

**Notes on birds in the Severn and Avon Vales (the “Severn Hams”),
mainly Gloucestershire
April – June 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.
- 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 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; Barrow Ponds have been excavated alongside the Chelt, east of the A 38. 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. Near Sandhurst and Maisemore there are a number of abandoned overgrown riverside brick-pits.
- Minsterworth Ham, on the west bank of the Severn below Gloucester.
- 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. When the Severn and Avon flood, there may be extensive floods over the whole floodplain area. The River Chelt holds 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, Mythe Hook, Sandhurst and Maisemore brick pits, and Walham Pools are all artificial excavations in the floodplain or along the rivers. Barrow Ponds are created by the artificial damming of a small tributary of the Chelt.

Weather and flooding: general

After a mainly flood-free winter, there was light flooding at most of the main sites in the first few days of April following heavy local rainfall in the last days of March. This led to light flooding, which attracted an excellent variety of migrant waterbirds, but flooded out many clutches laid by early ground nesters like Lapwing. There was no further spring flooding. May was dry and rather cold. In June, there was a dry bright period in the middle of the month.

April began with a sudden increase in Severn levels (four feet rise in the night of 31 March/1 April, following heavy rain higher in the catchment and locally - Cheltenham was reported to be the wettest place in Europe), even though tides were low, and most wetlands experienced light flooding; river level at Haw Bridge 9.86 on 2 April, highest since October. But water levels dropped quickly after a week. Weather mild and warm, anticyclonic, in first few days of April, though frost on 9 April. Rest of April very variable, with rainfall higher than average nationally. Early May bright, but then there was an extended cool spell across the country, with northerly winds and ground frost on 10 & 11 May. Warm and changeable for the last ten days, with quite heavy rain from 21-23 May; with some cloud and sunny periods, allowing silage to be cut on higher ground; warmest day of year so far on 27 May, heavy wind on 28 May. Nationally, this was the driest May for four years in England and Wales, with less than 80% of the average rainfall over the period 1971-2000. Some rain on 1 June, fine spell (good hay-making weather) from 7 June, some rain 14 & 15 June, warm and sultry period afterwards, also good for hay-making, ended with thunderstorms and rain on 24-25 June, becoming fine again on 26 June.

Conditions at the main sites

Upham Meadow, Twynning: Light flooding in the first few days of April had almost disappeared by 4 April. Grass developed well in late April and May. Opening of fishing season on 16 June brought

increased disturbance along Avon bank from fishermen camping with cars. Some hay-making began on 17 June, extensive areas, perhaps 30% of total, cut by 20 June.

Ashleworth/Hasfield: Water levels in the reserve and on Hasfield Ham were quite high in the first few days of April, Dirty Lane was only just passable and field 23 well flooded on 2 April, but dropping back by 6/7 April. Impossible to remove boards from sluice in the first few days of the month, but top board removed on 9 and another on 12 April; water levels rose again around 20 April, with water flowing back into reserve; but levels dropped quickly and all remaining boards were removed on 26 April, with the aim of producing much drier conditions in the reserve in the coming summer than in recent years. Water levels dropped quickly during May. Hay-making on Hasfield Ham SSSI (but not GWT reserve) began on 17 June, and continued intensively on following days.

Coombe Hill: The flooding in early April meant that the Broad Mere hide was inaccessible on 2 April, but could just be reached on 4 April, though levels dropped very rapidly in the next couple of days; any Lapwings that had already laid lost their first clutches. Conditions of light flooding attracted additional prospecting Shelduck and Redshank, together with many migrants. After mid-April, water remained in scrapes, dropping gradually. Some hay-making in fields around reserve from 14 June onwards.

Leigh Meadows: Some very light flooding in the first few days of April, but after that no further flooding and hay developed well, with one or two spots where grass was shorter following shallow flooding. First grass cut for silage in last couple of days of May, more cutting in June, though several traditional hay meadows remained uncut until the end of the month.

Walmore Common: Some water remained in ponds and low areas until early June, following a local cloudburst in mid May, which produced excellent conditions for nesting waders.

Bird records

Grebes. Little Grebe: Breeding occurs rarely in the Vale. At Ashleworth Ham, the whinnying breeding display call was heard in early April, but birds left the site as water levels dropped and did not breed, though one seen on 2 and 7 May. One at Coombe Hill on 20 April. Nested successfully at Ryall Gravel Pits (Worcs) where full-grown young were seen on 17 June. Great Crested Grebe: Few breeding records in the shallow water wetlands of the Vale, but may occasionally nest on slow-flowing rivers like the Avon. At Coombe Hill, one appeared on floodwater from 5-7 April. At Mythe Hook brick pits, a pair of adults was present on 4 April & 28 May and may have bred. At Bredon's Hardwick pits, up to 15, April to June, probably breeding. On Avon by Upham Meadow an apparent advanced juvenile on 28 May, but an adult on 7 June. On Severn, pair below Lower Lode on 30 May. Black-necked Grebe: A passing migrant, appeared briefly at Ashleworth on 27 April, a most unusual observation; it was flying north, landed for a few minutes, then flew on.

