

Notes on birds in the Severn and Avon Vales (the “Severn Hams”), Gloucestershire and south Worcestershire October - December 2007

General introduction

The main sites are (from the north):

- Along the Severn in Worcestershire, there are a series of well-watched gravel workings which attract many water birds, notably waders; these are (from the north): Grimley (on the west bank just north of Worcester), Clifton (on the east bank just south of Kempsey); and Ryall (on the east bank opposite Upton). Upton Warren Nature reserve is north of Droitwich and is outside the area of the present report, but is occasionally mentioned as it attracts many significant birds.
- Upton Ham (Worcs), the Upper Ham, a hay meadow south of the town, is an SSSI and is the best conserved of the riverside hams in botanical terms; south of the old railway embankment is the Lower Ham.
- Longdon Marsh (Worcs), a nearly enclosed basin north of the M50 motorway, flowing via the Longdon Brook to the Severn, just above the Mythe north of Tewkesbury.
- Avon Meadows (on either side of the Avon, going north from Tewkesbury), along the border between Gloucestershire and Worcestershire, and including: the restored gravel pits at Bredon’s Hardwick (Worcs); Upham Meadow (sometimes called the “Great Hay Meadow”) and Summer Leasow 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 Worcestershire Avon is the Gwen Finch Worcestershire Wildlife Trust Reserve near Nafford (Worcs), an area of shallow lakes by the Avon; between Pershore and Fladbury is Lower Moor. Just to the east of Bredon 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, and are particularly well-watched. 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 brick-pits. Maisemore Ham is now largely converted to arable farming.
- Sites on the edge of urban Gloucester, once flood meadow: Port Ham and Castlemeads on Alney Island, Sudmeadow, and the Gloucester Landfill Site (GLS). Port Ham has recently been restored and some shallow scrapes dug; at the southern end of Port Ham is Lower Parting where the two arms of the Severn meet again; Sudmeadow is immediately south of Lower Parting; GLS 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.
- Walmore Common, on the west bank of the Severn below Gloucester; also the little marsh at Rodley (Wilmore Common), 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 (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 flood-banks along the river, there may be extensive floods over the whole floodplain area. The major Severn tributary, the Avon, does not have flood-banks 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

A generally dry autumn after the massive flooding of the summer. Weather patterns were generally anticyclonic in early October, with high pressure over Europe extending eastwards to the UK and easterly winds at the beginning of the month; occasional Atlantic fronts got through however, with fair amounts of rain on 9 October. Westerly depressions continued until 16 October, when there was heavy rain all day; then, until 19 October, a few days of cold weather, clear night skies with a hint of frost and easterly winds. The weather in late October and the first half of November was generally dry and mild, with light north-westerly winds, but there were short periods of easterly winds, with a sharp frost on 5 November. Nationally, November was dry (only 22 drier Novembers in the last 100 years), and temperatures were slightly above average. Heavy rain fell on 18/19 November, with even a light dusting of snow on the hills, and very cold with sharp overnight frosts on 22 and especially 23 November; mild with westerly winds till end of November. December was relatively dry, with the mean temperature near average. The weather turned wintry from 1 December, with strong cold westerly winds and fairly heavy rain on 2 and 5 December; then, for the next fortnight, the weather was dominated by a huge anticyclone over Europe, with cold easterly winds, frequent frost overnight and some fog by day; the anticyclone finally declined gradually, giving way to frontal weather from the Atlantic from 22 December until the end of the month, with the first rain for some time on 22 December, and quite heavy showers round Christmas.

Severn levels were low in October and early November, with little or no flooding on the meadows; however, water often hung about on the surface, partly because of the high water table after the summer floods, partly because these floods had drowned most of the earthworms, so that the topsoil was poorly drained. Levels rose after the rain of 18/19 November, causing local streams to back up and a slight rise in levels on meadows, but dropped again from 22 November. The rain of early December caused the Severn level (and in turn local ditch levels) to rise, with quite extensive flooding on meadows from 4 December, peaking 9-12 December, dropping by 15 December. The heavy showers round Christmas raised water levels from 26 December onwards.

Conditions at the main sites

Ashleworth/Hasfield Hams: The three pools on the GWT reserve were still full of water in early October, but water levels were otherwise low; the main reserve fields were mown at last in early October (mowing was impossible earlier because of the summer floods); young willows at the southern end of reserve were cut back and the brash was burnt in October, and another 30 metres of hedge along Ham Road were re-laid. There was little flooding until Ashleworth reserve and Hasfield Ham were lightly flooded by the rain of 18/19 November; the first three boards were inserted in the Ashleworth sluice on 18 November to maintain these water levels, and the fourth board on 23 November, resulting in a rise in water levels on the reserve, with the main area of the reserve covered with a thin film of water for the first time this autumn in the last week of November, then rising again in the first few days of December, with extensive flooding in the middle of the month; after this flood had dropped, a final board was inserted in the sluice on 15 December bringing water levels to their winter norm by 22 December; they rose again slightly from 26 December. With low autumn water levels, ringing of passerines continued until late October.

