

Notes on birds in the Severn and Avon Vales (the “Severn Hams”), mainly Gloucestershire April – June 2006

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. Few records available for 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); Upham Meadow and Summer Leasow (sometimes called the “Great Hay Meadow”) at Twyning (Glos); Rectory Farm Meadows, across the Avon from Upham Meadow (Worcs); Strensham Pits, sludge pools below the waterworks at Strensham (Worcs); further north along the Avon is Gwen Finch Reserve near Nafford (Worcs), an area of shallow lakes by the Avon. Just to the east is Kemerton Lake (Worcs), a restored gravel pit in the valley of the Carrant Brook, which flows through Cowfield Marsh 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 (including Cobney Meadows at the western end); and the Leigh Meadows alongside the River Chelt and Leigh Brook above Wainlodes; Barrow Ponds are beside the Chelt, east of the A 38. Ashleworth Ham and Coombe Hill are Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust reserves. This area also includes: the Severn Ham at Tewkesbury; the Severn between Lower Lode and Haw Bridge; and the Severn from Wainlodes, past Ashleworth Quay and Sandhurst, to Gloucester. The River Leadon flows into the Severn just above Gloucester, but its valley, extending back past Newent, has been little prospected. Near Sandhurst and Maisemore there are a number of abandoned overgrown riverside brickpits.
- Port Ham on Alney Island, Sudmeadow, and the Gloucester Landfill Site, all on the edge of urban Gloucester and once flood meadow; Port Ham has recently been restored and includes a number of shallow scrapes. The Landfill Site 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. Few records available for 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 available for this period.

Most of these sites are marshes which flood when the level of the Severn is high (either because of water coming down from North Wales, or because of high tides downstream; or more often a combination of both), thus preventing local streams from reaching the Severn, so that they back flood. When there is a major Severn flood, with water coming over the floodbanks along the river, there may be extensive floods over the whole floodplain area. The major Severn tributary, the Avon, does not have floodbanks in many places and so floods easily above Tewkesbury. 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

The wet weather with southwesterly winds continued from the end of March into the first couple of days of April, but the wind went north-easterly from 3 April with sharp frosts on 4 & 5 April; north westerly again from 6 April, releasing migrant waders; southwesterly, bright and warm on 10 April, but cold and overcast from 11-13 April; still southwesterly, but warmer with some sun, from 14 April; southerly winds from 20 April seemed to release migrants (good showings of Sedge Warbler, Whitethroat, Redstart), and on 22/23 April (Spoonbill, waders and wagtails); last week of April anti-cyclonic with mainly northerly winds; continuing anti-cyclonic with northerly winds in late April and

early May. Fine, hot days on 10/11 May, but thundery rain on 12 May and dull southwesterlies after that. Quite heavy rain from 16 to 27 May, followed by near heat wave conditions in late May and most of June, with only occasional duller periods and little rain..

Severn levels remained high, with high tides in the first few days of April, but began to drop from 4 April; water on the meadows remained quite high and dropped more slowly than the river with some flooding still on 8 April, though the floods had pretty much gone by 11 April; with little rainfall, levels continued to drop for the rest of month, despite high elver tides in the middle and end of month. No flooding on meadows in late April or first half of May, but heavy rain in the second half of May, coinciding again with a high tide cycle, caused water levels to rise dramatically everywhere to winter levels (Severn at Haw Bridge on 8.95 on 27 May, top of high tide cycle; Ashleworth sluice on 8.05, well above normal winter level, on 28 May). This late flooding was catastrophic for ground-nesting species like Lapwing, Curlew and Redshank which must have lost many eggs, and also appears to have affected passerines like Sedge Warbler and Reed Bunting, which nest low down in thick vegetation. Ringing at Ashleworth showed very poor numbers of juveniles in June. These floods dropped in the first week of June.

Conditions at the main sites

Upham Meadow, Twynning: Very briefly under water for a day in early April, grass still short on 5 April, grown a bit by 27 April; the May floods affected this site too, and there was shallow flooding at the end of May. Fewer records than usual.

Ashleworth/Hasfield: Water levels until 5 April were at their highest so far this year, with ditches backing up and flooding the reserve and Hasfield Ham, but dropping on meadows quite quickly by 8 April and almost gone by 11 April, though levels on the reserve stayed high. Most boards were removed from the sluice on 15 April, causing water levels on the reserve to drop rapidly, the last one being removed on 3 May. As in 2005, the reserve, was hence drier than in previous summers; some surface water still remained on Hasfield Ham into mid May. But heavy local rainfall in May caused water levels to rise, and water was pouring back into reserve, the level reaching 7.63 on 22 May and 8.05 on 28 May, with the reserve again under water and most meadows ankle deep; water levels did not return to previous summer levels until about 8 June (7.71 flowing out at sluice on 4 June); back to normal low summer level on 10 June. First mist-netting session of the summer at Ashleworth on 22 April, the Constant Effort Site ringing was carried out regularly from 29 April. At Hasfield, the late May floods also affected much of the area and there was standing water into June

Coombe Hill: Water levels until 4 April were the highest so far this year, as high Severn levels prevented streams emptying into Severn; ditches were overflowing in early April on Cobney Meadows; floods began to drop gradually from 6 April and had gone by 11 April, though water levels were maintained in scrapes and ditches by the new weir at Wainlodes, where the Deerhurst Parish Drain flows into the Severn. The scrapes continued to hold water through to mid-May, but levels rose sharply with heavy rain in the second half of the month, and islands in the scrapes were under water on 27 May, when the Grundon Hide was almost inaccessible, and Cobney Meadows were ankle deep in water; levels dropped much more slowly than at Ashleworth because the weir at Wainlodes kept water levels higher.

