

Notes on birds in the Severn and Avon Vales (the “Severn Hams”), Gloucestershire and south Worcestershire July – September 2007

General introduction

The main sites are (from the north):

- 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; across the river is Ryall Gravel Pit, still being exploited, and a magnet for many waterbirds, notably waders.
- Longdon Marsh (Worcs), a nearly enclosed basin north of the M50 motorway, flowing via the Longdon Brook to the Severn above Tewkesbury.
- Avon Meadows (on either side of the Avon north of Tewkesbury), along the border between Gloucestershire and Worcestershire, and including: the restored gravel pits at Bredon’s Hardwick (Worcs); 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 Avon is Gwen Finch Worcestershire Wildlife Trust 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, 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, poorly covered in this period.
- 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, also poorly covered.

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

The weather in July was exceptionally wet, parts of Gloucestershire receiving 320% of the July average rainfall for the last thirty years and creating two massive floods, one continuing from late June, the second from 20 July a one-in-200 year event, higher than the March 1947 flood, hitherto considered as the nec plus ultra of Severn floods. August was morose until the last ten days, when a period of dry, settled anticyclonic weather begun lasting nearly until the end of September, which was unusually dry and cool.

In the first half of July, the weather continued cloudy and damp, with frequent showers brought in by Atlantic depressions. The Azores anticyclone failed to extend to Britain and instead linked with the Mediterranean high; furthermore the July jetstream, instead of passing north of UK, passed well to the south. These two factors created a heatwave in the Mediterranean and a deluge in UK. On 20 July, warm air arriving from the southeast (essentially from the vast high over the Mediterranean) met a northwesterly front coming from the Atlantic, producing huge downpours with two or more times the average monthly rainfall for July falling in less than 24 hours; some of the highest figures recorded nationally were at Brize Norton on the Cotswolds (121 mm between midnight and 17h00 on 20 July, a sixth if its normal annual rainfall) and Pershore on the Avon received 124 mm in 24 hours. The weather continued unsettled with more rain, sometimes heavy, until the end of the month. The month of July was not the wettest July on record; averaged across England and Wales, the total monthly rainfall was 133mm - 232% of the average, and there have been 16 wetter Julys in the last 240 years; but Pershore had a monthly total of 255 mm, five times the average. The period from May to July as a whole had the heaviest rainfall since records began in 1766, a total of 396.5mm.

In August the weather was cold, dominated for the first three weeks by fronts from the Atlantic, with more rain (fairly heavy on 18/19 August), and only occasional periods of sunny weather. From about 21 August until mid September, the Azores anticyclone extended across western Britain, bringing dry, fine, mainly sunny weather, though with cool north-westerly breezes and frequent high cloud. From mid September, some fronts began to move round the eastern side of anticyclone, bringing north westerly winds with light rain, the first for a month, on 16 and 17 September; in late September the anticyclone weakened gradually and drifted south fitfully, allowing some westerly Atlantic depressions to move in, a particularly strong one on with considerable rain on 23/24 September, but after that rainfall was light, with winds mainly going round the anticyclone and coming from the north.

The late June flooding (in itself the heaviest for 39 years) persisted into the first ten days of July, and was slow to recede because, while the Severn level dropped, the outlets from meadows to river are small and only allow a slow getaway of accumulated floodwater (Severn at Haw Bridge on 9.95 on 5 July, 9.50 on 7 July, 7.49 on 13 July). Practically no hay was cut after the silage cuts in late May and early June; much stagnating vegetable matter and dead invertebrates remained in the meadows, while water flowing from the Chelt and other outlets into the Severn was black from lack of oxygen.

On 20 July, torrential rain, falling on already very wet fields, provoked a second massive flood, this one higher than those of November 2000 and late June 2007, and higher even than the March 1947 flood. Water poured down from the Cotswolds on 20 July via the Chelt and minor streams like the Horsebere and Hatherley Brooks, causing immediate and extensive flooding on the west bank of the Severn and adding to the main rush of water coming down the Severn; the Severn was overtopping both banks at Haw Bridge (level read as 11.08 at midday on 21 July; it in fact went much higher but the bridge was inaccessible and the level could not be read); the highest reading from Hasfield in the next few days gave a level of 12.2 metres, and the maximum on the Severn at Lower Lode just below Tewkesbury was 12.7! These high Severn levels caused the bank to slip below Lower Lode, covering some of the beach. On the Avon, Evesham was devastated; on the Severn, Upton and Tewkesbury were cut off, Gloucester nearly so, with huge damage to houses and buildings; the waters were at their peak in Tewkesbury on 23 July, Gloucester on 24 July. As the waters receded in August, a scene of desolation was left, with hedges dead to a height of five or six feet, meadows covered by a mat of dead hay and only the odd dead dock plant showing through. Standing hay (which had not been cut because of the earlier flood) was flattened by the flood and formed a muddy brown thatched mat; the question was how to deal with this dead mat: simply leave it and hope that winter frosts, rain and flooding would break it down? Or try to cut it and break it down (difficult, because it was so short and the ground underneath was so wet). After the floods receded in mid-August, grasses, sedges and other meadow plants did in fact begin to grow through gaps in the mat; in September many fields were

“topped” (cut with a light mower to remove docks and break up the mat), but it proved difficult to cut low enough to remove much mat and some fields were just left for nature and winter frosts and floods, to take their course.