Coombe Hill: In early October, the scrapes and Long Pool were still full of water, which had lasted all summer; most vegetation round the scrapes had been killed off by the summer flooding; young willows on the islands in the scrapes were cleared to improve nesting conditions for waders next year. Water levels remained constant at this level until late November, then rose in early December, with extensive flooding from 9 to 12 December, then dropping again; slightly more water on scrapes from 26 December, and scrapes submerged on 29 December.

Leigh Meadows: No surface flooding in October/November, surface water on fields in early December, and flooding in mid-month, dropping again by 22 December; River Chelt high again on 31 December.

Walmore Common: No flooding in October; very light flooding on 21 November, following local rain, had dropped again by 28 November, more light flooding following rain of 2 December, and quite extensive shallow flooding on 9 December, which receded by mid-month.

Bird records

Grebes

Little Grebe: At the Gwen Finch reserve there were up to two throughout the period and, at Kemerton, 14 on 11 October, seven on 21 December.

At the Mythe, one on 21 December. At Ashleworth, odd singles from 26 October to 7 November and on 11 & 29 December. On the Severn near Sandhurst, two on 17 December. At Coombe Hill, one on 3 October and 7 November.

Great Crested Grebe: At Bredon's Hardwick, monthly maxima of seven on 18 October, eleven on 25 November, two in late December.

Cormorant: At Bredon's Hardwick, the main loafing and fishing spot, monthly maxima of 19 on 18 October, 41 on 25 November, 38 on 24 December. At least ten along the Severn above Tewkesbury on 30 November. Most other records were of birds flying up and down the Severn on their way to or from Bredon's Hardwick: at Wainlodes, one over the river on 16 October; at Coombe Hill, three flew over on 27 November, six to north on 29 December.

Little Egret: As usual, numbers petered out in autumn and there were very few winter records: singles at: Grimley on 31 December; Lower Moor on 17 October; Kemerton on 14 October; Hasfield Ham on 13 November; and in flight over Sudmeadow on 18 November.

Grey Heron: At Gwen Finch, one or two from October to December. At Bredon's Hardwick, one or two from 14 October to 24 December. At the Mythe, ten together on 30 November. At Ashleworth, singles October to December. At Coombe Hill, up to three, from November to December. At Walmore, one on 28 November.

Mute Swan: On the Avon Meadows, the wintering flock of 27 on 29 November included a couple of ringed birds that had been seen at Coombe Hill in the summer, 25 on 30 December. At Mythe brick-pits, five on 30 November. At Ashleworth, two adults with four full-grown cygnets on 17 October. At Coombe Hill, 3AY and mate (which had nested there in summer) were still present from October to December, while a flock of eight Mutes were grazing with Whoopers on the only really fresh grass on the southern meadows from 27 November to 4 December, before the flood; at Leigh Meadows, a family party of four (two full-grown cygnets), grazing on fresh grass on 4 December, were joined after the flood by up to 20 Mutes and the Whoopers at the end of December. These Mutes returned to roost on the Coombe Hill scrapes, 16 were seen roosting on scrapes, then going to graze on the meadows on 22 December. At Walmore Common, a family party of five from late November, seven on 6 December, nine on 9 December, 15 (five cygnets) on 31 December.

Whooper Swan: With little water at Ashleworth, the first arrivals went straight to the estuary as they had done in 2004/05 and 2005/06; two were seen on the early date of 18 October at Slimbridge, and then disappeared. A quite separate group of three adults and five cygnets were on the water at Upton Warren on 18 November until 09h30 when they flew south. What must have been the same birds were in the Teme Valley near Bransford Bridge, close to Worcester, from 19 to 23 November, but were not found again anywhere else. Where did they go?

There were occasional sightings of two birds in the Coombe Hill area in mid-November (very probably the birds first seen at Slimbridge in October), though none were found feeding in the usual preferred site on the Leigh Meadows; two on 11 November and again on 19 November (when they landed on the scrape in mid morning with some Mutes). Two were seen briefly in flight over Slimbridge at 09h30 on 21 November, but not found there again. Two were seen at Coombe Hill (again with Mutes) at mid morning on 23 November; then from 27 November until 4 December, two adult Whoopers were found feeding with Mutes in secluded fields on the southern meadows, not used in previous winters; these were fields from which the mat of dead grass left by the summer floods had been removed, and were clearly more palatable to the swans; to judge by their behaviour on 27 November, (very relaxed and unconcerned by passing farm workers), they had probably been there for some time, perhaps since the beginning of the month. Two were seen coming to roost on the scrape at Coombe Hill on the evening of 27 November, and heard leaving the scrapes at first light on 1 December. The two birds remained grazing on the same southern meadows until water levels began to rise around 9 December; they were

not found there after 15 December, presumably because the floodwater had affected the quality of the grazing and because sheep had grazed the grass down; two were on fields near Ashleworth on 17 December, then were seen grazing on another field of agriculturally improved grass with no dead mat on Leigh Meadows in the last week of December. It seems certain that all these records refer to the same two birds.