Leigh Meadows: No flooding left by 11 April. Hay meadows developed as usual through late April and early May, with some sheep grazing.

Walmore Common: Water levels rose slightly from 1 April, following high Severn levels and rainfall in late March, but produced no more than light superficial flooding until 6 April; still water in ponds and ditches to end of month; as elsewhere, high water levels in the second half of May caused loss of eggs by Lapwing and Redshank..

Bird records

Grebes

Little Grebe: Regularly occurs in spring and early summer, when its breeding call may be heard, but there are few definite proofs of breeding, and was rarely seen (though perhaps overlooked?) after early May. At Nafford, one on 27 April. At Ashleworth, one whinnying until 17 April and three seen on 15

& 18 April. At Coombe Hill, one whinnying from Long Pool and Broad Mere for most of April, two seen from 15 to 29 April, one on 3 May. One still at GLS on 6 April.

Great Crested Grebe: Recorded in small numbers in deeper pools, few signs of breeding. At Bredon's Hardwick, up to four throughout the period. At Severn Ham Tewkesbury, one on Mill Avon on 5 April. At Deerhurst, two on the Severn on 14 April. Two on Severn at Wainlodes on 22 April. At Coombe Hill, one appeared on floodwater on 30 May, showing they are still in the area at quite a late date.

Cormorant

Cormorant: The main loafing area is at Bredon's Hardwick, where up to seven or eight were recorded throughout the period. Most other records are of birds in flight on the way to or from Bredon's Hardwick: at Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, two in flight on 5 April. At Ashleworth, one in flight on 1 and 22 April. At Coombe Hill, one in flight on 11 April.

Spoonbill: A very rare visitor: an adult, the first for several years, seen and photographed on the scrapes at Coombe Hill from late morning on 22 April until mid afternoon on 23 April.

Little Egret: In the last few years has occurred regularly in summer throughout the area, but especially at Coombe Hill. At Coombe Hill, the first of the year appeared on 13 April, with four on 20 April, one or two in May and up to six throughout June. At Port Ham, one on 25 May. At Walmore, after smaller numbers in February and March, seven (!) on 6 April, six of them apparently in a separate flock, eight on 7 April, singles on 14 and 19 April.

Grey Heron: The small heronry near the Severn at Maisemore had five occupied nests this year; the bigger heronry overlooking Elmore Back had 23-26 pairs. Otherwise birds occur in small numbers all over the area. Recorded at Nafford (eight on 25 June); Upham Meadow (one on 27 April); at Bredon's Hardwick, two to four throughout the period; at Ashleworth, throughout the spring, with a maximum of six (four immatures) on 25 April. At Coombe Hill, up to three from April to June, also at Cobney Meadows; at Leigh Meadows, often found on the Chelt. Up to three at Walmore, no doubt from the Elmore heronry.

Mute Swan: Non-breeding flocks generally persist for much of the summer (though most birds go to Slimbridge); pairs breed at several traditional nest-sites. At Nafford, pair nested, cygnets seen from 2 June. Near Strensham Pits (Worcs), a non-breeding flock of 12 on 5 April, two birds incubating nests there on 27 April. At Bredon's Hardwick, odd birds throughout, maximum 11 on 26 June. At Ashleworth, four or five in early April, one on nest from 11 April, two nests being incubated from 22 April; one pair had young on 10 June. At Coombe Hill, one pair which nested here last year (P24 and mate) was on ditches in early April, but another pair (3AY and 3CC) was by the Wharf from 4 April, nest building on 11 & 15 April, incubating from 20 April, and had four small cygnets from 27 May. At Cobney Meadows, one apparently sitting on 11 April, definitely sitting on 25 April, but not found on 27 May, perhaps flooded out. At Handkerchief Pool, one sitting on 11 April. At Walmore, six on 14 April, at least one nest on 28 April. Flock of non-breeding immatures seemed to commute between Coombe Hill Southern Meadows (when they were wet in early April), the wetter areas of Coombe Hill Meadows, and Hasfield Ham: about 10 on floodwater in early April, but 17 on 15 April, 28 on 20 April, numbers decreasing thereafter but still six on 18 June.

Geese

Greylag Goose: In recent years, numbers have been higher in winter, and small numbers have stayed to breed. At Bredon's Hardwick up to a dozen adults, with goslings from 7 May. Did not breed at Ashleworth, but up to five in April and May. At Coombe Hill, seen regularly in May and June, up to nine birds, but no sign of breeding.

Canada Goose: Numbers in recent winters have regularly approached a thousand, but most disappear in early spring (probably breeding further up the Severn and Avon); numbers in spring are generally low and very few breed. At Nafford, two nests, goslings seen in June. At Upham Meadow 20 on 5 April, 10 on 27 April. At Bredon's Hardwick, up to 60 in May, including locally-bred goslings. At Ashleworth, up to half a dozen in April and May, but no sign of breeding. At Coombe Hill, there

appeared to be two or three pairs in early April, but birds seen later in the month did not seem to be breeding; by day there were often up to ten, with up to 22 arriving to roost in the evenings; one pair definitely nested on Cobney Meadows, sitting tight from 11 April, and with six or seven goslings on 27 May. At Maise more Court, 10 on 2 April. At Walmore up to half a dozen in early April.