Conditions at the main sites

Upham Meadow, Twynning: Totally flooded on 24 July, with water partly covering Summer Leasow.

Ashleworth/Hasfield Hams: Ham Road still closed by flooding for first week of July and hide still inaccessible; Ham Road open again by about 12 July, but water levels on the reserve were extremely high for the time of year even before the second flood; the long standing high water on the meadows caused vegetation to rot, giving off a foul smell and turning the water black, contrasting with the muddy brown of the Severn. The second flood completely submerged the whole area, with the Haw Bridge, Ham and Red Lion roads impassable till early August; hundreds of dead fish and worms at Hasfield on 13 August. Still a lot of surface water on Hasfield Ham (field 23) on 25 August and fair amounts on 16 September. All July Constant Effort Site ringing sessions had to be cancelled, and the first two August ringing sessions produced respectively only five and seven birds, but 60 on the final August visit; (CES ringing did continue at Sudmeadow, where the ringing site is slightly above the floodplain, and the habitat was less affected by the flood); non-CES ringing continued into September. No hay crops were taken anywhere, but some fields on SSSI topped; no fields on the reserve had been topped by 24 September.

Coombe Hill: Flood levels remained high on the meadows (the level at the outflow to Severn was still over nine metres on 8 July, though flowing out); at the outlet to the Severn at Wainlodes, the level in the meadows was still 9.34 on 7 July, though some boards were removed before 15 July, but the Grundon Hide was still inaccessible till mid-month; when the waters began to drop they too were discoloured black by lack of oxygen and gave off a foul smell; the anaerobic waters led to the deaths of many fish and earthworms. The second even more massive flood from 21 July submerged everything again. By 21 August, most of the flooding had gone, but there was still some stagnant standing water, and the area had a general smell of decay, with the fields brown and abandoned: no hay, no cattle feeding; the scrapes still held plenty of water, but many invertebrates must have died. The meadows were drying out by early September, with plenty of water still in the scrapes; some fields on and around the reserve were topped about 6 September; water in scrapes dropped by mid-September, the vegetation around edges being destroyed by flood.

Leigh Meadows: Still extensive flooding on meadows on 8 July; Red Lion road still closed, though Chelt flowing out strongly on 8 July, until 13 July. Even when floods receded, much surface water, lack and stinking, on meadows in mid July. The whole area was reflooded from 21 July by the second flood.

Walmore Common: Also affected by flooding, which had dropped by 24 August, though flashes still full and Common very wet; drying out on 27 August.

Bird records

Grebes

Little Grebe: Many more records than usual because of the flooding; they may have bred successfully at coombe hill despite the flooding. At Ashleworth, one on 12 August, two on 18 August. At Coombe Hill, two calling from Long Pool on 14 & 15 July between the two floods; after the second flood, up to four from 6 August (with at least two adults and one immature), and throughout September. At Walmore, five on 2 August, one on 11 August

Great Crested Grebe: Records at the height of the flooding. At Bredon's Hardwick (Where they have bred in previous years), up to six throughout the period, plus four juveniles on 10 August. At Ashleworth, one on 8 and 13 August. At Coombe Hill, two on 15 July, three on 6 August. At Barrow Ponds, two on 16 July.

Cormorant: Following the second flood, Cormorants became much more frequent in the area, fishing in the floodwater before it receded and for a short time adopting one of the electric pylons at Hasfield Ham as a roosting and loafing site: 28 on the pylons on 7 August, six on the pylons on the evening of 22 August, but not afterwards. On the Leigh Meadows, three perched on a tree by the Chelt on 18 July. At Barrow Ponds, two roosting on evening of 13 July, three on 16 July. At Bredon's Hardwick good numbers throughout the period: maxima of 18 in the first half of July, 32 in August, 32 in September. After the floods receded, usual records of small numbers moving through the area: one flying over Ashleworth on 29 September.

Night Heron: A juvenile at Ashleworth on 17 July, a time when there were large numbers of Grey Herons and Little Egrets in the aftermath of the flood.

Little Egret: Unusually high numbers occurred after the first flood event, no doubt attracted by the large numbers of dead fish, and roosting locally. At Longdon Marsh, one on many dates from 10 August to 2 September. At Bredon's Hardwick, two on 12 August. At Cobney Meadows, three by the floodwater on 10 July, then 16 on 11 July, two along Coombe Hill canal on 14 July, 13 on 15 July. They seem to have gone to roost at Barrow Ponds: six were seen flying towards Barrow Ponds on the evening of 12 July, 21 found roosting in trees on the island there on 13 July, 12 on 16 July; but the roost appears to have dispersed when the floods rose again after 20 July: only one bird on the evening of 24 July, which did not stay to roost, but flew at dusk off towards the Severn. Only small numbers after the second flood, presumably since the fish were already dead: at Coombe Hill, one on 6 and 11 August; at Ashleworth, one on 11 August. At Longford, one on 30 July, seven on 1 August. At Port Ham/ Sudmeadow, further down river, one to three throughout September; one feeding, disturbed by the rising tide, on 13 September. At Walmore, two on 2 August