Cormorant: Odd records here and there, mostly of small numbers flying up or down the Severn, probably to and from Bredon's Hardwick Pits, the main loafing site; up to seven at Bredon's Hardwick in April, one on 14 May & 8 June, but seven on 16 June, four on 17 June, two on 20 June. One perched on tree by the Severn at the Mythe, Tewkesbury, on 4 April. Two on Severn by Minsterworth Ham on 20 April. One over Upham Meadow on 28 May and 16 June.

Grey Heron: The two main heronries in the area are at Maisemore Park and Elmore Back. Both were occupied in 2005. At Maisemore heronry, four occupied nests on 10 April; at Elmore probably about 30 nests, difficult to estimate as the nests are in Scots Pines. Otherwise, small numbers seen throughout the period at most of the sites, maximum eight on floodwater at Coombe Hill in early April, including an immature with a wing tag, probably CI, ringed in Gloucestershire the previous year.

Little Egret: Following records on the scrapes at Coombe Hill in late March, the species was present much more regularly than in previous years, being recorded without interruption from mid-May onwards, with one from 10 May, two from 23 May, three on 28 May, four on 16 June. Three appeared to be roosting in trees in nearby Cobney Meadows on the evening of 16 June. One at Bredon's Hardwick on 8 May.

Mute Swan: The usual small summering flock of non-breeders built up at Coombe Hill, first on the floodwater in early April, then staying on the scrapes: 14 on 5 April, 25 on 25 April, maximum of 29 on 21 May, decreasing to 13 on 31 May, 10 on 8 June as water levels dropped. Nests completed by 2

April at the Wharf, Coombe Hill, with young from 17 May; at the Handkerchief Pool by Haw Bridge; birds incubating at Ashleworth and Maisemore Park from 10 April; territorial pair on Cobney Meadows on 12 April; a bird sitting at the Red Lion, Wainlodes, on 13 April, but was unsuccessful and had deserted by late May. Pair on Strensham Pits (Worcs) had tiny four cygnets on 14 May. At least one pair successful at Walmore, pair with six cygnets on 12 June, down to four on 24 June.

Whooper Swan: None in the Severn Vale, but the two that had been in the Slimbridge area since the beginning of the year were still present on the extraordinarily late date of 16 April.

Geese.

Greylag Goose: With the increasing nesting of feral birds of this species in the areas, small numbers were recorded at many sites, the main centre being Bredon's Hardwick, where there were 13 on 14 May, four on 17 June, pair with four goslings on 19 June. Odd ones also noted at Coombe Hill (eight in mid-May), Leigh Meadows, (flying over from direction of Barrow Ponds on 21 April), at Ashleworth and Minsterworth Ham.

Canada Goose: As usual, numbers of breeding birds were much smaller than numbers in winter. The main breeding area seemed to be along the Avon, particularly at Bredon's Hardwick. At Upham Meadow, a pair with one gosling on 14 May, a pair with nine goslings near Strensham Pits (Worcs) on 8 June. At Bredon's Hardwick, 130 on 17 April (and ten Barnacle Geese), about 30 with one gosling on 14 May, 20 and two goslings on 16 June; two pairs with goslings on fishing pool on 16 June. On the Severn above Haw Bridge a group of 12 with four goslings on 24 June. Numbers mainly in single figures at Ashleworth and Coombe Hill in April and May didn't look like breeding birds. At Minsterworth Ham, two on 20 April.

Egyptian Goose: One had been seen on the Severn in the first months of the year with wintering Canada Geese; presumably the same bird was on floodwater at Coombe Hill in early April, and was joined by a second bird in May, but was not seen after 4 June.

Shelduck: Adults were seen in likely nesting places several times, but there was no proof of breeding in April-June (though a pair was proved to breed on the pool at the Gloucester Landfill Site in July). At Coombe Hill seven on the floodwater in early April, with much active display; 24 on 6 April, eleven on 7 April (a pair and seven males chasing two females), 15 on 9 April; thereafter, numbers decreasing with maximum of four, seen now and then until 21 June. Similarly at Ashleworth/Hasfield Hams up to 15 in early April, a pair on 13 April prospecting in a hole under a tree, smaller numbers (up to four) in late April and May with a noisy pair on the evening of 9 May. Ones and twos also recorded at Upton Ham and Bredon's Hardwick (Worcs), Leigh Meadows and Minsterworth Ham in April and May. Five flew down the Severn at Lower Lode on 30 May.

