

Notes on birds in the Severn and Avon Vales (the “Severn Hams”), Gloucestershire and south Worcestershire January – March 2008

General introduction

The main sites are (from the north):

- Along the Severn in Worcestershire, a series of well-watched gravel workings attract many water birds, notably waders; these are (from the north): Holt and 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.
- Powick Ham, just south of Worcester, the flood meadows where the Teme flows into the Severn.
- 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; the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust has a reserve in the southern part between Hill Court and Marsh Lane, emptying via the Longdon Brook into 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 Twynning (Glos); Rectory Farm Meadows SSSI, 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 catchment 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, Castlemeads and Over Ponds 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; a little further south, near the Gloucester-Sharpness Canal, is the small Quedgeley Local Nature Reserve.
- 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. Mythe Hook, Sandhurst and Maisemore brick pits, and Walham Pools are all artificial excavations in the floodplain. Barrow Ponds are created by the artificial damming of a small tributary of the Chelt.

Weather and flooding: general

Nationally, January was dominated by south-westerly weather systems, despite persistent high pressure across Eastern Europe which in years gone by could have brought long periods of bitter easterly winds. It was a very mild month, especially between 17 and 21 January; rainfall was well above average all over the country, by 26% in the Southwest and Wales. Weather mild on the first day of year, then cold weather from the southeast for the next few days; milder from 7 January, with westerly Atlantic depressions; wind more north westerly, with heavy rain (45mm), on 11 January; then further rain from 12 to 15 January, easing a little on 16/17 January; remaining wet with westerly depressions from Atlantic for the rest of January, often quite cold, and causing heavy flooding. Nationally, February's weather was notable for its abundant sunshine; it was the sunniest February ever recorded in England and Wales (155% of average in SW England) and was notably dry, 42% below the long-term mean. In the first half of the month high pressure finally extended from Europe to Britain, bringing anticyclonic weather, with frost on 2 February and several subsequent days; bright and frosty on 9 February and from 16 to 20 February with easterly winds and night temperatures dropping to -3C. Warmer westerly winds and Atlantic depressions returned from 21 February, with the first rain for some time on 24 February, bright and calm on 27/28 February, light frost. Nationally, March was cold (absolute maximum lower than February's) and wet, rainfall in the Southwest and Wales being 20% above the mean for the last 30 years. It began with more frosty conditions and cold north-westerly winds until 5 March; westerly winds with gales from 6 March, with the first heavy rain for some time on 8 March; more extremely heavy rain on 15 March caused more flooding in the Severn Vale; quite strong NW winds from 20 March, associated with an anticyclone over European continent, bitterly cold over Easter with sleet and snow in the wind and a dusting of snow on the Cotswolds and Malverns, giving way to milder southwest fronts from the Atlantic from 25 March, with quite heavy rain from 28-30 March. .

The Severn level dropped in the first few days of year after fairly high levels in the river and marshes in late December; but following heavy rain on 11 January, the Chelt and smaller streams began to break their banks, flooding meadows, and the Severn rose very rapidly on 12 January, overtopping its banks below Haw Bridge; by 13 January (Haw Bridge stage board on 10.96), it was breaking its banks north of Haw Bridge (near Chaceley), and the whole of the Ashleworth and Coombe Hill Meadows were deeply flooded. Main roads over Haw Bridge and to Maisemore were closed by flooding from 18 January for about a week; the flooding was at its height on 20/21 January, with readings of the stage-board in Hasfield village over 11.00; water levels in the Severn and on the meadows then dropped very slowly in late January and very early February but rose again briefly in the second week of February; this flooding had gone by the middle of the month (the Severn level was down to 7.22 on 17 February) and there was no flooding in the rest of February or early March. However, following the heavy rain on 15 March, streams coming off the Cotswolds, notably the Chelt, were in spate in the following days, flooding the meadows, and by 18 March the Severn was again bursting its banks above and below Haw Bridge; the Red Lion and Ham roads were closed for a couple of days after 19 March, with waters dropping but flooding still extensive on 22 March, levels lower but flooding still quite extensive on 25 March; the rain in late March caused the Severn to rise a little again and inflowing streams to back up a little.

Conditions at the main sites

Longdon Marsh: Flooded on 16 January; water dropped slowly in second half of month. No floodwater on 9 February or 27 March.