Grey Heron: Both flood events attracted exceptionally high numbers, which came to prey on stranded and dying fish. At Longdon Marsh, two on 19 July, five on 10 August, four on 5 September. At Bredon's Hardwick, up to four in July, up to seven in August and up to three in September. At Lower Lode brick-pits, five on 28 August. At Ashleworth, at least 31 on the reserve in high water conditions after the first flood on 15 July; many were young of the year and one was identified by its wing-tag as a juvenile ringed at Frampton in April 2007; these high numbers were recorded for two or three days; the concentration was no doubt provoked by birds eating fish that were floating dead in the water for lack of oxygen; only six left on 17 July. At the Wainlodes end of Coombe Hill, ten on flood water on 11 July, 19 at Coombe Hill on 15 July. Similar short-lived high concentrations were recorded after the second flood in early August: 17 at Longford on 30 July, 24 at Wainlodes on 4 August, 60 at Ashleworth on 7 August, 30+ on 11 August, but only one in late August and September. At Coombe Hill, eight on 6 August and seven on 21 August, but one on 25 August, and up to five on various dates in September. At Leigh Meadows, three on 18 July. At Barrow Ponds, one roosting on trees on evening of 13 July, two on 16 July, three on 24 July. At Walmore, two on 24 August.

Mute Swan: At Bredon's Hardwick, seven on 5 July, three on 23 September. One of the pairs that had nested at Ashleworth still had six cygnets in late August and 20 September. The pair that nested at the Wharf, Coombe Hill, was on floodwater with six cygnets on 10 July, was back on the canal with six cygnets on 1 September, but had lost all cygnets on 20 September. The pair from Apperley still had seven cygnets on 21 August. The pair at Walmore had three cygnets on 27 August. The non-breeding flock at Coombe Hill numbered 12 on 25 August.

Geese

Greylag Goose: At Bredon's Hardwick, maxima of 26 on 12 August and 18 on 6 September no doubt included offspring of local breeders. Much movement of the local flock between Coombe Hill, Ashleworth and Barrow Ponds: at Ashleworth, 25 coming from the south at first light on 26 September; at Coombe Hill, up to 40 in late August, 53 on 1 September, 80 roosting on 20 September flew off early in the morning to the northeast, 90 on 25 September; at Barrow Ponds, 30 on 16 July, including several locally born goslings; 23 on 24 July including some coming in to roost from NW.

Canada Goose: At Bredon's Hardwick, maxima of 95 on 12 August and 110 on 16 September no doubt included offspring of local breeders. At Tirley Court Lake, 30 on 24 July, 20 on 21 August. At Barrow Ponds, 20 on water on 13 July, 55 (perhaps including goslings born this year) on 16 and 24 July. At Ashleworth, two with broken wings spent the whole summer in situ. Numbers at Coombe

Hill began to build up in August: 120 on 6 August, noticeably brown-stained; 140 on 21 August, 166 roosting on 28 August, 240 roosted on 20 September, flying out early in the morning to southwest.

Barnacle Goose: At Tirley Court Lake, the surprising number of 12 adults (none ringed) with two goslings on 24 July; on 21 August, three pairs there, two with four full-grown goslings each; don't recall previous records of breeding here: are they feral or tame birds? At Coombe Hill, as is often the case, one occasionally seen with the Canada flock in late August and September.

Ducks

Shelduck: At Kemerton Lake, a pair of Shelducks tried to nest but were harassed by gulls and failed. At Ashleworth, three were on the floodwater on 10 July, after an absence of several months, and three (same birds?) over Leigh Meadows on 14 July. At Coombe Hill, a juvenile (born where?) on 11 August. At Sudmeadow, a flock of 13 flew north on 23 August.

Ruddy Shelduck: A group of six (two adults) at Bredon's Hardwick on 16 August had been tracked across the country from Suffolk to Worcs and were considered by some observers to be genuine wild birds.

Surface-feeding ducks:

Wigeon: Winter visitors beginning to arrive in September, after some early records in August. At Nafford, five on 23 September. At Bredon's Hardwick, one on 2 September and three on 23 September. At Ashleworth, one, just able to fly, on 28 August. At Coombe Hill, three on 8 August, one on 26 August, 15 on 29 September.

Gadwall: At Coombe Hill, two on 6 August; four on 15 September, one on 29 September.

Teal: The first birds often re-appear in July: between the two floods, six at Coombe Hill on 15 July and three on 6 August. At Ashleworth and Coombe Hill, the wet conditions attracted above average numbers of early returning migrants, the same birds probably moving back and forth: at Ashleworth, 26 on 14 August, 60 on 20 August, 120 on 28 August; at Coombe Hill, 70 dabbling in mud for seeds on 21 August, September monthly maximum 60. At Nafford, 26 on 23 September. At Walmore, 30 on 22 August, 60 on 27 August.