Barnacle Goose: A small feral flock occurs in the general area. Occasionally seen at Bredon's Hardwick, with nine on 16 April. At Maise more Court, two on 2 April. At Coombe Hill, one with Canada Geese on 4 and 29 April.

Egyptian Goose: The odd ones recorded last spring and summer did not reappear this year.

Hybrid Geese: A hybrid Barhead x Greylag at Coombe Hill on 23 April and 1 May. A hybrid Canada x Greylag on the Avon by Upham Meadow on 27 April.

Ducks

Shelduck: In the early part of the year, this species moves inland from the estuary, often occurring on floodwater in flocks numbering up to 100; some stay on well into the spring, no doubt looking for opportunities to nest in holes in the ground or hollow trees. With numbers in early 2006 low because of the lack of flooding, the maximum recorded anywhere this spring was about 15, often carrying out very active and aggressive displays; they were clearly interested in breeding, but only one definite record of successful breeding: a pair with seven small young seen on the Severn at Forthampton on 4 June. At Nafford, two in June. At Upham Meadow, two on 27 April. At Bredon's Hardwick a single on 7 May. At Ashleworth/Hasfield, up to nine on many dates in April and May, appearing to be paired, with a loafing flock of 14, not looking like breeders, on 10 June; but no proof of breeding. At Coombe Hill, up to 14 on many dates in April, with eight, definitely four pairs, at the end of the month, joined by another five aggressive intruders on 29 April; 12 was the maximum in May, two on 18 June. Birds will undoubtedly have moved back and forth between Coombe Hill and Ashleworth. At Cobney Meadows, two in April and May. At GLS, two pairs on 6 April. At Walmore, two on 6 April, six on 7 April, two on 14 April.

An indeterminate hybrid at several sites in early April, at Coombe Hill on 11 April.

Mandarin Duck: Not often recorded in the Severn Hams, though the species is numerous in the Forest of Dean. A male at Coombe Hill on floodwater on 27 May was perhaps the first record for the reserve, then a female on 4 June. A pair at Port Ham on 22 and 23 May.

Surface-feeding ducks: By early April, most of the wintering duck have left, with a few stragglers lasting into May and even June. The main interest at this period is whether any stay to nest, but only Mallard did so this year.

Wigeon: At Ashleworth, numbers dropped from 220 on 5 April (maximum for the month), to 80 on 8 April, nine (one with an injured wing) on 3 May, four on 30 May, two on 3 June and one on 13 June. At Coombe Hill 80 on 6 April (monthly maximum), 12 on 15 April, two throughout May; 80 on Cobney Meadows on 4 April.

Gadwall: At Nafford, two on 7 May. At Ashleworth 12 on 4 April (maximum), two on 28 May. At Coombe Hill, 20 on 1 April (monthly maximum), five on 27 May.

Teal: At Nafford, four on 13 April, six on 27 April. At Ashleworth 50 on 4 April, 14 on 1 May, five on 3 May, one on 30 May. At Coombe Hill, 60 on 6 April (monthly maximum), two on 1 May; on Cobney Meadows, 30 on 4 April. At Walmore, 120 on 6 April, 12 on 14 April. No signs whatever of breeding anywhere this year.

Mallard: Mallard is the only surface-feeding ducks which breeds regularly. At Bredon's Hardwick up to 25, some with young. At Ashleworth, 20 on 24 April, female with six tiny ducklings on 25 April. At Coombe Hill, 20 on 23 April; first female with ducklings (eight tinies) on scrapes on 23 April; another on Long Pool with five tinies on 25 April, one with eleven on 29 April; two families of different size on 1 May, three families on 3 May; one family of three ducklings surviving on 16 May;

50 adults and four families on evening of 21 May; 20 adults and one brood of biggish ducklings on 18 June. At Cobney Meadows, ten on 25 April.

Pintail: At Ashleworth, 20 on 1 April, one on 29 April. At Coombe Hill, two on 15 April.

Garganey: None of this migrant duck, which winters exclusively south of the Sahara, were recorded during the floods of early April (whereas there were several last year); but a male in good plumage on floodwater at Coombe Hill on 27 May and two males on 3 June, late dates for passing migrants.

Shoveler: At Nafford, one on 16 April. At Ashleworth 40+ on 1 April, five on 17 April. At Coombe Hill, 30 on 8 April, one on 25 April; on Cobney Meadows, 10 on 6 April. Returning birds already by late May, with two at Ashleworth on 30 May, and five at Coombe Hill on 13 June.

Diving ducks: Not many diving ducks are recorded in the shallow waters of the riverine meadows.

Ring-necked Duck: An individual of this rare North American species reported from Mythe Hook on 8 May; not known if it was a wild bird or an escape.

Tufted Duck: Odd birds hanging on at several sites until midsummer, suggesting possible breeding, rarely recorded in the Vale. Up to four regularly seen at Nafford. At Upham Meadow, two on the Avon on 27 April were seen later on Strensham pits. At Bredon's Hardwick, up to half a dozen. On Mythe brick-pits, two on 5 April. At Ashleworth, one on 8 April, two on 18 April. At Coombe Hill, two on floodwater on 6 April, six on 7 April, two on 25 April, six (three pairs) on 23 May; pair on floodwater on 27 May, four on 30 May; up to four throughout June.

