Odd few, one at Wainlodes on 6 December.

Raven: Odd few higher up the river at Ashleworth (one on 2 November) and Coombe Hill (two on 9 October). Much more regular and numerous at Walmore, with up to ten birds in December.

Tree Sparrow: One at Colways Farm, Hasfield on 13 November.

Greenfinch: 50 at Longdon on 4 December.

Linnet: Flock of 70 at GLS on 5 October

Redpoll: Much more in evidence than in recent years: at Ashleworth, 12 trapped on 16 October, three seen on 7 December. At Coombe Hill, seven on 18 October and a small flock regularly seen feeding in willows and tall weeds along the canal bank in December: nine on 10 December, six on 14 December, flock of 15 on 24 December, 12 on 27 December. At Rodley four on 13 November.

Siskin: Female at GLS pond on 25 November. Two caught on 23 December at Rimes Place Farm, alongside Ell Brook (near Newent) where there is a fine stand of alders.

Bullfinch: Quite widespread, in flocks of up to ten, especially in thick old hedges at most sites throughout the period.

Yellowhammer: Some visible movement on 1 October over Coombe Hill and Leigh Meadows. Otherwise few and far between; one at Leigh Meadows on 26 November, but 50 at Longdon on 4 December.

Reed Bunting: At Ashleworth more than 20 caught on 16 October, but after that, numbers of wintering birds very small, rarely more than four or five found at Coombe Hill and Ashleworth; it would seem that breeding birds move out in winter, and are not replaced by others coming in from elsewhere (as seems to happen in the Cotswold Water Park).

Compiled by M. Smart from his own observations and those of Gordon Avery, Les Brown, Colin Evers Andy Jayne and Mervyn Greening, with some cherries picked from the Gloster Birder website.