Mallard: At Longdon Marsh, 30 on 17 July, eight on 11 August. At Bredon's Hardwick, maxima of 30 in July, 45 in August, 78 in September. At Ashleworth, at least 10 on floodwater on 10 July, about 80 on 21 August, 150 (a good number for recent years) on 28 August. At Coombe Hill, 100 on 25 August, 70 on 20 September. At Walmore, 150 on 22 August.

Pintail: As usual, only small numbers in late summer: at Coombe Hill, one upending on scrapes on 1 September, up to four later in the month. At Walmore, an early bird with Mallard in August.

Garganey: At Coombe Hill, three (two adult males and a female or juvenile) on 6 August (the ones seen earlier in the summer?) and on 11 August.

Shoveler: This species also seems to have been attracted early by wet conditions. At Nafford, 15 on 2 September, six on 23 September. At Bredon's Hardwick, seven on 6 September. At Ashleworth, four on 11 August, 15+ on 13 August. At Coombe Hill, three on 15 July, 20+ on 6 August, 14 on 1 September, 50 (!) on 18 September and 25 September. At Walmore, 30 on 2 August.

Diving ducks:

Pochard: At Kemerton Lake, a pair of Pochard nested, losing their first brood of nine to predation, though an adult with one duckling was seen later. At Bredon's Hardwick, one on 16 August. At Coombe Hill, five on floodwater on 6 August, three on 11 August; a female was seen on the ditches throughout August and September.

Tufted Duck: At Bredon's Hardwick, three on 5 July, 24 on 23 September. At Ashleworth, a pair was present on 14 July, singles in late August. At Coombe Hill, this species had again been proved to breed before the floods rose, and good numbers were seen on the floodwater (perhaps locally produced young

and opportunist arrivals): about 30 from 7 to 15 July after the first flood, up to 17 in mid-August after the second flood, maximum of seven or eight from late August to late September. At Barrow Ponds a male was seen on 24 July. At the GLS pool, not affected by flooding, breeding was proved again this year: a female with five tiny ducklings on 5 July, and a second female with a brood a few days later.

Raptors

Marsh Harrier: A female over the flooded meadows at Hasfield on 7 August; rarely recorded in autumn.

Hen Harrier: At Ashleworth, a male (probably second year) apparently roosting on 26 September, seen again on afternoon of 27 September.

Goshawk: At Walmore an adult male on 22 August.

Sparrowhawk: At Haw Bridge, one on 25 August. At Coombe Hill, a male bringing food to two juveniles on 6 August, a large female on 30 August, one chasing a Kingfisher on 2 September.

Buzzard: Continues to be commonly recorded in the whole area: at Ashleworth, two on 10 July, and on 28 August, one apparently a young bird calling anxiously, six soaring on 5 and 16 September. At Coombe Hill, one or two in August and September.

Kestrel: Under-recorded: at Ashleworth, two on 10 July, one on 27 September.

Merlin: Only one record of this elusive species, at Ashleworth, a male was seen chasing pipits, the preferred prey species, on 22 September.

Hobby: A particularly good number of records, probably because successful local breeders were easily seen as they tended young birds. At Ashleworth, one flew over on 17 July; up to three noisy birds were seen regularly on trees and pylons from 10 August to 22 September, thought perhaps to be a newly-fledged young bird with its parents, calling to be fed. At Coombe Hill, one on 15 July; one harrying hirundines on 21 August, and singles on 8, 15 and 29 September. At Longford, one on 30 July, at Twigworth, one on 30 August. At Walmore, the species was also reported to have nested successfully; one seen on 11 August, two on 2 September, two juveniles on 16 September.

Peregrine: At Ashleworth, one recorded on the pylons on 17 July, then regularly from late August the end of September. At Coombe Hill, one on 6 August and one all through September.

Gamebirds and Rails

Water Rail: At Ashleworth, one heard on 7 August. At Coombe Hill, one on 14 July, three on 15 July, up to three seen and heard regularly from the Grundon Hide in August and throughout September, notably by observers looking for the Spotted Crake.

Spotted Crake: A specially obliging individual of this species, rarely recorded in the county, showed itself, mostly in the early morning or late evening, right in front of the Grundon Hide at Coombe Hill, from 28 August to 6 September.

Moorhen: Common throughout the area, perhaps more obvious during the flood when the vegetation in which they normally hide was submerged: at Ashleworth up to three on late August, at Coombe Hill up to ten in late August; a tiny newly-hatched chick on 28 August; 15 on 1 September, up to five in the rest of September. At Walmore, five on 27 August.

Coot: Recorded in modest numbers at most sites, but no proof of breeding: at Bredon's Hardwick, one on 5 July, two on 10 August. At Ashleworth, up to ten in August, two on 16 September. At Coombe Hill, at least ten on floodwater on 10 July, 15 on 21 August, three on 20 September.

Waders

The smaller May flood had already had serious adverse effects on ground-nesting waders, and few produced young. For many which tried to re-nest, the late June/early July floods eliminated any replacement broods in most places. From July, as usual, a particular point of interest was the southward passage of migrant waders, returning from northern breeding grounds; in the aftermath of the flood in August and September, conditions in the meadows were much wetter than usual, and so these species tended to stop in the Hams rather than flying straight "over the top"; numbers of Snipe were particularly high, but there were also many records of species like Greenshank and Green Sandpiper, with records of Curlew Sandpiper, familiar on the estuary, but an infrequent visitor to the Hams.