Pochard: At Nafford, up to four in April.

Ruddy Duck: At Nafford, three on 26 May, one on 2 June.

Raptors

Marsh Harrier: A very scarce species, occasionally recorded on spring passage. At Coombe Hill, a female on 13 May; another on 27 May was a different bird, an immature with less yellow on forewing. Two in one spring is an excellent number.

Red Kite: More and more of this species, re-introduced in the Chilterns, are now being recorded, though they are still scarce. One over Upham Meadow on 26 May.

Goshawk: One at Walmore on 7 April, presumably from the Forest of Dean, where good numbers breed.

Sparrowhawk: A much commoner raptor. At Coombe Hill, two chasing one another at dusk on 23 April, one by day on 3 May.

Buzzard: Widespread in the vale, clearly breeding. Recorded at Upham Meadow, Mythe brick-pits, Ashleworth, (seven between Haw Bridge and Ashleworth on 5 April), Coombe Hill, Leigh Meadows, Walmore.

Kestrel: Also common: two at Wainlodes on 27 May were screaming loudly from an oak and may have been breeding nearby.

Hobby: This scarce species appears most years as a migrant, chasing large flying insects on hot days in May. Very small numbers appear to breed in the Vale and records after mid May probably refer to breeding birds. Singles, chasing insects at midday, at Coombe Hill on 24 April, 6 and 16 May, and at Ashleworth on 3 and 13 May; over Longlevens on 12 May. One over Longford on 25 June.

Merlin: Several surprisingly late records of this bird, more often recorded in winter. At Coombe Hill, one hunting at dusk on 6 April, a probable male on 30 April; and a female, chased off by breeding Lapwings, on 23 May, an extremely late date.

Peregrine: One or two regularly perching on the pylons that snake through the Severn Vale. At Ashleworth, two brown young birds soaring high and chasing one another on 8 April, singles on the pylons on many dates in April until 16 May, one on 17 April killed a pigeon but didn't bother to pick it up. One over Tredworth in Gloucester city on 28 May. One over Longford on 25 June.

Gamebirds and Rails

Quail: The characteristic "wet my lips" call was not heard this year.

Red-legged Partridge: Many have been released for shooting purposes over the years. Two pairs on the road near Ashleworth on 27 May, keeping their feet dry in very wet conditions in the fields.

Water Rail: Occasionally heard at Ashleworth: one on 6 May and one grunting on 28 May, during the high water period. At Coombe Hill, one was calling at dusk on several dates in April and 1 May; one chipping continually by day on 25 April and on 8 & 9 May.

Spotted Crake: No records anywhere this year (despite much time spent listening in the late evening) after repeated records over the last few years.

Coot: As usual, numbers increased in spring after small numbers in winter. Recorded breeding at a number of sites with permanent water. Nested at Nafford, young seen in June. At Strensham Pits, two on 27 April. At Bredon's Hardwick, up to 25 in May and June. At Ashleworth, 20+ on 4 April, when one was sitting on a nest; 70+ (an unusually high figure), including 50 at Hasfield, on 8 April, still 50 on 13 April, 30 on 25 April. At Coombe Hill, 20 (mostly paired) on 1 April, 63 on 15 April, 25 on 3 May; two sitting birds on 3 May, nests still emerging from flood on 27 May; up to 13 in June; ten and a family with chicks on 18 June; at Cobney Meadows a family with three tiny chicks on 18 June. At Walmore, where not regularly recorded, four on 14 April.

Waders

At this time of year there is twofold interest in waders; on one hand, species that may breed in low-lying meadows (traditionally Lapwing, Snipe, Curlew and Redshank, but of late also Oystercatcher and Little Ringed Plover); on the other hand, species that move northwards through the area en route to breeding areas further north (in some cases the Arctic), and which often occur in spring, particularly if there is any flooding as occurred in early April; these birds return south very early, and there are signs of return passage by mid or late June.

Oystercatcher: Has nested regularly at Bredon's Hardwick, and shown signs of prospecting elsewhere. At Upham Meadow, two feeding on 5 April (probably the birds from Bredon's Hardwick). At Bredon's Hardwick a pair from 13 April; nest seen from 16 April but appeared to have been predated on 2 June; new nest on 15 June. At Lower Lode, two flying upriver on 11 April. At Hasfield, one on floodwater on 1 April. At Coombe Hill, a series of records during the April flood suggested an inclination to breed, which never quite happened: two from 6 to 19 April, one on 28 April; then one again on second flood on 27 May.

Avocet: First ever record for the reserve on floodwater at Coombe Hill on 6 April; probably departed that evening, not found again in following days; perhaps one of those seen on the estuary in early April, or one returning to Upton Warren in Wores?

Little Ringed Plover: No proof of breeding. At Coombe Hill, one or two very discreet birds were recorded for most of April and seen mating on 25 April; one on 3 May was more vocal than before; one until 16 May, then again on 30 May; it was never clear if a single pair, sometimes difficult to find, was involved (probable), or (less likely) a succession of passing birds; if they did try to breed they certainly did not succeed. At Ashleworth Ham, one on 19 April.

Ringed Plover: A migrant recorded in small numbers at Coombe Hill: two on 6 April; two on 1 May probably left the same evening (flight call heard after dark).

Lapwing: Formerly a very widespread breeder, now occurs in a much more limited number of wet meadows, sometimes breeding on more open ground or in arable crops. Those breeding in lowland

meadows were severely hit: first by the April floods, which washed out many nests, so that the cycle of display and mating resumed in late April; but the May flood then wiped out most replacement clutches. Production was undoubtedly very low this year.