Bewick's Swan: Autumn counts from the Netherlands indicate that summer 2007 was a very poor breeding season on the tundra, the second worst on record with only 3.8% young (1997 was the worst with 2.3%). First arrivals at Slimbridge were six, including a pair (the same individuals that have been the first to arrive for the last three years) on 18 October, following clear skies, cool temperatures and easterly winds. On 20 October, the seven birds present left Slimbridge at 08h10; what must have been the same birds were seen flying south over Ashleworth at 09h35 and were back at Slimbridge at 10h40; seven were seen again on the water at Coombe Hill early on 24 October; so, as in previous years, newly arrived Bewick's seem to reconnoitre the situation in potential feeding areas in the neighbourhood soon after arrival; they will have been disappointed to find it so dry this year. These two October records were the only ones in the Severn Hams until the last few days of the year. By 31 October, 31 different individuals had visited Slimbridge. Six were seen flying low over Gloucester towards Slimbridge after dark on 14 November. The first pair with cygnets arrived at Slimbridge on 15 November. By 30 November, 61 birds (still only one juvenile) were present, out of 93 individuals recorded so far this winter. There was little or no indication of any use of other feeding sites in the area, because they were all so dry. The easterly winds and cold weather in mid-December led to a considerable influx: the maximum on the reserve was up to 68 on 17 December, increasing sharply to 114 on 17 December and to 172 on 21 December, by which date 211 individuals had been recorded (only nine cygnets).

At Walmore, where Slimbridge birds regularly go to graze, two adults plus a cygnet were seen briefly on 17 November, two on 18 November. But records there were few and far between: no more in November or early December; then eight (six adults and two cygnets) on 23 December; 17 (all adults, highest count so far) on 26 December; nine (eight adults and a yearling, all unringed) on 29 December, 17 (including one yearling and two cygnets) on 30 December, eleven (all adults, none ringed) on agriculturally improved grassland on 31 December.

At Leigh Meadows, one yearling (wearing yellow ring 675) was seen with Whoopers and Mutes from 26 to 31 December. Interestingly, this was a bird which had not yet visited Slimbridge this winter, and must have found its way to the Severn Hams directly, without going to Slimbridge.

Geese

Pink-footed Goose: An unusual record of one with Canada Geese at Lower Moor from 17 December to the end of the year. In the previous days prior, a strong movement had brought good numbers of Pinkfeet into the North & East Midlands. This bird was presumably a straggler from this influx, as there had been no known feral or escaped birds anywhere in the area earlier in the year. This scenario has been seen in other years, the vagrant joining the local feral geese flocks, and becoming imprinted on the habits and lifestyle of the wild birds, possibly explaining the extended stays.

Greylag Goose: At Bredon's Hardwick, 92 on 1 October, 195 on 14 October (apparently the highest ever count in Worcs), 110 on 4 December, 55 on 30 December. At Ashleworth, eight had roosted on 5 December. At Coombe Hill, a lone bird with a broken wing present from October till the end of the year; six flew in on 16 October.

Canada Goose: The usual winter influxes along the Avon and Severn. At Lower Moor, 150 on 16 December. At Gwen Finch reserve, 47 on 24 December. At Kemerton, 274 on 1 October, 330 on 11 October, 500 on 8 November. At Bredon's Hardwick, 44 on 30 December; on the Great Hay Meadow, 80 on 14 October, 160 on 30 December. The above records probably refer to the same birds moving about.

At Ashleworth, two with broken wings had summered and were present throughout the autumn. The usual winter build-up occurred with a lower peak, due no doubt to the dry conditions: ten were seen on 15 October, 35 on 22 November; 60 had roosted on 5 December; 75 flew in from Coombe Hill on 8 December; 180 roosting on 24 December. At Coombe Hill, 150 had roosted on 16 October, then flew off after feeding round scrapes; 160 had roosted on 27 November, 170 on 26 December, 240 on 29

December; most flying off to north (to feed where – on the Avon?), some to south. There is much interchange between Coombe Hill and Ashleworth, so the above records will certainly refer to the same group, and there may indeed also be interchange with birds from the Avon.

Barnacle Goose: A single, seen with the flock of Canada Geese, at Ashleworth on 8 December, and at Coombe Hill on 16 October and 29 December.

Egyptian Goose: At Bredon's Hardwick, two on 10 & 14 November, and on 21 & 30 December.

Ducks

Shelduck: As in most years, small numbers began to appear towards the end of the year. At Gwen Finch reserve, seven on 24 December, eight on 30 December. On the Great Hay Meadow, an early bird on 14 October. On the Severn Ham at Tewkesbury, four on 21 December. At Coombe Hill, a single, the first of the autumn, on 24 November; two on 29 December. At Walmore, two on 3 December, six on 9 December, two on 31 December. At Rodley, four on 2 December and a party of five, already lekking, on 3 December.

Hybrid Shelduck: At Rodley, one on 3 December, probably the Australian x Paradise cross seen there on 5 January.

Mandarin: A drake at Kemerton on 28 November. A female at Walmore on 22 October.

Surface-feeding ducks

Small numbers in October and early November, mainly at Coombe Hill because Ashleworth was dry. With increased water levels at Ashleworth in the last ten days of November and in mid December, numbers built up there.