Mandarin Duck: A male showing great interest in a female Mallard at the Mythe on 4 April. A male on Severn at Haw Bridge on 30 May. (Some escaped from a collection at Birtsmorton (Worcs) many years ago).

Surface-feeding ducks.

Wigeon: Numbers dropped even more rapidly than usual as birds moved out in spring: at Bredon's Hardwick 80 on 3 April, 2 on 17 April; at Ashleworth, 350 on 2 April, only 20 on 9 April, ten on 13 April, two on 26 April, throughout May, still present on 15 June; at Coombe Hill, 40 on 5 April, 20 on 6 April, four in late April, staying on until at least 15 June. Gadwall: Up to six on the floodwater at Coombe Hill and Ashleworth in early April; the species has bred locally in the past and some later records raised the possibility of breeding: a male at Ryall Gravel Pits (Worcs) on 17 June and a pair at Bredon's Hardwick on 8 June a male at Coombe Hill on 11 June. Teal: Most records were of departing wintering birds early in the season: at Bredon's Hardwick 20 on 3 April; four at The Mythe on 4 April; at Coombe Hill up to 50 in early April, 15 on 20 April, two on 11 May, one 15 June; at Ashleworth 20 on 2 April, 30 on 13 April, 40 on 13 April, three on 27 April; at Ashleworth 40 on 13 April, three on 27 April. No indication of breeding this year, though some occasional records in June: a drake, flying poorly, at Cobney Meadows on 16 June and a male at Bredon's Hardwick Pits on 17 June. Mallard: At Coombe Hill, a female with 8 or 9 tiny ducklings on 7 April, three females with ducklings on 11 May. Pintail: Very small numbers at Coombe Hill and Ashleworth in the first week of April only, maximum twelve. Garganey: A better showing than usual at Coombe Hill, thanks to the April flooding: two resplendent males on 5 April; three and a female on 6 April, at least one male on 7 April, then a male on 23 April and one early in the morning of 26 April. Shoveler: At Bredon's Hardwick, 25 on 3 April,

one on 8 May. Numbers held up well at Coombe Hill and Ashleworth well into April, but there was no indication of breeding this year: at Coombe Hill still 25 on 7 April, three on 16 April; at Ashleworth 70 on 10 April and 60 on 13 April when it was the most numerous duck! Still some on 21 April, last two on 23 April.

Diving ducks.

Tufted Duck: After a winter with very few records (given the lack of flooding), good numbers occurred almost as soon as the water rose in early April: at Coombe Hill, nine on 2 April, almost the first there all winter, big increase to 31 on 5 April, but only 6 on 6 April, one on 9 April, two on 21 May; at Ashleworth up to four from 2 to 6 April. Occasionally breeds on deeper, usually artificial waters in the Vale: at Ryall Gravel Pits (Worcs), a pair on 10 May, at least six pairs on 17 June; at Bredon's Hardwick, 25 on 3 April, 10 mid-May, up to six during 20 June; on the Avon by Upham Meadow, three on 7 June. Pochard: No records. Goosander: A male flying over Coombe Hill towards the Severn on 26 April, a most unusual date for this species which is normally a scarce winter visitor!

Raptors:

Red Kite: a wing-tagged bird over Coombe Hill on 7 April. Marsh Harrier: An adult male going determinedly north flew over Coombe Hill at 11h40 on 21 April, clearly a migrant on its way north and apparently not the bird that had been at Frampton earlier, since that was still present on 22 April. Rare in the vale, especially in spring. Sparrowhawk: Singles at Coombe Hill and Ashleworth, April to June. Buzzard: Recorded widely and frequently, apparently breeding in many sites. At Upham Meadow and Rectory Farm (Worcs) in June. At Coombe Hill and Ashleworth, one or two throughout April, May and June. At Leigh Meadows, one mewing very noisily and persistently as though there were young birds in a hedgerow tree in the meadows on 22 June. At Sandhurst, one on 20 May. At Minsterworth Ham, two or three on 20 April. Kestrel: Recorded regularly throughout the period at Coombe Hill and Ashleworth and at Minsterworth Ham in April. Peregrine: On pylons at Hasfield Ham in April, last seen on 23 April, then one on 29 May, two on 30 May; one at Coombe Hill on 14 and 19 June. One flew into Gloucester Cathedral from north on 2 April, landing on the top of the tower, perhaps the Ashleworth bird? NB: A pair nesting on Gloucester Royal Hospital this year is thought to be different from the Ashleworth birds. Hobby: As usual, seen on spring passage: one over Coombe Hill on 5 May; seen regularly around midday, hawking insects over Ashleworth from 29 April, with three on 11 May, until 21 May. Some birds no doubt breeding locally, and nest reported near Haw Bridge: one Ashleworth 11 June, brilliant views of one hawking dragonflies over the scrapes at Coombe Hill, later sitting on a dead tree on 21 June

Gamebirds and Rails:

Quail: One calling at Longdon Marsh over a longish period in late May and June. One calling at Coombe Hill on 18 May, not found later. One reported near Haw Bridge on 7 June.