Oystercatcher: The species bred north of Worcester at Grimley and Upton Warren. At Kemerton Lake, one pair had lost its first young to gulls, but later reared two young. At Bredon's Hardwick, where the first nest had been predated, the pair probably tried to re-nest: one on 5 July and two (perhaps nesting?) on 19 July, but were flooded out shortly afterwards.

Little Ringed Plover: At Clifton Gravel Pits, one pair was present but produced no young: juveniles seen in August and September were migrants from outside of the area. At Ryall Pits, eight pairs nested, seven of them successfully. At Coombe Hill, none bred this year and the only records were of southward migrants: one dropped in briefly on 11 August, there were five on 8 August, a juvenile on 26 August and one on 8 September. At Walmore, one on 22 August.

Ringed Plover: More records than usual of autumn migrants at Coombe Hill: one on 8 August, two on 28 August, one on 8 September, seven on 9 September, five on 10 September.

Golden Plover: Once again, records of small numbers of southward migrants at Coombe Hill: one flew southwest, calling, on 26 August, another seen on 28 August, two flew south on 2 September. At Walmore, one on 16 September.

Lapwing: Most breeding birds had already failed earlier in the year, losing their first brood to the May flood, and any replacement broods to the flooding which began in late June. Practically all records therefore refer to post-breeding assemblies. At Longdon Marsh up birds were seen feeding on the receding waters of the June flood: 20 on 10 July, 40 on 14 July, 45 on 17 July, 12 on 19 July. At Kemerton Lake, five pairs tried to nest but failed because of predation by gulls and corvids; 20 pairs nested elsewhere in the Carrant catchment with greater success. At Bredon's Hardwick maxima of 26 on 12 July, 24 on 16 August and 22 on 16 September. At Ashleworth, ten, clearly migrants on the edge of floodwater on 10 July, 70 on 8 August, seven on 30 August. At Coombe Hill, no sign of the local breeders (washed away by floodwater) in early July, but 28 (21 adults and seven flying birds of the year), clearly passing migrants, on 10 July and up to 38 later in the month; 34 on 6 August were the only waders present, 60 on 8 August; up to 20 later in August, not more than seven in September. At Leigh Meadows, two on a muddy maize field (more like a mudflat!) on 18 July, were no doubt passing migrants. At Walmore, 80 on 24 August.

Dunlin: Trickle of birds passing through Coombe Hill: an early one on 15 July, then more (likely to be juveniles) in late August/September: six on 29 August, ones and twos from 6 to 29 September.

Curlew Sandpiper: Rarely recorded in the Severn Vale: at Coombe Hill, two juveniles on 9 September, a moulting adult on 12 September.

Little Stint: At Coombe Hill, two juveniles 5 to 9 September. Another juvenile at GLS on 28 September.

Ruff: Only a few records of passing migrants at Coombe Hill: two on 15 July; one on 21 August, two on 25 and 26 August, one on 29 and 30 August.

Snipe: The conditions after the second flood attracted spectacular numbers, much higher than usual, no doubt passing migrants, which would normally have gone "straight over the top", but were attracted by wet conditions in late August and early September: At Nafford, four on 12 August. At Ashleworth, there were up to 15 from 10-31 August, 80 (!) on 9 September, the eight to 15 for the rest of the month. At Coombe Hill, 21 were seen on 10 August, up to 25 for the rest of the month up to 12 in September. At Walmore, just one on 2 August, then in ideal conditions, very soft and wet underfoot, a

series of unprecedented figures: 60+ on 11 August, 165 on 19 August, 80+ on 22 August, 270 on 24 August, 70 on 27 August, 125 on 2 September, down to 28 on 16 September.

Black-tailed Godwit: Perhaps surprisingly, none seen after the flock of nine on 26 June.

Curlew: Normally, early July is the prime time for young Curlews to fledge in the hay meadows; but most, if not all, must have been washed out by the late June flood, and most adults seem to have departed for the estuary before the second flood rose; rather few passage Curlew are recorded in autumn. At Ashleworth, two on 7 July, but no sign of Curlew on 10 July. At Leigh Meadows, two on 7 July. At Coombe Hill, no sign of the local breeders, but one solitary adult at edge of floodwater at Wainlodes on 10 July; two on 15 July. At Longford, one on 30 July. At Walmore, two on 22 August.

Whimbrel: As usual, no autumn records.

Spotted Redshank: An unusual late summer/autumn visitor: at Coombe Hill, one dropped in briefly (with a Greenshank) on 11 August.

Redshank: At Kemerton Lake, Redshank did not breed this year. At Coombe Hill, local breeders had been washed away by floodwater in late June; one, no doubt a passing migrant, on 10 July.