Wigeon: At Gwen Finch reserve, two on 14 October, six on 25 November. At Kemerton, 42 on 14 November, 60 on 4 December, 125 on 13 December. At Bredon's Hardwick, monthly maxima of 92 on 14 October, 120 on 25 November, and a brief peak (which must have included all the Wigeon in the vales) of 1,150 on 24 December. At Mythe Brook, 60 on 30 November. At Ashleworth, five on 15 October, 30 on 20 November, 140 on 22 November, 250+ on 5 December, 300 on 8 December, 500 on 24 December, 350 on 27 December. At Coombe Hill, 27 on 3 October, 18 grazing round scrape on 16 October and decoying towards a passing fox, 62 (monthly maximum) on 24 October; 150 on 20 November, much smaller numbers in the first three weeks of December (41 on 4 December, only 12 on 22 December), but 950 on 18 December, 340 on higher water on 29 December. Much exchange between Ashleworth and Coombe Hill.

Gadwall: At Gwen Finch reserve, one on 14 October. At Ashleworth, maxima of five in November, seven in December. At Sandhurst, eight at on 17 December.

Teal: At Gwen Finch reserve, 72 on 14 October, 85 on 8 November, 260 on 24 December. At Kemerton, 50 on 21 December. At Bredon's Hardwick, maxima of two in 14 October, 20 on 25 November and 28 on 30 December. At Mythe Brook, five on 30 November. At Ashleworth, 127 on 24 November, up to 200 throughout December. At Coombe Hill, 50 on 3 October, 60 on 27 November, about 200 on 18/22 December. At Walmore, 11 on 7 October, 100 on 28 November, 166 on 9 December, 200 on 31 December.

Mallard: At Gwen Finch reserve 55 on 8 November, 35 on 24 December. At Kemerton, up to 145 in 14 November. At Bredon's Hardwick, monthly maxima of 54 on 14 October, 50 on 8 November, 25 on 30 December. At Mythe Brook, 20 on 30 November. At Ashleworth, 30 on 29 November, 55 on 8 December. At Coombe Hill, 65 on 10 October (monthly maximum), 50 on 16 October, 30 in late November and December. At Leigh Meadows 20 on 4 December. At Walmore, five on 28 November, 66 on 9 December.

Pintail: The rather dry early part of the winter did not produce the flocks of several hundred seen in some wet autumns, and numbers remained low until the light flooding of early December.

At Grimley New Workings, two on 21 November; at Clifton GP a drake on 25 November. At Bredon's Hardwick, single figures on many dates in December, but 28 on 17 December. At Kemerton, a male on 1 October, three on 17 December.

At Ashleworth, one on 22 November, five on 23 November, then 18 on 29 November and, with increasing water levels, 31 on 4 December, 70 on 8 December, 90 on 24 December. At Coombe Hill, one on several dates in October, 120 on 12 December, 32 on 29 December. At Walmore, four on 9 December.

Shoveler: At Gwen Finch reserve, up to 19 November and December. At Kemerton, 14 on 1 October. At Ashleworth, 20 on 22 November, 58 on 27 November, 75 on 24 December. At Coombe Hill, 30 on 3 October, 40 on 10 October, 45 on 10 November, then much smaller numbers until 60 on 8 December, 50 on 15 December. At Walmore, six on 29 December.

Diving ducks

Pochard: At Kemerton, 25 on 13 December. At Bredon's Hardwick, six on 14 October. At Coombe Hill, the solitary female present since late August stayed throughout the autumn until at least 27 December.

Red-crested Pochard: A drake was seen near Grimley from 9 - 17 October, at Grimley New Workings on 6 November, at Bredon's Hardwick on 11 November, then at Lower Moor from 30 November until the end of the year; presumably the same bird in all cases.

Tufted Duck: At Gwen Finch, one female on 30 December. At Bredon's Hardwick, nine on 9 October. At Mythe brick-pits, five on 30 November. At Ashleworth, one on 24 December.

Goldeneye: Recorded regularly in Worcestershire, but not in Gloucestershire. At Grimley New Workings, up to four, including an occasional drake from 30 October until the end of the year; at Kemerton, a female on 14 November and 4 December; at Bredon's Hardwick, a male and a female on 25 November.

Goosander: Most records again from Worcestershire (this species is recorded in numbers on reservoirs in the north of the county): at Clifton GP, a female on 11 November; at Bredon's Hardwick, up to three (normally redheads but including an occasional drake) on several dates from 11 November until 6 December. At Kemerton, two redheads on 28 November, one on 4 December. A redhead at Coombe Hill on 27 October and 10 November.

Ruddy Duck: At Kemerton, one on 14 November.

Raptors

Goshawk: At Coombe Hill, one performing a gliding flight (almost like display) on 20 November.

Sparrowhawk: Singles (sometimes noted as females, sometimes as males) regularly recorded at Ashleworth and Coombe Hill.

Buzzard: Widely recorded: at Tirley, four on 21 October. At Ashleworth, one or two throughout the period. At Coombe Hill, 8 on 11 October, then one to three until the end of December. At Leigh Meadows, one on 29 December. At Rodley, one on 28 November.