Upham Meadow, Twynning: Deeply flooded on 14 January.

Ashleworth/Hasfield Hams: Water levels returned to normal in the first few days of January, following slightly higher levels in the last few days of December; however heavy local rain on 11 January caused deeper flooding, and the whole area was under water, with the Ham Road closed on 13 January after the Severn had burst its banks. Very extensive flooding continued throughout the second half of January, dropping slowly, with the Ham Road open again, from 2 February, but rising slightly again on 8 February; the flooding had gone by 16 February, but surface water iced over, at least in part, from 16-20 February; water levels were low in the last week of February and first week of March, with some frost and light icing. On 18 March, with the Severn breaking its banks again, water levels on the

meadows were rising very rapidly, and the Ham Road was closed from 19-22 March; water was still extensive on 22 March, though decreasing, but rose again, notably at Hasfield following rain at the end of March; the first board removed from sluice (not without difficulty) in order to lower levels on the GWT reserve on 31 March.

Coombe Hill: Water levels round the scrapes dropped in the first few days of January, but floodwater was deep and extensive from 12-14 January as first Chelt water backed up over meadows, then the Severn overtopped. Fields at Cobney Meadows were lightly flooded in early January and ideal for Snipe, but were deeply flooded by 12 January; the Red Lion road was closed on 13 January. Very extensive flooding for the rest of January; the Red Lion road was open again at the end of month, but water was slow to clear from the meadows and the Grundon Hide was still inaccessible on 2 February; it was briefly accessible on 6 February, then water rose again and the hide was inaccessible from 9 to 16 February; water levels remained low for the rest of month and early March. But by 18 March, most of the area was under water again, and the Grundon and Long Pool hides were inaccessible; floods decreased but were still extensive from 22-25 March and hides were still not accessible; the water was much lower (and hides accessible) on 29 March, but had risen again on 31 March.

Leigh Meadows: No flooding in the first week of January, but there was extensive flooding on 12 January, as Collier's and Leigh Brooks backed up and the Chelt broke its banks; flooding receded a little by the end of the month, but was still extensive on 2 February. No flooding in the second half of February and early March, but there was extensive flooding of the whole area on 18 March, dropping by 25 March.

Minsterworth Ham: Extensive flooding on 14 January, light flooding 21 March.

Walmore Common: No flooding in the first week of January, but waters were rising on 11 January following heavy rain; extensive flooding by 14 January, most of it gone by 2 February, all gone by 16 February. Moderate flooding again on 20/21 March had dropped by 31 March.

Bird records

Grebes

Little Grebe: At Hill Court reservoir, Longdon, one on 27 March. At Ashleworth, one on 5 & 12 January, 12 & 23 February, two on 5 March, three on 9 March. At Coombe Hill, one on 12 February. At Port Ham, singles in summer plumage on several dates in March.

Great Crested Grebe: At Bredon's Hardwick, present throughout period, maximum five on 9 March. In Gloucestershire occasionally appears at times of high flood: at Ashleworth, one on 26 February, three on floodwater on 22 March, and three (different birds!) on the same date at Coombe Hill.

Cormorant: The main loafing and roosting sites are Bredon's Hardwick, with a less important site at Barrow Ponds. Most records are of birds moving along the Severn to and from these sites. Maxima at Bredon's Hardwick eight in January, 23 in February, 28 in March. At Kemerton, eleven on 9 January. At Ashleworth, singles in February. At Coombe Hill, singles in January and March. Two flew from Barrow Ponds towards the Severn in early morning of 25 March.

Little Egret: Practically no winter records, but numbers began to pick up, especially in sites nearer the estuary, in March. At Holt, one on 12 February. At Coombe Hill, three on 14 March. At Castlemeads/Over, singles from 1 March onwards, two on 6 and 30 March, when they were probably disturbed by joggers and dog walkers. At Walmore, three on 1 March, one on 29 March.

Grey Heron: Seen regularly in small numbers (usually ones and twos, maximum eight at Bredon's Hardwick on 21 March) at Longdon, Bredon's Hardwick, Ashleworth, Coombe Hill, Cobney Meadows, Walmore and Rodley.

Bittern: The only record was at Ryall GP, where one was seen on 13 January.