Greenshank: A small but regular stream of records of passing migrants, mainly in August and early September (so probably young birds). At Ashleworth, one on floodwater's edge, no doubt a migrant, on 10 July. At Coombe Hill, migrants dropped in briefly, first on 10 August, three on 14, then singles on many dates to 30 August, the one from 22 to 26 September. At Plock Court, just north of Gloucester, four flew over the floodwater, heading southwards, on 21 August. At Walmore, three on 2 September.

Green Sandpiper: The first returning migrants had already occurred, as is the case in most years, in late June. They continued to be recorded in small groups at many riverside sites throughout July, August and September, with most in late August. At Ashleworth, one on 22 September. At Wainlodes, one by the Severn on 17 July. At Coombe Hill, one on 10 July, two on 15 July, the two from 10 to 25 August, three on 28 August, three from 5 to 12 September. At GLS, three on 19 July. At Lower Parting and Sudmeadow, seven on 16 August, singles 22 to 29 August, three on 30 August, two on 6 September, five on 8 September. At Walmore, one on 16 September.

Wood Sandpiper: Sadly, none found this year among Green Sandpipers.

Common Sandpiper: Another wader which regularly appears on return passage in autumn, sometimes on beaches along the Severn itself. Some early birds (probably adults) in July: at Port Ham, one on 2 July, one at Coombe Hill on 15 July, and one at GLS on 19 July, at Longford, three on 30 July and 1 August. At Plock Court, two on floodwater on 22 August, one on the beach at Haw Bridge on 22 August, one the beach at Lower Lode on 28 August, at Coombe Hill one or two on the scrapes from 25 August to 1 September.

Gulls and Terns

Mediterranean Gull: Not often recorded this far upstream. At Ashleworth, an adult flying over en route to the estuary with Black-headed Gulls on the evening of 17 July. An adult at Leigh Meadows on 4 August.

Black-headed Gull: At Bredon's Hardwick up to 70 in August. At Ashleworth, at least 300 (no juveniles) round floods on 10 July. At Coombe Hill, at least 1,000 round edge of floodwater on 10 July, 1,200+ on 11 July, 1,600+ on 14 July. At Leigh Meadows, 200 on floodwater on 13 July.

Lesser Black-backed Gull: At Kemerton Lake, a flock of 500 non-resident gulls caused serious predation of duck and wader chicks; one pair of Lesser Blackbacks nested and was seen to feed young on Coot chicks. At Bredon's Hardwick, monthly maxima of 240 on 19 July, 170 on 10 August, and 30 on 27 September. At Coombe Hill, at least 1,000 round edge of floodwater on 10 July, 100+ on 14 July. At Leigh Meadows, at least 700 on floodwater on evening of 13 July, en route to estuary roost.

Yellow-legged Gull: Frequent at GLS from July onwards.

Herring Gull: At Bredon's Hardwick, up to half a dozen throughout the period.

Great Black-backed Gull: At Bredon's Hardwick, where they nested until a couple of years ago, two on 16 August, the first record for some time.

Kittiwake: Most unusually a first summer bird at GLS on 5 July, coincidentally (?) the day after an adult Gannet, another seabird, was seen over Cheltenham.

Common Tern: At Bredon's Hardwick, two on 12 July and 19 July, perhaps re-nesting on latter date? But the second flood prevented success. At Coombe Hill, one on 14 July.

Pigeons

Stock Dove: At Ashleworth, three on 5 September.

Turtle Dove: No observations whatsoever of this fast-vanishing bird, apart from late records of birds singing in May at Bow Bridge and Brockeridge Common near the Severn just north of Tewkesbury (Ted Rice).

Cuckoo

At Coombe Hill, a juvenile on 14 July.

Owls

Barn Owl: At Ashleworth, one calling at dusk on 17, 18 July. One of the nests found earlier in the year was occupied for a second time, with three young birds and five eggs still being incubated, on 24 August; this may be a first record of a second brood in Gloucestershire. At Walmore, reported to have nested successfully, with three newly hatched chicks and five eggs in August.

Little Owl: Once widespread in the area, a slight increase in records. At Ashleworth, one or two were calling regularly in the early morning from 11 to 27 September. At Coombe Hill, one was calling on 28 August. At Barrow Ponds, one was calling in evening on 16 & 24 July. At Longford, one on 30 July.

Tawny Owl: Near Sudmeadow, one found drowned in a drain on 29 July, presumably carried there by the force of the floodwater as it tried to retrieve a prey item! Heard calling regularly morning and evening at Ashleworth in August and September.

Kingfisher

At Coombe Hill, one on 19 July. At Leigh Meadows, one on 10 July. At Llanthony, near Gloucester, one landed briefly on a clothes line in a flooded garden on 23 July; one (the same?) flashing through the same garden at the speed of light on 8 September! One over Llanthony Weir on 22 August, 11 September. At Walmore on 11 August.

Passerines

Skylark: At Ashleworth, still one or two singing on 10 July, before the second flood, but notably absent at Ashleworth on in late August and the first half of September, but though singles passing over on 17 and 22 September; also absent at Coombe Hill on 30 August and the first half of September, but about 12 passing over to south on 25 September. At Walmore, five on 27 August.