At Bredon Hill Farm (Worcs), a pair was displaying over a potato field where they have bred in previous years on 5 April, but not seen later. At Rectory Farm Meadows (Worcs), four pairs displaying on 27 April. At Bredon's Hardwick, only small numbers in April and May, and breeding; flocks of up to 25 in late June were no doubt migrants that had finished or abandoned breeding. None found between Staunton and Eldersfield on 4 April (but two nests reported at end of month). At Ashleworth, did not breed on reserve, though one or two birds were recorded in late April, and display and mating was seen on 29 April; – newly arrived breeders, flooded out from somewhere else? One was chasing crows on arable land above the reserve on 28 May. At Hasfield, 15-16 on floodwater in early April, not much display, but seven birds displaying on 13 April, at least two incubating in late April, and apparently four pairs in early May; in late May and early June everything very wet, up to six adults still about, behaving as though they had young; so these Hasfield youngsters probably hatched before the May floods rose. At Coombe Hill, the birds that had been displaying actively in late March undoubtedly lost any eggs to floodwater in early April, so the whole cycle began again when the floods went down; several birds with bright red legs were present on 8 April, doing courtship display as though they had not yet laid, on 15 April, 11 birds present, males doing tail-up display to females as though eggs not yet laid; two females seen incubating from 25 April; maybe new arrivals on 29 April, when 10 present, were more active in display; on 3 May 12 were present and several males in bright plumage doing tail-up display; five different females seen sitting on 16 and 21 May (when the males were very subdued), but none were sitting on 27 May when floodwater had submerged most of the nesting sites, though two pairs were behaving as though they had young; eight adults with one full grown flying chick on 18 June, no extra activity in evening. At Cobney Meadows, two displaying on 7 April, four on 11 and 25 April, but none on 27 May, no doubt flooded out; one giving alarm call as though it had young on 18 June. At Leigh Meadows, seven on 12 April, not on fields where they nested in previous years, appeared to be none nesting on 16 May. At Walmore, six displaying on 6 April, 12+ on 7 April, five on 28 April; five pairs apparently nesting in May had disappeared in conditions of high water on 27 May.

Dunlin: At Coombe Hill, three on 23 April did not stay long; six in summer plumage on 1 May also probably left that evening (calling heard after dark); up to four on various dates in May, last on 27 May.

Ruff: The only records was of two females at Coombe Hill from 6 to 10 April during the first flood.

Jack Snipe: At Ashleworth, singles on several dates, last on 11 April.

Snipe: One of the key breeding species, which has greatly decreased in recent years. Many birds recorded well into May, often calling excitedly in the evening, but no records of drumming display flight, and it is almost certain that this species did not breed anywhere. At Ashleworth, 15 on 1 April, 30 on 11 April; much calling at dusk on 12 April, but no drumming; 15 on 13 April, seven on 17 April; much calling at dusk again on 24 April, with at least six birds present but none drumming; the situation was similar on 25 April, when the “whicker, whicker” call was heard; about five in evening of 28 April with much excited calling but no drumming, four or five calling at dusk on 30 April, a little calling on 3 May, one by day on 6 May, but none after that. At Coombe Hill, six on 7 April, much calling after dark on evenings of 6 and 7 April but no drumming; at least two calling on evening of 26 April; one flushed by day on 18 June was the first for some time and probably a returning migrant. At Walmore, still 25 on 6 April, 12 on 14 April.

Black-tailed Godwit: A migrant wader often occurring on spring floods; all are likely to be birds of the race that breeds in Iceland. At Coombe Hill, four on 6 April, fourteen on 7 April, two remaining (both apparently males) on 8 and 11 April. A second wave arrived on 23 April, when ten were seen for a brief period. Then five at Hasfield Ham on 3 June, and three at Coombe Hill on 3 June.

Curlew: Another key breeding species, with a predilection for large hay meadows; breeding was clearly attempted at several sites, but no indication of breeding success yet as the breeding system extends well into July. At Rectory Farm Meadow (Worcs), one on 5 April, two pairs on 27 April. At Upham Meadow, 14 presumably breeding birds on 5 April; rather quiet, maybe five or six pairs,

present for rest of month. At Severn Ham Tewkesbury, one or two pairs on 5 April. At Chaceley, one by Chaceley Stock and two by Cockbury Hall on 14 April. At Hasfield, one or two pairs in April, frequently giving bubbling breeding call, less in May though some bubbling on 28 May and 10 June. At Coombe Hill, monthly maximum was 14 on 1 April; two pairs displaying throughout April; in the evenings, coming in good numbers, presumably from surrounding territories, to roost at dusk by the water at Coombe Hill, 15 on 6 April, 12 on 7 April, only five on 23 April, but extremely excited and one pair nearly mated – which suggests that they cannot have laid yet; even more excited on the evening of 26 April, when mating was seen; on 1 May, 14 birds, still pretty excitable though less so than on 26 April; nine by day on 9 May was the monthly maximum by day; nine, very noisy, came to roost on 21 May; two pairs displaying on 27 May; one or two displaying in the morning of 18 June; fifteen (!) coming to roost on evening of 18 June were still very noisy and excited. At Cobney Meadows, a pair in April and May, not found on 18 June. At Leigh Meadows, two pairs displaying on 12 April and 16 May. At Wainlodes, three by the Severn on 4 April; reportedly bred here, but eggs taken by Carrion Crow.