Coot: Nests on deeper waters. On Strensham Pits (Worcs), presumably nesting, on 14 May. Appeared to be nesting on Gwen Finch Reserve, Nafford Worcs) on 8 June. At Bredon's Hardwick about ten on 8 June, 20 on 16 June, 15 (including one young bird) on 20 June. By Upham Meadow, Twyning, one or two on the Avon, where they may nest, on 4 April & 28 May. At least 20 on Mythe Brickpits and Brook on 4 April, one on 28 May. At Lower Lode, two on 30 May. At Coombe Hill up to 40 appeared after the flood in April, with three nests on scrapes in April and May, a pair on the Canal with four young on 25 May, young still surviving on scrapes and canal on 21 June. At Ashleworth up to 30 in April, one sitting on nest in front of hide, before water levels dropped. Calling from Price's Pool, Sandhurst, on 20 May, presumably nesting. Moorhen: Up to ten seen regularly on the canal at Coombe Hill. Young seen at Walmore on 24 June. Water Rail: Rather few records: one at Coombe Hill on 6 April, two on 22 April, but not heard singing at night there on evenings of 25 April or 9 May; however, young seen from the Long Pool hide in June. Spotted Crake: A probable glimpsed at Coombe Hill on 22 April, but no sign of calling bird at dusk, despite careful searches throughout April and May at Coombe Hill and Ashleworth. One was found singing regularly on the Mill Avon at Tewkesbury from 10-24 June; it disappeared following a rise in water levels provoked by a sudden storm. Corncrake: A bird was reported calling from the Leadon Valley on 7 June

Waders.

Special efforts were made to record the main breeding waders - Lapwing, Snipe, Curlew and Redshank, plus Oystercatcher and Little Ringed Plover - at the major breeding sites in the Severn and Avon Vales this year, as a follow up to the 2002 breeding survey, for the Severn and Avon Wetland Partnership. Initial results suggest that the early April floods affected Lapwings badly, that no Snipe bred in the

Vales this year, that Redshanks held their own, and that Curlews were badly hit by predators and hay cutting.

Oystercatcher: A pair has nested at Bredon's Hardwick in recent years, and two birds were recorded there from 10 April; they had a nest on 1 May which seemed to have failed by 15 May, they had a new nest by mid June; birds heard over Rectory Farm (Worcs) on 14 May and one on the Avon by Upham Meadow on 28 May were probably from Bredon's Hardwick.

Ringed Plover: A few recorded on northward passage: singles on the floodwater at Coombe Hill on 6 April, with another on 30 April, one at Upton Ham (Worcs) on 10 May. Three at Coombe Hill, including a juvenile, on 15 & 16 June must have been southward migrants, returning early.

Little Ringed Plover: At Coombe Hill singles on 12 April, 1 & 10 May, but no sign of breeding; a Song Thrush singing from the Long Pool has a phrase incredibly like Little Ringed Plover's flight call! Two at Upton Ham (Worcs) on 10 May were probably northward migrants. Two pairs, apparently breeding at, Ryall Gravel Pits (Worcs) on 17 June. No sign of breeding at Bredon's Hardwick pits; one there on 12 and 16 June was probably a southward migrant.

Lapwing: At Upton Ham (Worcs) a female still on eggs on 10 May. At Ryall gravel pits (Worcs) about three pairs, apparently with young, on 17 June. Breeding reported at Longdon Marsh (Worcs). None bred at Upham Meadow, nor on arable land nearby at Bredon Field Farm where they have bred in previous years, but at Rectory Farm across the Avon at Bredon's Norton (Worcs), at least three nesting pairs (young seen on 14 May, and six fledged young and one tiny chick on 8 June). Doesn't seem to have nested at Bredon's Hardwick pits this year, but up to 35 post breeding migrants recorded in the second half of June.

At Coombe Hill, the area of the northern meadows, where ten or more pairs had been displaying and perhaps laying in late March, was mostly under water on 2 April, when about ten birds were still present and displaying actively, with one apparently still sitting on higher ground; about 20 on 5-7 April, looking a bit forlorn but still displaying, some moved to arable; eight on 9 April, some display; but these birds seem to have lost their eggs to the floods. Up to six or eight birds in late April and May appeared to be re-nesting; six by hide on 17 & 18 May seemed to have lost eggs and to be preparing to lay again, while another pair to the north seemed to have young; on 25 May, only two near scrapes, perhaps preparing to re-nest, none on northern pool; on 31 May two pairs apparently preparing to re-lay, still there but not looking very interested on 8 June; but on 21 June, with two pairs of adults present, a single tiny chick was finally seen; on the same date a flock of 25, clearly migrants, were sitting in a cut hayfield some way from the scrapes. None found displaying over southern meadows.