Mute Swan: As usual, the wintering flocks roosted on water, and flew to graze on nearby grassland very early in the morning, returning to the water in the evening. As a result of last summer's floods,

hay had not been cut on many meadows and had been reduced to a brown dead mat, so good grazing was difficult to find (for swans as well as cattle); many swans unerringly identified the few good areas of grass, thereby making themselves unpopular with farmers.

At Leigh Meadows, up to 20 were feeding on a small area of agriculturally improved grassland below the Red Lion, often with Whoopers and Bewick's, in early January before the floods rose, some flying towards the Severn to roost (and three being killed when they hit an overhead power-line on 7 January), others towards Coombe Hill; after the floods rose these birds seemed to move to Ashleworth. At Ashleworth, a family of three (two adults with a cygnet) were roosting at first light on 8 January, then flew 200 metres to their feeding area on improved grassland alongside the reserve; ten were grazing there on fresh grass, above the tidemark left by the recent flood on 5 & 6 February, eighteen on 9 February, but were scared off by the farmer, and moved to another grass field on higher ground and above the flood line; up to 30 were at the latter site in the second half of February, often with the Whoopers; 20 (mainly first winter birds) were on the two fields on 28 February (both equipped with scaring devices, one with ribbons on posts, the other with a gas gun, but the swans took little notice); up to 30 (mainly first winter birds) on these fields throughout March.

At Minsterworth, six on 1 February. At Walmore, up to 15 (including two family parties with respectively two and three cygnets) were seen in January, 6 on 16 February, up to 15 throughout March. At Rodley, two adults on 2 January.

Breeding birds were active early: at Coombe Hill, the pair that nested by the Wharf last year (colour-ringed 3AY and mate) was near the nest site as early as 8 January, and again on 6 February, but not in early March when the nesting site was flooded, though they were back on 29 March; at Cobney Meadows, where a pair had nested last year, a pair (3OJ and T68) was present on 5 February; 3OJ was there on 28 February; on 29 March 3OJ and mate were on another pond where a pair nested last year. At the Handkerchief Pool nesting site near Haw Bridge, a pair was near the nest site on 5 March, which was under water on 18 March with the birds swimming nearby on the flood; they were at the nest site when the floods dropped on 22 March, and had one egg on 29 March. At Walmore, one pair had a nest but no eggs on 31 March.

Whooper Swan: On 4 January, a third adult joined the two that had been present in the Coombe Hill / Leigh Meadows area since November; all three were seen by day, grazing with Mutes on agriculturally improved grassland on the Leigh Meadows from 5-12 January; on the latter date the field was partly flooded and they were the only swans left; they were not there in deeper floodwater on 15 January, but were found again on 16 January, at the edge of the flood with Mutes near Hasfield, in a favourite place when waters are high; they were still in the Hasfield area from 1-10 February, feeding with Bewick's on partly flooded maize stubble; they were back feeding (with Mutes) on several grass fields at Hasfield above the flood mark from 15 February to 16 March, the last date when they were recorded. They roosted (as usual) on deeper water at Ashleworth, where they were often difficult to see, since they flew out very early in the morning, returning very late at night, but were seen at Ashleworth at first light on 8 & 10 January, flying off towards Leigh Meadows at about 07h50, and were definitely roosting on the water at Ashleworth throughout February.

Bewick's Swan: A coordinated count at all likely sites in Gloucestershire (Berkeley Heath, Slimbridge, The Moors, Walmore, Rodley, Coombe Hill, Leigh Meadows, Ashleworth) on 9 January gave a total of 193 individuals. At Slimbridge, a count of 192 (nine cygnets) on 12 January was the highest of the winter (and the lowest peak since 1965-66); in all, 273 different individuals were recorded at Slimbridge this winter (another low figure which compares poorly with last year's figure of 318, and is well below the five-year mean of 360 individuals). At Slimbridge there were 181 (nine juveniles) on 15 January, numbers then dropped slightly in late January, as some birds moved to Walmore, staying to roost on the floodwater there: 160 (seven cygnets) at Slimbridge on 24 January, 169 (seven cygnets) on 28 January, including some birds known to have been at Walmore, 172 (seven juveniles) on 1 February including more birds from Walmore; numbers declined gradually in February, some going to Bredon's Hardwick (see below). Over the weekend of 23/24 February, 47 departed from Slimbridge on westerly winds, leaving 90 (six cygnets) on 25 February; another 45 left on 27 February, with south-westerly following winds, and were heard over Gloucester at 13h00; only one yearling (the first bird to arrive last October) remained on 29 February, still there on 6 March. The low proportion of juveniles recorded in Netherlands in autumn 2007 is confirmed by a count of 5.0%

juveniles out of 1,957 birds on the Ouse Washes in Cambridgeshire on 4 January; numbers of cygnets remained low in the Severn Vale this winter.