Sand Martin: The riverbank colonies were submerged by the June flood and, after levels had dropped, no birds were in evidence on 8 July; a couple at Coombe Hill on 10 July were perhaps refugees from the colonies. The July flood seems to have provoked a small landslip along the bank by the Lower Lode colony; no birds there on 28 August. No ringing at any of the colonies this year.

Swallow: Some southward passage noted: at Ashleworth, ten on 17 September, fifty going to southwest on 22 September, fifty on 27 September, about 200 on 29 September. At Coombe Hill, at least a hundred hawking insects low down on 21 August and being chased by a Hobby for their pains, steady southward passage on 1 September, ten on 18 September, 30 on 20 September, about 200 migrants to south west on 25 and 26 September. At Walmore about 50 chasing midges with House Martins on 27 August.

House Martin: At Ashleworth, at least 50 with Swallows on 29 September. At Coombe Hill, at least a hundred hawking insects low down on 21 August and being chased by a Hobby for their pains, southward passage on 1 September, one or two on 18 September; about 40 going to south west on 25 September, 200 on 26 September.

Meadow Pipit: More attention was given to southward autumn passage this year, and considerable efforts devoted to catching them for ringing, by attracting them to nets in open fields with recordings of their song. The first passage birds were noted over Apperley on 9 September, about 100 at Ashleworth on 11 September, 26 caught, exclusively juveniles; small passage of 15+ to SE on 12 September, 200 on 16 September, when four (all juveniles) were caught; at least 200 on 17 September, 60 caught, all juveniles again; at least 100 passing on 20 September; about 300, 58 caught (all juveniles) on 22 September; at least 50 roosting on morning of 27 September; 32 caught on 29 September included the first five adults to be caught. At Coombe Hill, 20 on 20 September, steady southwest passage all morning (about 200 birds) on 25 September, 20+ on 26 September.

Yellow Wagtail: Some passage (often with other wagtails) was noted, mainly in late August and early September of this species, which has almost disappeared from the meadows as a breeding bird: at Coombe Hill, two on 21, four on 28 and 30 August, one to the south on 1 September, one on 9 September. At Longford, 2 or more on 30 July. At Sudmeadow, one on 30 August, the first there since May 2002. At Walmore, there were eight on 22 August, two on 24 August and five on 27 August.

Grey Wagtail: At Coombe Hill, three flew over towards the south west on 20 September.

White/Pied Wagtail: More of the continental subspecies, White Wagtail, were recorded than in most autumns: at Coombe Hill, a flock of 15 Pied on 21 August, and a flock of 35 including at least ten White Wagtails on 28 August; two flocks totalling 40, feeding on matted dried vegetation on 30 August, included at least one White Wagtail; 30 Pied on 5 September, 20+ on 9 September.

Nightingale: At Sudmeadow, where the species is most unusual, a juvenile was trapped on 18 July, the first since 1994.

Redstart: At Coombe Hill, two on 15 July were probably still breeding, and one was giving the e alarm call on 21 August. At Ashleworth, where good numbers breed in the heads of old pollarded willows, there was a series of September records: one seen on 9 September, a male seen on 12 September, a juvenile caught on 16 September, another seen on 17, a juvenile caught on 22 September. At Walmore, where they are less frequent, two on 2 September.

Stonechat: At Ashleworth, the first of autumn was on 27 September.

Whinchat: The usual trickle of southward migrants in late August and September: at Ashleworth, two on 5, 12 and 16 September. At Coombe Hill, two on 5 September. At Sudmeadow, one on 8 and 11 September. At Walmore, singles on 11 and 27 August.

Wheatear: This species too generally appears in small numbers on southward autumn passage: at Ashleworth, one or two from 22 to 27 September. At Coombe Hill, one on 29 August, two from 22 to 25 September.

Sedge Warbler: It is thought that this widespread vale breeder suffered severely from the May and late June floods, which must have destroyed many nests and young birds in long grass. The floods played havoc with the long term monitoring of this species at Ashleworth, since no ringing was possible for much of July and August. Despite probable losses of nests and young to flooding elsewhere, a juvenile was caught at Sudmeadow, the first indication of breeding there for several years.

At Kemerton Lake, the highest count of singing males this year was five, with five more at other sites. Between the two big floods, one singing on Port Ham on 2 July, only one heard singing on 10 July between Haw Bridge and Ashleworth Quay, but up to six singing along Coombe Hill canal on 14 July. At Ashleworth, two juveniles caught on 29 August, none on 11 September, but one juvenile on 22 September. At Coombe Hill, two seen on 28 August.

Reed Warbler: At Kemerton Lake, where large numbers breed in the reed-beds, the season's highest count of singing males was 27. In general a less common breeder than Sedge Warbler because of the shortage of reed beds (though it nests in withies and other vegetation at Ashleworth and Coombe Hill), but those that did try to breed must also have been affected by the floods. One singing at Sudmeadow on the evening of 6 July. On 10 July, one singing by the Severn at Wainlodes, a site where they had not previously been recorded, after the first floods; and one singing at Coombe Hill by the Long Pool on 14 July. One singing at Port Ham and another singing at Over on 19 July. At Walmore, two or three skulking in reeds on 27 August.