At Leigh Meadows, up to six pairs have nested in previous years on an uncultivated field which was ranker and less suitable this year, and they did not use this field this year; three pairs all on or near surrounding arable on 12 April, but on 21 April, two pairs on green field sites in wet meadows, round water areas. In late May there were four pairs with young or eggs on these meadow sites, but on 2 June the grass there had been cut for silage, though two green patches had been left in the centre where two or three large young and two tiny ones were seen; on 7 June four large young were in these patches, with adults still giving alarm calls but no small young seen; on 16 June eight flying birds including at least one juvenile; all had departed by on 22 June. From late May there also appeared to be one or two pairs nesting on young maize south of the Chelt.

None at Sandhurst on 20 May or at Wallsworth on 21 May, where they had been reported to be nesting on arable, but the ground they were using had just been ploughed.

At Ashleworth, birds were seen displaying over grassland at Hasfield Ham from early April into May; four or five adults were behaving there as though they had young which they had raised successfully in late May and early June; small young there on 8 June. Two on 19 June on cut hayfield were probably migrants.

At Walmore, at least four pairs appear to have nested for the first time for some years. Five medium-sized chicks were seen on 7 June and eight adults with eight flying juveniles on 24 June.

Dunlin: On the floodwater at Coombe Hill, two on evening of 6 April, one in summer plumage with dark belly spot; at Hasfield three on 30 April.

Ruff: Up to four recorded on floodwater at Coombe Hill in the first week of April.

Jack Snipe: A late wintering bird at Ashleworth on 10 April.

Snipe: As usual there were good numbers at Coombe Hill, Ashleworth and Leigh Meadows in April, believed to be migrants on their way back to breeding sites in central and northern Europe; up to 20 in early April, two calling (but not drumming) late on evening of 25 April at Coombe Hill. No drumming heard despite frequent evening visits in May and June. It therefore seems likely that, as in 2003 and 2004, no Snipe bred at Ashleworth, Coombe Hill (or anywhere else) in the Severn or Avon Vales.

Black-tailed Godwit: A particularly good showing this year, with migrant birds en route to breeding areas in Iceland clearly appreciating the flooded conditions early in April, and moving through in several waves. At Coombe Hill on 2 April five dull plumaged birds on floodwater; on 5 April nine (one in summer plumage) in the early morning were joined by twelve more (five or six in full plumage) later in the morning; 25 on 6 & 7 April; all those in full plumage were undoubtedly of the Icelandic subspecies (which winters in Britain and western France), stopping over on their way back to the breeding grounds. The 25 were still present on 8 April, but had disappeared by the early morning of 9 April, when three more arrived, stayed for an hour, then moved on. Seven on 27 April. A few reappeared in early June, two on 8 June, one from 11 to 16 June; these seem likely to have been birds already returning from the breeding grounds.

Curlew: Breeds in fair numbers on hayfields throughout the Vales, the young generally not capable of flight before early July.

One pair apparently breeding on Upton Ham (Worcs). At Ryall Gravel Pits, about four birds present on 17 June, probably non-breeding birds or off-duty adults. Two pairs in early June at Gooseham near Eckington (Worcs). At Rectory Farm (Worcs), probably two pairs in early June.

At Upham Meadow, Twynning, usually one of the most important sites, two or three displaying on 4 April, six birds present on 9 April, and about 10 on 14 May (rather little calling, perhaps they were on eggs, so not advertising their presence?); at least ten birds on 28 May, two pairs calling very anxiously as though they had young. On 7 June, apparently two pairs, one probably with young south of motorway, two or three pairs rather quiet north of motorway. On 16 June, rather quiet, but probably one pair south of motorway, calling as though it had young, others to north; still about half a dozen on 20 June after the onset of hay-making. However, just across the Avon near Bredon's Hardwick, feeding and loafing on a nearby recently cut hayfield, the enormous number (for this area) of 21 birds on 16 June and 36 on 20 June, all apparently adults – were these local birds, off duty, birds which had lost young to the hay-making, or passing migrants? At Bredon's Hardwick a pair bubbling on 8 June from meadows behind the pits.

On the Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, at least three giving the bubbling display call on 16 June. Along the Severn between Haw Bridge and Lower Lode, about three pairs on 30 May, calling anxiously as though they had young; on 24 June still at least two pairs apparently with young.

In the general area of Coombe Hill, probably about five pairs displaying in April, continuing into May; a pair appeared to have young on Cobney Meadows on 20 June. At least two pairs still bubbling on 21 June. Near the Severn at the western end of the canal, apparently two pairs with young on 24 June, not found again on 26 June. At Leigh Meadows, about four pairs in April, through May and into June; but very quiet in mid and late June. At Ashleworth/Hasfield, two pairs displaying throughout April, May and June. Two pairs present and bubbling in early morning of 18 June, but hay-making carried out in both nesting fields probably destroyed young; forlorn pair in cut hayfield on 19 June, no young.