Kestrel: Widely recorded too: at Ashleworth Ham, one on 1 November. At Coombe Hill, two on 11 October. At Walmore, one on 28 November.

Hobby: A late juvenile at Lower Moor on 23 October.

Merlin: Records from Worcestershire are strikingly more frequent than Gloucestershire. A male at Ryall GP on 30 December. A male near Lower Moor on 30 November, and in December. A female at Gwen Finch on 23 November. At Walmore, an adult male on 29 December.

Peregrine: At Grimley one on 7 December. At Clifton GP, two on 17 November and 22 December, one 29 December. At Longdon Marsh, one on 15 November. At Gwen Finch, two on 17 December.

At Ashleworth, one (often on the pylons on the Hasfield side) from 3 to 27 October, (noted as a male on 18 October), and throughout November and December (at least two different birds). At Coombe Hill, one resting on a tree near the canal on many dates from 3 October to late December (at least two different birds involved, one male, one female, probably the same birds as at Ashleworth). At Leigh Meadows one on 29 December. At Walmore, one on 11 November (immature) and 9 December.

Gamebirds and Rails

Red-legged Partridge: At Sudmeadow, two on 5 November.

Water Rail: At Kemerton, two on 24 October & 14 November. At the Mythe, two calling on 21 December. At Ashleworth, one was calling on 29 November. At Coombe Hill, one heard and/or seen regularly from 24 October, through November and into December. At Sudmeadow Marsh, one on 11 & 17 December. At Walmore, one heard on 22 October, two on 11 November.

Moorhen: Regular in fair numbers. At Ashleworth, two on 8 December. At Coombe Hill, five on 27 November, three on 1 December.

Coot: At Gwen Finch reserve up to eleven throughout the period, but 126 at Kemerton on 21 December. In Gloucestershire, much less numerous than Moorhen in early winter. At Mythe Brick-pits, five on 30 November. At Ashleworth, up to three in 24 December, none at Coombe Hill.

Waders

There were a few records of late migrants passing through but, as usual in recent years, numbers of waders wintering in the Severn Hams, particularly in dry years like this one, have been very low.

Oystercatcher: At Grimley, one on 22 December.

Golden Plover: In Gloucestershire, wintering Golden Plover have for some years deserted the Severn Vale to winter in large numbers on the estuary. But some clearly stay in south Worcestershire: 250+ with 300 Lapwing near Smite Farm, north of Worcester, on 22 November; at Ryall GP 200+ on 10 November; regular records west of Fladbury in the Lower Moor area on many dates, e.g. 82 on 7 October, 95 on 13 October, 218 on 23 October, 186 on 8 November, 160 on 30 November, 170 on 12 December & 27 December.

Other records perhaps relate to passing migrants: at Gwen Finch 22 on 1 October, nine on 9 October; at Ashleworth, one migrant flew south on 8 October.

Lapwing: At Kemerton, 215 on 1 October, 61 on 31 October.

Numbers wintering in Gloucestershire were very low, with no appreciable flocks before Christmas apart from cold weather movements down the Severn. At Gwen Finch, six on 14 October; at Bredon's Hardwick, 22 on 18 October, 40 on 29 November, 35 on 24 December. There were weather movements on 20 November, when 180 flew southwards over Coombe Hill, on 17 December, when 160 flew southwest over Sudmeadow in cold weather, and 24 December when 300 flew south over Ashleworth; then a flock of 180-200 between Ashleworth and Coombe Hill on 27/29 December. Otherwise, at Ashleworth, ten on 22 November, 15 on 26 December; at Coombe Hill, 10 on 29 December; and at Walmore, 38 on 9 December.

Knot: One, well out of its normal estuarine wintering area and habitat, at Bredon's Hardwick on 19 November mirrored a similar record on 5 October 2006.

Dunlin: Most records were of straggling autumn migrants, but the occasional individual turned up in December: at Grimley, one on 13 November, and 16 December; at Gwen Finch, two on 1 October; at

Bredon's Hardwick, seven on 21 December; at Coombe Hill, one from 3 to 17 October, then four on 8 December.

Little Stint: Again mainly late migrants, no doubt largely juveniles: at Grimley, a juvenile from 14 to 17 October, and at Coombe Hill, one on 3, 10 and 17/18 October (noted as juvenile on latter date).

Ruff: Occasionally occurs in winter floods, but most of these records were no doubt late passage migrants: at Grimley two on 3 October, one on 7 & 9 October; at Ryall GP, one on 19 October; at Longdon Marsh, a juvenile on 3 October; a juvenile male at Gwen Finch on 10 October. At Coombe Hill, one was recorded from 3 to 11 October.

Jack Snipe: The number of records and individuals was distinctly higher in Worcestershire than in Gloucestershire. At Grimley New Workings, up to six from 20 October, up to three in November, and as many as twelve on 16 December; at Castlemorton Common, one on 28 October and five on 27 December; at Clifton GP, singles on 11 November, and 26 & 31 December. At Ryall GP, 4 on 10 November, one on 30 December. At Gwen Finch, one on 3, 9 October. At Kemerton, nine on 9 November, five on 12 December, nine on 27 December.