Whimbrel: Often recorded in early spring when they pass through en route to breeding sites in Europe. At Hasfield Ham, 11 on 3 May; at Coombe Hill, one on 19, 20 and 29 April. Two flew downstream at Ashleworth calling loudly, on 24 June, an early date for return passage.

Spotted Redshank: No records this spring.

Redshank: Another key breeding wader, probably affected by flooding in April and more especially in late May. At Rectory Meadows, two pairs on 27 April. At Upham Meadow, four (presumably breeding birds) on 5 April, about six on 27 April. At Bredon's Hardwick, formerly a stronghold, one or two in April, but no sign of breeding. At Ashleworth/Hasfield, none in early April, but two appeared briefly and displayed on 29 April, perhaps flooded out elsewhere? But they were not found again; similarly two over Hasfield on 10 June looked like birds displaced from elsewhere after flooding. At Coombe Hill, up to seven displaying round floods in early April; five (mating seen) on 19 April; two (one making a nest scrape) on 20 April; up to four in late April and until about 20 May (often quiet as though the females perhaps sitting?), but four on 27 May were very subdued, behaving as though they had lost their nests; seven on 13 June and five on 18 June, very noisy as though beginning to breed again; still one on 27 June; they do not seem to have begun again. On Cobney Meadows, attempted breeding seems to have been unsuccessful: up to four in early April, still two on 25 April, but none 27 May in wet conditions, and none in June. At Leigh Meadows, two on 12 April with a bit of display, but none on 16 May. At Walmore about 10 on 6 April, some displaying, four or five later in April; one pair, apparently breeding in early May, disappeared when water levels rose at the end of the month.

Greenshank: Passage migrant: at Coombe Hill, one from 6 to 8 April; another on 11 May. At Ashleworth Ham, one on 19 April.

Green Sandpiper: At Sudmeadow where they had wintered, one still present on 6 April. At Ashleworth, one on 3 May was no doubt a passage bird.

Common Sandpiper: Occasional records of this passage migrant at Coombe Hill: one on 22 April, two on 25 April, one on 1 May (calling in evening, may have left) and two on 3 May.

Gulls and Terns

Large numbers (many hundreds) of very noisy Lesser Blackbacks, Herring, Common and Black-headed Gulls stopping off on floodwater at Coombe Hill on the evenings of 6 and 7 April for a wash and drink before continuing their roosting flight back towards the estuary.

Lesser Blackback: At Hasfield, 30 on floodwater on 1 April.

Common Gull: At Ashleworth about 50 on 1 April

Common Tern: At Bredon's Hardwick, where a pair has bred regularly for some years now, recorded from 7 May, with a bird apparently on its nest on 5 and 25 June. At Coombe Hill, one on 3 May and 3 June, no doubt passing birds.

Pigeons

Stock Dove: At Upham Meadow, five on 5 April. At the Severn Ham at Tewkesbury, four on 5 April. At Ashleworth, 3 on 8 April and 25 May. At Coombe Hill, one or two on 4 April.

Turtle Dove: A species which has decreased massively in recent years. One reported by a Hasfield farmer in late April; at Ashleworth one singing on 1 May.

Cuckoo: At Strensham Pits, one on 27 April. At Ashleworth, one from 15 April (including one on 22 April with aberrant call), one or two singing from mid April to 18 June, one being mobbed by a Chaffinch (why?) on 29 April. At Coombe Hill, song throughout May.

Owls

Barn Owl: Singles regularly recorded, sometimes going to roost trees in the Ashleworth/Coombe Hill area in early morning or evening throughout April and May (perhaps the same bird seen several times), but no confirmation of breeding. One over Castle Meads, Gloucester, on 15 April.

Little Owl: Rather few records: two calling after dark at Coombe Hill on 7 April, one near the Wharf on 23 April, one calling after dark on 1 May. At Over, one on 29 April.

Tawny Owl: At Ashleworth, two or three calling at dusk in late April and early May (very noisy from Meerend Thicket on 30 April). At Coombe Hill, one calling on 26 April, much calling on 1 May.

Swift

First dates: at Sudmeadow, 10 on 27 April; at Coombe Hill, 25 on 29 April, five on 1 and 3 May.

Kingfisher

At Upham Meadow, one on Avon on 5 April. At Lower Lode one on 27 June.

Woodpeckers

Green Woodpecker: One at Coombe Hill several dates in April.

Great Spotted Woodpecker: At the Mythe, one drumming on 5 April. At Ashleworth, one drumming on 1 April, two drumming only 50 metres apart on 13 April, one drumming in late April and 28 May. At Coombe Hill, one drumming in several dates in April.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker: a probable, singing at the Mythe on 5 April.

Passerines

Skylark: At Upham Meadow, two or three singing in April. At Ashleworth, singing up to three in April and up to 28 May. At Coombe Hill, two or three singing in 15 April and up to 27 May. At Walmore several singing on 14 April.

Sand Martin: None at Ashleworth or Coombe Hill in the cold conditions of early April after fair numbers in late March; then about 15 at the Mythe and 10 at Lower Lode on 5 April. At Ashleworth and Ashleworth, smaller numbers (up to five) from 8 to 15 April; then more at Coombe Hill: 30 with Swallows on 20 April, 100 passing through on 22 April; at Cobney Meadows, two or three with Swallows on 11 April. The colony at in the Severn bank at Lower Lode was occupied, with about 80 birds present on 27 June; of 34 birds caught on 27 June, ten were birds ringed there last year.