Whimbrel: Usually recorded on northward passage in small numbers in late April and May. A flock of five that flew over Minsterworth Ham on 20 April, going fast to the north, were believed to have been of this species. One calling early morning at Leigh Meadows on 21 April. Three at Coombe Hill on 26 & 27 April. One flew over Coombe Hill on 1 May, one in evening of 5 May, one on 11 May appeared to have roosted. At Walmore one on 11 May.

Redshank: Formerly nested in good numbers in damp meadows, in recent years has tended to adopt nesting sites in artificial pools and gravel pits. Where conditions are very favourable for a short time,

concentrations larger than those of local nesters may occur: thus on the floodwater at Coombe Hill, as many as 15 were present for a short time in early April, and a total of 14 on a riverside pool at Upton Ham (Worcs) on 10 May was probably a group of local breeders plus migrants on favourable habitat.

Two pairs at Upton Ham, apparently with young, on 17 June. Appeared to have young at Gwen Finch Reserve, Nafford, on 8 June. At Gooseham, Eckington (Worcs), two pairs, apparently with young, on 8 June. At Rectory Farm (Worcs), probably two pairs on 8 June, one certainly with young. Singles present at Bredon's Hardwick in May and June did not behave like breeding birds.

At Upham Meadow, four pairs present in May and June, appeared to have young on 7 June. All had departed by 20 June when hay-making was under way.

At Coombe Hill, birds present and displaying during floods in early April (up to 12 birds), with two pairs into May and June and, to judge their by agitated behaviour, they had young on 21 June. Two more pairs on Cobney Meadows in mid June, clearly with young.

At Leigh Meadows, at least two pairs displaying in April and May, three adults and two young seen in remaining grass in cut field on 2 June; two agitated adults in same general area on 6 June, none found on 15 or 16 June.

At Ashleworth/Hasfield, no sign of breeding Redshanks all spring.

At Walmore, three on 11 May. Three pairs, very agitated, with at least four smallish chicks on 7 June; adults still giving alarm call on 12 June; on 24 June two adults still agitated and one presumed flying juvenile seen.

Spotted Redshank: One in full summer plumage at Coombe Hill on 6 April

Greenshank: At Coombe Hill, one on 26 April. At Upton Ham, one on 10 May. At Walmore one on 11 May.

Green Sandpiper: At Coombe Hill, one on 2 April.

Gulls and Terns: Up to 100 gulls on floodwater at Coombe Hill and Ashleworth on 2 April, mainly Common and Lesser Blackbacks, a few Black-headed. More on 5 April, with 200 Common and 300 Black-headed and three Little Gulls made a brief appearance, not stopping for more than ten minutes. At Minsterworth Ham, the new pond excavated at the southern end of the Ham seems to be occupied only by Lesser Blackbacks washing after a visit to the Gloucester Landfill Site.

The Great Blackbacks which have nested in recent years at Bredon's Hardwick were seen in April and up to 29 May with one on 5 June, but do not appear to have nested this year; up to 20 Herring and 100 Lesser Black-backed Gulls present at Bredon's Hardwick throughout the period, mainly immatures loafing, not breeding birds; one immature Lesser Blackback hunting over hay meadows at Rectory Farm on 8 June, as though it had found a young Curlew chick. Twenty or more Lesser Blackbacks following tractor as it turned baled hay at Ashleworth on evening of 19 June, probably looking for nests of voles and shrews revealed by hay making.

A Sandwich Tern flew from Bredon's Hardwick back into Gloucestershire on 3 April. A Little Tern appeared for ten minutes at Coombe Hill on 1 May. Both species are rarely seen inland.

Two Common Terns were on the island at Bredon's Hardwick from 8 May, at the same place where they nested last year and had a nest by 29 May; probably the same bird over the Avon near Upham Meadows on 8 June.

Five Black Terns at Bredon's Hardwick on 15 May.

Pigeons.

Stock Dove: Widespread in small numbers clearly nesting through out the area. At the Mythe about ten on 4 April. At Upham Meadow, five on 7 June. At Strensham Pits, five on 8 June. Along the Severn, several above Haw Bridge on 24 June. At Coombe Hill, five on 7 April, seven on 9 April, two or three

on 31 May. At Leigh Meadows, five on 12 April. At Ashleworth, a couple on 2 April. Good number, about twenty, mostly paired, at Minsterworth Ham on 20 April.

Turtle Dove: The only record was of one singing near Hasfield on 29 May.

Cuckoo: Singing at Coombe Hill from 21 April to 21 June; one at Handkerchief Pool on 25 May; one Leigh Meadows on 6 June; at Ashleworth singing from 26 April, two on 15 May, at least three on 29 May and 5 June, very active, chasing one another, bubbling call from females, still singing on 19 June. At the Great Hay Meadow, one singing on 28 May, at Strensham Pits one on 8 June.