At Ashleworth, one on 30 October; two on 3 November, one on 14 November; one at Hasfield on 22 & 24 December. At Coombe Hill, less than usual, perhaps because of the high water levels retained in the Long Pool (formerly the preferred site in the Severn Hams): seven on 3 October, one on 13 and 30 October; one on Cobney Meadows on 27 November. At Longford, one flushed from Hatherley Brook on 17 December was taken by a Sparrowhawk. At Walmore, one on 3 December.

Snipe: At Kemerton, 18 on 24 October, 21 on 18 December. On the Severn Ham at Tewkesbury, 34 on 21 December. At Ashleworth, two on 8 October, many calling at first light on 15 October, ten on 30 October, 40 on 13 November; only five over whole area on 29 November, 12 on 5 December, 20 on 24 December. At Coombe Hill, three on 8 October, five on 30 October and 20 November; with deeper water on the Long Pool at Coombe Hill, Cobney Meadows seems to have become the preferred winter spot for this species: 15 on 27 November, 40 on 22 December and 60 on 29 December. At Leigh Meadows, ten on 27 December. At Sandhurst, three on 17 December. At Port Ham, one on 19 October, three on 20 October, one on 11 November. At Walmore, smaller numbers after the huge quantities in August: ten on 7 October, five on 22 October, six on 11 November, five on 28 November, twelve on 3 December, fourteen on 29 December.

Woodcock: At Castlemorton Common, one flushed on 14 December. Near Lower Moor, three on several dates from 1 to 12 December. At Kemerton, one on 12 November, with birds reported from more than 15 sites on the Kemerton estate. Two at Sudmeadow on 6 December, one on 11 December.

Curlew: As usual in winter, when breeding birds move to the estuary, not a single record.

Greenshank: At Coombe Hill, one late migrant from 3 to 6 October.

Redshank: Few records of this species which also deserts the meadows in winter: two at Grimley from 17 to 29 December; one at Clifton GP from 29 to 31 December; one at Lower Moor on 23 October; unusually, one at Coombe Hill on 17, two on 19 November, one on 20 and 27 November, 8 December.

Green Sandpiper: This species occurs in the vales not only as a frequent autumn passage migrant, but fair numbers stay throughout the winter, particularly in areas where there is running water, with records from Worcestershire much more numerous than those from Gloucestershire. At Grimley New Workings, up to four throughout October, up to three in November and one or two in December. At Clifton GP, four on 28 October, up to seven in 17 November, with one or two on many dates in December. At Ryall GP, two on 30 December. At Lower Moor, one on 12 December, two on 27 December.

At Mythe Brook, one on 30 November. At Ashleworth, two on 8 October, one on 11 October and 9 November. At Coombe Hill, one or two in October, one or two on many dates in November and December; one on Cobney Meadows from 27 November to 22 December. At Leigh Meadows, one on 26/27 December. At Sudmeadow, two on 2 December, one on 6 December.

Gulls and Terns

Few gulls (and no terns) recorded on the meadows, though they are regularly seen passing over between the estuary roost and landfill sites where they feed by day.

Great Black-backed Gull: Unusually, three on floodwater with other gulls at Coombe Hill on 29 December; two at Bredon's Hardwick on 30 December.

Pigeons

Stock Dove: At Hasfield, 56 on 19 November; at Coombe Hill, two on 29 December.

Owls

Barn Owl: At Kemerton, one on 4 December, two on 12 December. At Gwen Finch, one on 3 October. At Ashleworth, one calling at first light on 8 and 15 October.

Little Owl: Rather few records of this once common species. At Ashleworth, one was calling at first light on 8 & 15 October, 3 November. At Cobney Meadows, one seen by day on 22 & 29 December. At Walmore, one on 3 December.

Tawny Owl: Frequently heard; one calling at Tirley early morning of 14, 21 October, 3 November.

Long-eared Owl: One flushed from a new roost on 11 December, presumably a recent arrival following cold weather. Report of up to four at traditional sites.

Kingfisher

At Kemerton, one on 31 October. Often found along the Severn: at Wainlodes, one on 16 October & 4 December. At Over Ponds, one on 9 & 19 October. At Sudmeadow, one on 20 November & 11 December. At Walmore one on 11 November and 29 December.

Woodpeckers

Green Woodpecker: Common.

Great Spotted Woodpecker: Common. At Coombe Hill, two on 27 November, one on 1 December.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker: No records.

Passerines

Skylark: Fewer records than usual of this species which must have been hard hit by the summer floods. At Mythe Brook, one or two on 30 November. At Ashleworth, meagre passage: one over to the southwest on 8 October and five on 15 October. A single bird was seen in the whole area on 24 December. At Coombe Hill, two or three migrants flew over on 16 October. Only one was found on 27 November; heard over Cobney Meadows on 22 December. At Leigh Meadows, four on 4 December. At Walmore, 50 on 7 October (mostly migrants overhead), only one on 28 November.

Swallow: At Kemerton, two late birds on 14 October. At Ashleworth, the last ten went southwest in the late morning of 8 October. At Coombe Hill, heavy southward passage, at least 250, on 3 October.