Swallow: Very few hirundines in first few days of April after movements of late March. At the Mythe, one on 5 April. At Ashleworth, 20 over reserve on 8 April; ten passing through on 22 April; young birds ringed in nest on 10 June. At Coombe Hill, 2 on 1 April, six on 7 April, two on 8 April, at least 20 moving west on 11 April when there was also movement at Cobney Meadows, with 30 sitting on bush sheltering from wind; at least 70 at Coombe Hill at least 70 on 20 April.

House Martin: At Ashleworth, one on 8 April. At Coombe Hill, two on 11 April, one on 25 April, 20 on 1 May.

Meadow Pipit: At Upham Meadow, one or two on 5 April. At Ashleworth, two on 1 April. Small passage to northwest noted round Haw Bridge on 5 April. At Coombe Hill, 12 on 8 April were no doubt migrants, just one on 11 April.

Yellow Wagtail: The only records on wet meadows were of birds on passage in April and early May; no sign of nesting by a species once considered typical of this habitat; some may have nested in cereal fields. At Strensham, one over arable field on 27 April. At Ashleworth, one flying over on 17 April. At Coombe Hill, four from 7-10 April, all passing through; two on 12 & 18 April; 3-4 on several days from 18-20 April, one on 29 April, two on evening of 1 May, one by day on 3 May. At Over, one over arable on 29 April.

White/Pied Wagtail: The White Wagtail subspecies is regularly recorded on passage in spring; Pied Wagtails, the British breeding subspecies, also move through, some staying to breed. At Coombe Hill, three obvious Pied males on 4 April; 31, including one White, on 7 April; another White on 9 April, three Pied on 11 April; three White on 18 April; several Pied and White on 20 April; three White and four male Pied on 23 April; eight Pied on evening of 26 April, at least 12 on 1 May.

Grey Wagtail: One at Coombe Hill on 3 June.

Robin: First juvenile of the year caught at Ashleworth on 10 June, several more on 24 June.

Nightingale: At Strensham Pits (Worcs), two singing from scrub on 27 April.

Redstart: A summer visitor with a particular local adaptation to willow trees, where it nests in pollarded boles, rather than the more familiar oak trees; usually recorded from first week in April, earliest dates a bit later this year. At Upham Meadows, a male singing well on 27 April, first time ever recorded here. At Ashleworth, first two singing birds on 13 April, up to six or seven singing throughout April and May, still a little song on 10 June. First juvenile of the year netted at Ashleworth on 18 June. At Coombe Hill, first noted on 20 April, up to three singing in April and May. At Leigh Meadows, one singing on 16 May. At Wainlodes, one singing on 27 May.

Stonechat: Wintering birds seem to have moved out by the end of March; no records in April and no sign of breeding this year.

Whinchat: No records of this species, usually noted on northward spring passage, this year.

Wheatear: Odd birds recorded on passage, does not breed. At Coombe Hill, a male landed at the top of a hawthorn bush along the canal on 15 April. At Ashleworth, a pair on 23 April. At Sudmeadow, three females of the Greenland race on 3 May.

Fieldfare: A late one by the Severn near Deerhurst on 14 April.

Mistle Thrush: At Ashleworth, one singing on 28 May. At Coombe Hill, one singing on 25 April

Cetti's Warbler: A species rarely recorded north of the Slimbridge/Frampton area: one reported singing from the Mythe, Tewkesbury on 8 and 9 May, and one singing by the Severn at Minsterworth on 1 May.

Grasshopper Warbler: No records of birds singing or seen anywhere in the Severn Hams this year, despite much effort listening in the evenings; none trapped in ringing operations at Ashleworth either.

Sedge Warbler: Breeds commonly in rough vegetation around wet areas, and is one of the main species studied at ringing operations at Ashleworth. The floods in late May seem to have restricted breeding success severely. At Strensham Pits, at least ten singing on 27 April. At Upham Meadow, five or six singing on 27 April. At Ashleworth, first singing bird on 17 April, several in following days, well established with at least five birds singing by 29 April; several adult male retraps (i.e. birds ringed here in previous years and now returning) on 22 April, many adults trapped on 14 May,

including females in egg; some song but only one caught on 10 June, after the floods. Ten caught on 24 June included adults first ringed here in 2000 and 2002, but only four juveniles. At Coombe Hill, first singing bird on 15 April, up to five singing during late April, May and June. At Leigh Meadows, several singing on 16 May.

Reed Warbler: Much less widespread than Sedge Warbler, because of the lack of reed-beds. At Upham Meadow, only one singing in reeds along River Avon on 27 April. At Lower Lode, one singing by Severn on 27 June. At Ashleworth, none until 4 June, when one bird was singing from willow scrub and two adults were caught, and song recorded later in the month. At Coombe Hill, first one singing on 25 April, and one or two singing throughout May and June from old osier beds.

Lesser Whitethroat: A summer migrant which breeds in quite fair numbers. First one heard singing along the canal at Coombe Hill on 22 April, then two or three recorded singing in late April and May, even on 18 June; three singing at Cobney Meadows on 25 April. At Ashleworth one singing in evening of 24 April, four or five on evening of 3 May (are they crepuscular?); a retrap adult caught on 14 May; lots of song, and two adults caught, on 10 June; some song, only adults caught on 24 June. At Leigh Meadows, one singing on 16 May.