Owls: Records of Little Owls have seemed few and far between in the last couple of years, so the flurry of records was welcome: one flew out from an old pollarded willow, where it was probably breeding, at Coombe Hill on 12 April, the first for a long time; another on Upham Meadow on 14 May. One on a road casualty near Chaceley on 7 June, one at Apperley at dusk on 8 June, and one calling loudly in the Leigh Meadows on 22 June. A Tawny Owl at Coombe Hill on 11 May. A Barn Owl at Walmore on 7 June, said to be nesting nearby; one in the Leadon Valley at Lassington on 6 and 19 June.

Swift: Six at Coombe Hill on 24 April were the first.

Woodpeckers: At Coombe Hill and Ashleworth, Green Woodpeckers numerous, yaffling in April. Great Spotted very frequent throughout the area, one drumming at Ashleworth on 9 & 10 April, several on 13 April. Lesser Spotted recorded regularly at a bird table adjoining an old orchard in Ashleworth village in April, possibly song on the reserve on 2 April and on 18 June.

Passerines

Swallow: First one flying up the Severn at the Mythe on 4 April. About five at Ashleworth on 9 April, round buildings where they had nested last year. Well established round farm buildings at Minsterworth by 20 April.

Sand Martin: First record at Coombe Hill on 5 April. Several small colonies found nesting in the banks of the Severn: several round nesting holes in the east bank of the Severn bank opposite Minsterworth Ham on 20 April. None nesting at the former site south of Haw Bridge on the east bank, though half a dozen birds present on 26 April. Half a dozen a little way upstream of Haw Bridge in late May and June were occupying a different colony site on the west bank, with young calling from burrows on 24 June. Another larger colony with two groups of six and eight holes just below Lower Lode on 30 May and 28 birds recorded there on 19 June.

House Martin: First record was of half a dozen over the Severn at Minsterworth Ham on 20 April.

Skylark: Recorded regularly singing over hayfields at Coombe Hill, Ashleworth and Minsterworth Ham, and many other sites.

Meadow Pipits: No breeding records, only a few late passage birds in April: at Coombe Hill, one or two until 7 April. At Ashleworth, five on 10 April. Still about a dozen at Minsterworth Ham on 20 April.

Yellow Wagtail: Very few records indeed; the few breeding pairs were on arable rather than on hay-meadows. One at Bredon's Hardwick on 17 April (with a White Wagtail) and one over Coombe Hill on 21 April were no doubt passage migrants. One at Ryall Gravel Pits (Worcs) on 10 May and a male there on 17 June may well have been breeding. Three on arable at Bredon Field Farm (Worcs) on 14 May. Two on bean field at Rectory Farm on 8 June. Two on Upham Meadow appeared to be breeding in hay meadow on 16 June, but not found on 20 June after hay-making had begun.

Nightingale: One singing, just in Gloucestershire, between Strensham and Showborough on 29 May (Strensham is a regular site for the species in Worcs).

Redstart: A characteristic breeding bird of pollarded willows in the vales, recorded with special care this year since it was one of the target species in BTO's Scarce Breeding Woodland Species Survey; and good numbers found over a wide area. At Longdon Marsh, one singing on 26 April. At Ashleworth, the stronghold, the first was seen on 2 April, at least half a dozen males singing in later April and May, one seen going to hole in willow on 27 May; first juvenile trapped on 18 June. At Coombe Hill, one singing well on Apperley side on from 21 April into May; at least three more singing

along the canal. At Leigh Meadows, one singing well in 12 April, but not recorded again till 6 June, when a female present was very agitated, either because she had young or because the willow where she was nesting just had been pollarded. Another agitated bird in a different part of Leigh Meadows on 20 June probably had newly fledged young nearby, while alarm calls were heard in a third area on 22 June. One calling, but not singing at Minsterworth Ham on 20 April – new locality? One singing well at Sandhurst on 20 May, also a new locality. Two singing at Handkerchief Pool near Haw Bridge on 25 May, another new locality. None found at Apperley or Chaceley, where habitat appears ideal.

Stonechat and Whinchat: One migrant Whinchat at Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, on 28 April, another at Longford on 4 May. The Stonechats that had wintered in such numbers didn't stay into April and they did not repeat last year's breeding at Ashleworth.

Fieldfare and Redwing: Departed early: no Fieldfares at Coombe Hill or Ashleworth in April, but two Redwings at Ashleworth on 13 April.

Cetti's Warbler: One singing well alongside Severn near Apperley on 30 May. A pair bred at another Severn site.

Grasshopper Warbler: None at all recorded anywhere in the Vale this year, despite several evening sessions at Coombe Hill and Ashleworth throughout the period; none trapped at Ashleworth either. Probably did not breed in the Vale this year.