House Martin: A few moving south with Swallows on 3 October.

Meadow Pipit: The usual autumn passage (mainly of juveniles), some being caught for ringing at Ashleworth; smaller numbers stayed to winter.

At Grimley, a high figure of 450 on 7 October (joined by a Richard's Pipit!). At Mythe Brook, five on 30 November. At Ashleworth, 60 on 3 October, 75 over to southwest on 8 October (15 of them caught, including two adults); on 15 October, 25 flew over (two juveniles caught); 40 flew over on 16 October; 25 roosting on 17 October, 20 on 3 November was monthly maximum, 40 on 5 December, 10 on 24 December. At Coombe Hill, 60 on 3 October (monthly maximum) 40 on 30 October; 35 feeding on wet field on 20 November with wagtails (monthly maximum); only five on 1 December, 15 on 22 December. At Leigh Meadows, two or three on 4 December. At Port Ham, 30 on 9 October. At Sudmeadow, 30 on 17 December. At Walmore, 105 on 7 October, 30 on 22 October, 48 on 28 November, 40 on 6 December. At Rodley, ten on 28 November.

Water and Rock Pipits: Both in Worcestershire and Gloucestershire, small numbers of Water Pipits were recorded, the first for 22 years at Grimley and probably the first ever in the upper Severn Vale in Gloucestershire. All the Worcs Water Pipit records came from Grimley and seemed to relate to a single individual seen regularly from 9 November until the end of the year. In Gloucestershire up to five were found, generally feeding with Meadow Pipits and wagtails, from late October with most records in November: at Ashleworth, one on 31 October/1 November, two on 2 November, three on 3 November, one on 4 November, 2+ on 8 November, two to five on 9 November, three on 13/14 November, one on 20 November, four on 24 November, one on 11 December. At Coombe Hill, two associating with 35 Meadow Pipits on 19 November, two on 21 November. At Walmore, still 80 on 3 December.

In addition up to six Rock Pipits, a species noted only on the estuary in Gloucestershire, were recorded at Grimley from 3 to 20 October.

Given these records, the heavy passage of Meadow Pipits, and observations in the last two years of Richard's and Red-throated Pipits, more attention should certainly be paid in future to pipits.

Grey Wagtail: At Kemerton, two on 3 November. One on the Great Hay Meadow, on 25 November. At Ashleworth, two on 17 November, one on 29 November. At Wainlodes, one on 4 & 22 December. At Coombe Hill, singles in October and November, two on 17 October, 13 November, one on 1 December. At Leigh Meadows, one on 26 December. At Sudmeadow, two on 22 October. At Llanthony Weir in Gloucester, three on 22 October, one in late October. At Rodley, one on 28 November.

White/Pied Wagtail: On the Severn Ham at Tewkesbury, 50 on 21 December. At Ashleworth, five flew over to southwest on 15 October; twelve on stubble on 27 October; one or two feeding on 20 November, ten on 24 December. At Coombe Hill, one or two over on 16 October, 19 on 24 October (monthly maximum), 15 feeding on wet field on 20 November, only or two in late November and early December, but 30 on 18 December, 15 on 22 December. At Walmore, eight on 28 November. At Rodley, four on 28 November, 15 feeding on 3 December.

Stonechat: The usual spate of early autumn records. At Grimley, up to four in December. Near Lower Moor, one on 30 November, seven on 17 December. On the Severn Ham at Tewkesbury, two on 21 December. At Ashleworth, up to three from 15 to 30 October, four from 7 to 27 November, two from 8 to 27 December. At Coombe Hill, a pair from 13 October, two in November and December. At Port Ham three on 9 October, six on 19 October, a pair on 6 & 9 December. At Sudmeadow, a pair on 22 October, joined by another female on 27 October; another pair nearby on Gloucester Football Club ground from October till early December, and a third pair nearby on 2 November (male still there on 20 November); a pair at Lower Parting on 21 November. At Walmore, five on 7 October and 11 November, one on 19 & 28 November, a pair on 3 December, up to five in December. At Rodley, a male on 3 December.

Wheatear: Two near Fladbury (Worcs) on 7 October, one at Defford on 18 October. One at Hasfield on 3 October, at Coombe Hill, two on 11 October.

Blackbird: At Ashleworth, two juveniles caught on 15 October were possibly of continental origin.

Fieldfare: At Mythe Brook, 50 on 30 November. At Tirley, ten flew west on 10 October, 39 on 21 October. At Ashleworth, three flew over on 15 October; 25 roosting on 17 October, 75 on 22 November, 800+ (!) on 27 October, 500+ on 3 November, 120 on 29 November, 150 on 5 December. At Coombe Hill, ten on 16 October, 75 on 30 October, still 75 along canal bank on 27 November and 4 December, 50 on 22 December; 50 on Cobney Meadows on 29 November. At Leigh Meadows, 100+ on 4 December. At Walmore, 200 on 22 October, 30 on 28 November, 50 on 6 December. At Rodley, 20+ on 28 November.

Song Thrush: At Ashleworth, two caught on 8 October were the first caught this year – perhaps recent arrivals?