Whitethroat: A widespread summer migrant, which used to be recorded mainly on higher ground above the meadows but which, in recent years, has spread down into the wetter areas in some numbers, apparently breeding. At Strensham Pits at least five singing on 27 April. At Ashleworth, several singing and one new bird trapped on 22 April, at least five singing on 29 April. Some song, a couple trapped on 14 and 28 May. Some song on 24 June, birds caught included an adult female about to lay and some juveniles. At Coombe Hill, first singing birds on three 20 April, then regularly noted singing until 18 June. At Leigh Meadows, several singing on 16 May.

Garden Warbler: No records. This species is very scarce in the meadows in spring.

Blackcap: One of the warblers which winters in small numbers, then more arrive in spring as migrants, usually in taller trees around the wetland areas. At Upham Meadow, one singing on 27 April. At the Mythe, two singing on 5 April. At Ashleworth, one singing well on 8 April, then recorded singing regularly through April, May and until 24 June. At Coombe Hill, one with subsong (first singing bird this year) on 4 April, several singing on 20 April, then many singing birds in April, May until 18 June.

Chiffchaff: Another warbler which winters in some numbers; these birds begin to sing by mid-March and are then joined by waves of migrants. At Strensham Pits, two singing on 27 April. At Upham Meadow, one or two singing on 27 April. At The Mythe, five singing on 5 April. At Haw Bridge, one singing on 1 April. At Ashleworth, three singing on 1 April, then song heard throughout April and May; a juvenile caught on 24 June. At Coombe Hill, five singing on 1 April, then many singing throughout April and May to 18 June.

Willow Warbler: At Upham Meadow, one or two singing on 27 April. At the Mythe, two singing on 5 April. At Ashleworth, three singing, first of year, on 1 April, then singing regularly through April and May; several adults caught on 24 June were in moult, hence breeding season over. At Coombe Hill, two singing on 4 April, then recorded singing throughout April and May until 18 June.

Goldcrest: Common in winter in the hedges, occurs more sparingly in spring, usually where there are conifers. At Strensham Pits, one singing from conifer hedge on 27 April.

Spotted Flycatcher: Has become extremely scarce as a migrant in the vale. One at The Mythe on 9 May. One at Ashleworth Quay on 24 June may have nested locally. One going to a nest in Tirley on 25 June.

Long-tailed Tit: Noted more often in flocks in winter, but undoubtedly breeds widely in the area. At Ashleworth, five on 8 April, one or two on 29 April. At Coombe Hill, 15 on 4 April.

Treecreeper: At the Mythe, one singing on 5 April. At Haw Bridge, one singing on 1 April. At Ashleworth, one singing several dates in late April and May. At Coombe Hill, one singing several dates in April. At Cobney Meadows, one singing on 25 April.

Jay: At Strensham Pits, two on 27 April. At Ashleworth, two on 8 April. At Coombe Hill, one or two on several dates in April.

Carrion Crow: Reputedly solitary, they certainly gather in flocks. At Upham Meadow, 50 displaying on ground on 5 April; 60 just walking round on grass on 27 April. At Coombe Hill, group of 50 in willows interacting socially, on 4 April.

Jackdaw: Massive roost of 500 birds at Lower Lode on 27 June

Raven: Regular in good numbers at Walmore, but is being recorded more and more often elsewhere in the vale, usually flying over, but no proof of breeding so far. At Tirley, parties of two and five on 31 and 4 May. At Apperley, one on 17 April. At Coombe Hill one on 30 April and at Cobney Meadows, one on 25 April. As last spring, large numbers going to roost at Walmore, surprisingly late in the year: 43 in the evening of 7 April, 162 on 4 May, over 208 on 27 May.

Lesser Redpoll: Two at Ashleworth on 14 April. One at Sudmeadow, the first since November 2000, on 6 April, feeding on willowherb seed.

Bullfinch: Frequently recorded in thick hedges. At Ashleworth, one trapped on 22 April. At Coombe Hill, five on 8 April, a couple on 3 May.

Yellowhammer: At Ashleworth, one singing on 28 May near Stonebow. At Coombe Hill, where they rarely occur on lower meadows, one singing several times in the first half of April, and noted singing from three other song-posts in April and mid May. At Wainlodes, one singing on 27 May.

Reed Bunting: Numbers, especially of singing males, unusually poor in early April; breeding success also appears to have been adversely affected by late May floods which seem to have inundated many nests. At Upham Meadow, two or three but no song on 5 April, five with a little song on 27 April. At Severn Ham Tewkesbury, one singing on 5 April. At Lower Lode, song on 27 June. At Ashleworth, recorded throughout April but very little song; three adults from earlier years retrapped on 22 April, a male first ringed in 2003 retrapped on 29 April, when a little song was heard; a bit more active in May with more song; first four juveniles of the year caught on 24 June. Situation similar at Coombe Hill, with birds present throughout April but little song; present through May and June, some song in June. At Leigh Meadows, several singing on 16 May.

Corn Bunting: None recorded this year at sites like Upham Meadow or Severn Ham Tewkesbury where they have been found singing in previous years.

Compiled by M. Smart from his own observations and those of Les Brown, Mervyn Greening, Rich Hearn, Robert Homan, Andy Jayne, and Gordon Avery, with some cherries picked from the Gloucester Birder website.

24 November 2006