Sedge Warbler: First timid song at Ashleworth on 10 April; many singing there later in April, and many netted in breeding condition (mostly retraps from previous years), in May and June; nest with small young on 5 June, these birds fledged by 18 June – almost the only ones that bred successfully. At Coombe Hill one singing by The Wharf on 21 April, many singing throughout April and May. Singing birds also recorded at Leigh Meadows, and round the edges of Upham Meadow.

Reed Warbler: One or two in reed-beds along the Avon by Upham Meadow and at Strensham Pits (Worcs) in May and June. Elsewhere, numerous records despite the lack of reed-beds: at Coombe Hill, one singing along canal on 11 May, two or three in other parts of reserve later in month; at Leigh Meadows, one singing from vegetation in a very narrow and unlikely ditch on 22 June; at Ashleworth, adults trapped from 1 May to 18 June, and song heard by day and night; at Walmore, at least two singing on 24 June.

Blackcap: Males singing on 2 April at Haw Bridge and Ashleworth, many more later in month there and Coombe Hill. Several singing at Minsterworth Ham and over the river on 20 April.

Garden Warbler: One singing briefly at Ashleworth on 19 May, rather uncommon in the Vale, the first here since 2001.

Whitethroat: First was at Coombe Hill on the relatively early date of 7 April. Widespread thereafter at Sandhurst, Leigh Meadows, Apperley, Ashleworth, Minsterworth Ham. At Ashleworth, one or two several singing at low elevations, whereas until recently they were usually found only on higher ground; first juvenile trapped on 18 June.

Lesser Whitethroat: First short burst of song at Leigh Meadows on 21 April, one very agitated bird there appeared to have young on 15 June. Also recorded at Coombe Hill, Handkerchief Pool, Ashleworth/Hasfield, Rectory Farm (Worcs). At Ashleworth an adult from previous year trapped on 29 May, first juveniles trapped on 18 June.

Willow Warbler: Rather timid song on 2 April at Coombe Hill and Ashleworth. One singing, the Mythe on 4 April, and one or two at Coombe Hill on 5-9 April, well established with 4-5 singing on 26 April. At Ashleworth adults already in moult (so finished breeding) and a juvenile trapped on 18 June.

Chiffchaff: Well established, with many birds singing all over the area on 2 April. At Ashleworth the first juvenile trapped on 18 June.

Spotted Flycatcher: One by hide at Ashleworth on 17 May.

Goldcrest: One singing in reserve hedge at Ashleworth on 10 April, unusual this low down, and in Meerend Thicket from April to June.

Long-tailed Tit: At Coombe Hill one carrying food on 11 May.

Treecreeper: Song at Apperley on 7 April, at Ashleworth on 13 April & 11 May, at Minsterworth Ham on 20 April, at Coombe Hill on 25 May and at Leigh Meadows on 21 April. Two netted at Ashleworth on 10 April, apparently a breeding pair.

Raven: A couple over Minsterworth Ham on 20 April probably came from Elmore, and there were more at Gloucester Landfill Site. One at Coombe Hill on 5 May. The extraordinary number of 140, presumed non-breeders, going to roost at Walmore on 11 May, but none on 7 June.

Rook: Several hundred on cut hayfield, looking for insects and feeding begging young at Ashleworth on 19 June, and Upham Meadow on 20 June.

Jay: At Coombe Hill, two on 7 April, one on 25 May. At Ashleworth, two on 2 April

Linnet: Still a flock of 50 at Minsterworth Ham on 20 April. Juveniles, presumably locally bred, trapped at Ashleworth on 18 June.

Crossbill: Unusual record of a party of 20, including juveniles, passing through Coombe Hill on 16 June.

Bullfinch: Regularly noted in thick hedges at Coombe Hill, Ashleworth, Chaceley.

Reed Bunting: At Upham Meadow, plenty singing on 7 June, and many along Avon on 8 June. At Coombe Hill, some singing in early April, song at Leigh Meadows in June. At Ashleworth, some in early April, well established by 26 April, still singing strongly in May, but still no juveniles caught by 5 June. One at Minsterworth Ham on 20 April. At Walmore, plenty singing on 7 June.

Yellowhammer: One singing Rectory Farm (Worcs) on 8 June. At Wallsworth, several singing on higher ground (as usual!) on 21 May. At Leigh Meadows, song from April to June. At Coombe Hill, one singing in higher areas on 25 May. Above Haw Bridge, one singing on 30 May. At Ashleworth, one singing in early April. Several singing at Minsterworth Ham on 20 April.

Corn Bunting: Three singing on Upton Ham (Worcs) on 10 May, two on 17 June; not found on Upham Meadow or Bredon Fields on 14 or 28 May, but two or three singing on the meadow in June.

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

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