Redwing: At Mythe Brook, 30 on 30 November. At Ashleworth, first one heard flying over on 8 October, 20 on 15 October, 200+ on 27 October & 3 November, 50 on 27 November, 100 on 5 December. At Coombe Hill, six going over high to east on 3 October, 40 on 30 October & 4 December; at Cobney Meadows 20 on 29 November. At Leigh Meadows, 50+ on 4 December. At Sudmeadow, 75 on 22 October. At Walmore, 30 on 28 November, 127 on 26 December. At Rodley, 50+ on 28 November.

Mistle Thrush: At Ashleworth, one or two on 8 & 15 October.

Cetti's Warbler: At the Mythe, one on 21 December.

Reed Warbler: A late bird at Gwen Finch on 1 October.

Blackcap: At Coombe Hill, three on 11 October, one doing subsong, four along canal on 19 November. At Sudmeadow, a female caught on 22 October. At Walmore, two on 26 December.

Chiffchaff: At Coombe Hill, one singing along towpath on 8 October, one on 10 October. At Sudmeadow, one caught on 14 October; two on 7 November, one trapped; one of nominate race seen on the marsh on 17 December.

Goldcrest: At The Mythe, one on 30 November. At Ashleworth, one on 15 October. At Sudmeadow, two caught on 22 October.

Long-tailed Tit: At Ashleworth, nine caught on 15 October. At Coombe Hill, five on 16 October, 15 on 27 November, 10 on 22 December. At Leigh Meadows, 5 on 4 December. At Sudmeadow, 30 on 20 October.

Treecreeper: At Ashleworth, one caught on 15 October. At Sandhurst, four on 17 December.

Great Grey Shrike: One at Defford airfield (Worcs) on 16 October was not found on 18 October. Possibly the same bird was at Hasfield Ham from 17 October to 29 November, probably the first for the reserve.

Jay: At Mythe Brook, one on 30 November. At Rodley, one on 28 November.

Rook: At Ashleworth, at least 200 feeding on grassland on 29 November, looking for leatherjackets? At Leigh Meadows, about 100 (including some Carrion Crows) feeding on “fresh” grass.

Raven: At Ashleworth, up three on many dates in October, one on 10 November. At Coombe Hill, one on 20 & 27 November. At Port Ham, two on 19 October.

Starling: The traditional roost at Kemerton held 1,400 birds on 14 November; waves of birds were seen moving southwest from that direction at Mythe Brook on 30 November and at Coombe Hill on 1 & 4 December. Another roost in Gloucester near Barton Street held about 10,000 birds on 16 December. At Ashleworth, good numbers on damp fields throughout autumn, with maxima of 2,000 on 22 November and 1,000 on 5 December. At Coombe Hill, 100 on 27 November. At Leigh Meadows, 200 on 4 December. At GLS sharp increase to 1,450 on 22 October.

Brambling: At Ashleworth, three with 50 Chaffinches on 13 November, several heard flying over on 14 November, four on 19 November, one with 70 Chaffinches on 24 November. At Coombe Hill, one over, calling, on 11 October.

Siskin: At Grimley, 20 on 9 December, 15 on 22 December, 100+ near Grimley on 30 December. At Kemerton, 10 on 14 November, 24 on 4 December, increase to 50 by 10 December.

Linnet: At Mythe Brook, flock of 60 on rough ground on 30 November. At Ashleworth, 100 by farm on 15 October.

Lesser Redpoll: At Ashleworth, one on 3 November, a flock of 30 by river on 22 November, 40 on 13 December. At Sudmeadow, two trapped on 11 December were the first trapped at the site. At Walmore, four on 26 December.

Bullfinch: Regular in small numbers (two or three) at Ashleworth and Coombe Hill throughout the period.

Lapland Bunting: Two records of this infrequently recorded species, both on the same day: one at Grimley, one at Walmore on 7 October (date of the Richard's Pipit at Grimley!).

Reed Bunting: Only small numbers found in wet meadows in winter, as usual; do they move to farmyards in winter? Some at least roost in the reed-beds at Kemerton, where 84 were counted on 14 November. At Mythe Brook, two on 20 November. At Ashleworth, about ten present, six caught (one adult retrap, plus five new juveniles) on 8 October; three juveniles (two retraps, one new) caught on 15 October; seven seen on 27 October; only one or two seen on 22 November, two on 29 November, five on 5 December, two or three on 24 December. At Coombe Hill, one on 16 October & 1 December, one or two heard on 22 & 29 December. At Port Ham, one on 9 October, five on 19 October, one on 5 November, several on 9 December. At Castlemeads, one in song on 11 December.

Corn Bunting: Recorded only from Worcestershire, where the species seems to be much more numerous: at Lower Moor, two on 9 December, 11 on 12 December, 10 on 17 December.

These are unconfirmed records, compiled by M. Smart from his own observations and those of David Anderson, Gordon Avery, Les Brown, Colin Butters, Mervyn Greening, Andy Jayne, Julia Newth and Lawrence Skipp, with some cherries picked from the Gloster Birder and Worcester Birding websites.