Lesser Whitethroat: At Ashleworth, two juveniles caught on 29 August. At Sudmeadow, three trapped on 23 August, one on 6 September.

Whitethroat: Five still singing quite strongly after the first big flood in the Ashleworth area on 10 July; one churring in hedge on 28 August, three caught on 29 August, none on 11 September, one juvenile caught on 16 September. At Sudmeadow considered to have had a poor breeding season, but two trapped on 23 August. At Walmore, two skulking on 27 August.

Garden Warbler: Not often recorded in the vale, but two juveniles caught on 18 July at Sudmeadow were considered to be locally bred as they were still in body moult.

Blackcap: At Ashleworth, still a couple singing on 10 July, also at Coombe Hill on the same date; one in subsong on 14 September. At Sudmeadow, 24 juveniles trapped on 7 July, suggesting a successful breeding season, six caught on 22 September.

Chiffchaff: At Ashleworth and Coombe Hill, still a couple singing on 10 July, twixt floods. Large numbers recorded, as in most years, in late August and early September. At Ashleworth, about five in hedges, and some song, on 28 August; about 12, mostly juveniles caught with tit flock on 29 August; a couple singing and seven caught (the only warblers of the morning) on 11 September; three caught and one burst of song on 16 September; one caught & one burst of song on 17 September; two juveniles caught & one burst of song on 22 September; about ten caught, mainly juveniles on 29 September. At Coombe Hill, maybe ten along canal and one burst of song on 21 & 25 August, one or two on 28 August; 10+ with some song on 1 September, up to eight on 10 September, at least three singing on 20, 10+ on 22 September, one on 26 September. At Sudmeadow, considered to have had a poor breeding season; six caught on 22 September.

Willow Warbler: At Coombe Hill, one seen feeding a juvenile out of the nest after the first flood on 4 July. More records in late August and September: at Ashleworth, one short burst of song on 28 August, and about twelve (mainly juveniles but a couple of adults) caught with tit flock on 29 August. At Coombe Hill, short bursts of song on 21 & 25 August and 1 September. At Sudmeadow considered to have had a poor breeding season, though three trapped on 23 August.

Long-tailed Tit: At Ashleworth, about fifteen caught on 29 August. Ten seen on 16 September. At Coombe Hill, ten on 1 September.

Jay: At Coombe Hill, a couple on 1 September.

Jackdaw: At Coombe Hill, several dozen going to roost on 28 August.

Carrion Crow: At Coombe Hill, several dozen going to roost on 28 August.

Raven: At Tirley, one soaring with gulls on 8 July. At Ashleworth, one on 4 August, two in flight on 5 & 22 September. At Walmore only two going to roost on evening of 24 August.

Linnet: At Sudmeadow, three young males trapped on 23 August.

Chaffinch: At Ashleworth, some signs of passage in September, four juveniles caught on 16 September, three on 17 September.

Yellowhammer: At Barrow Ponds, one singing still on 24 July.

Reed Bunting: At Kemerton Lake, the highest count of singing males was three males with two at other sites. At Sudmeadow, two pairs were considered to have bred and a juvenile was caught on 18 July. At Ashleworth, this was another species hard hit by flooding: still a couple singing on 10 & 21 July; local birds seemed to disappear after the second big flood, but four caught on 20 August including retrap adults from previous years and some juveniles, none seen on 25 August, two found on 28 August after much searching; on 11 September thirty caught thanks to use of tape lure, mainly unringed juveniles (hence probably moving in from outside area), but a few retrap adults and juveniles; on 16 September 13 caught, all juveniles, a few recent retraps; on 17 September six caught (one adult, rest juveniles); at least five seen on 20 September; on 22 September, 14 caught included two retraps and three new adults, rest new juveniles, a higher number; on 27 September, at least 30 roosting early morning; on 29 about a dozen caught including a couple of new adults. At Coombe Hill, still five singing along canal on 14 July before the second flood; but not a single one found after this flood receded on 21, 25 & 30 August; just one on 1 September, two females on 9 September, none found on 18 September, but about five on 25 September, one or two on 26 September. At Port Ham, one singing on 2 July. A juvenile male was caught at Sudmeadow on 6 September, and an adult male on 22 September. At Walmore, none on 27 August.

Corn Bunting: No records at all in the hay meadows: the floods must have played havoc with their nesting too.

These are unconfirmed records, compiled by M. Smart from his own observations and those of David Anderson, Gordon Avery, Les Brown, John Clarke, Mervyn Greening, Andy Jayne, Ted Rice, John Sanders, Lawrence Skipp and Andy Warr, with some cherries picked from the Gloster Birder website.

cc: Gordon Avery, Juliet Bailey, Richard Baatsen, Emma Bradshaw, Pete Bradshaw, Les Brown, Colin Butters, Ian Carle, John Clarke, David Evans, Colin Evers, Mervyn Greening, Mark Grieve, John Hodson, Robert Homan, Andy Jayne, Mike King, John Martin, Julia Newth, Brian Smith, Colin Studholme, Viv Phillips, Alisa Watson, Ros Willder.