Numbers at Walmore this winter were fairly low compared with previous winters; they came to feed on agriculturally improved grassland, and the largest numbers (maximum 39, hence, as usual in recent years, well short of the 170 required to fulfil international importance) were noted at the end of January, when some of the birds that had come to feed stayed to roost on the floodwater instead of returning to Slimbridge. 16 were present on 2 January, a flock of nine adults and two yearlings, all unringed, and a family party of five (two adults and three cygnets); all five of the family were ringed (adults TXF and BAT, cygnets 701, 702 & 703) and had been seen at Slimbridge the previous week; they were seen leaving Slimbridge and flying towards Walmore at 09h30 that morning and all five had returned to Slimbridge by 16h30; this was their first recorded visit to Walmore this winter, but the parents have been seen at Walmore in previous winters. On 5 January, 15 (one of them a yearling), included a bird ringed 660 ("Mila") in the Pechora Delta in Arctic Russia at 68N 53E in August 2006, not previously recorded at Slimbridge this winter. On 9 January, eleven birds seen arriving from Slimbridge included three ringed birds, adults TUV and BCH, a known pair, with their 2005 ringed cygnet 607; all had been recorded at Walmore in previous winters, but this was their first recorded visit this winter. On 11 January, 10 birds, including once again the family of TUV + BCH + 607. Numbers were higher on 14 January when flooding was extensive: 21 birds (including a family with two cygnets, believed to be "Costos" and "Coronie") were feeding on floodwater (eating what?) and all apparently staying to roost overnight. In the early morning of 17 January, about 28 had roosted including the pair with two cygnets ("Costos"/"Coronie") and a yearling ringed 741 ("Yulia"), also ringed in the Pechora Delta in summer 2006, and previously seen at Slimbridge this winter, though not before at Walmore. On the evening of 18 January, 33 (including two cygnets) were definitely roosting at Walmore. On 19 & 20 January, 31 were present, including Costos/Coronie and their two cygnets, and probably roosting; on 27 January, 39 (two cygnets). Numbers decreased as the floods, which had no doubt rendered the agricultural grass unpalatable to the Bewick's, dropped. On 2 February only three present; two unringed adults on 11 February, but 16 adults, all unringed, on 16 February, none noted after this date.

North of Gloucester, the yearling ringed 675, which had been feeding with the Whoopers at Leigh Meadows since the last few days of December and had not been recorded at Slimbridge so far this winter, was still present in the first ten days of January; it was accompanied by two other unringed birds from 3-10 January; all three were with the Whoopers at Hasfield when the floods were rising on 16 January; nine near Haw Bridge on 15 January, four on 25 January. After the floods receded a group of 19 was noted on a flooded maize field near Hasfield on 29 January and 1 February (including ringed birds 660, from Walmore, and 675 again, plus "Lineage" and mate "Linia", not previously recorded in Gloucestershire away from Slimbridge and identified by bill pattern); 16 (including 660 and 675) were present on 2 February and 21 on 6 February; they may have been roosting at Coombe Hill, since on the morning of 5 February, 17 flew into Ashleworth early on, coming from that direction, and some were definitely roosting at Coombe Hill on the morning of 6 February. This group was not seen after 7 February. At Bredon's Hardwick, eight Bewick's Swans appeared with five White-fronted Geese on 8 February, departing during the night of 8 February. This coincided with a fairly large exodus of geese and swans from Slimbridge.

Black Swan: At Coombe Hill, three were seen on floodwater on 3 & 6 February.

Geese

Greylag Goose: At Bredon's Hardwick, maxima of 68 in February and 72 in March. A flock of up to a dozen was seen regularly, moving between Ashleworth and Coombe Hill, throughout the period. In addition, there were one or two with broken wings at Coombe Hill.

Pink-footed Goose: The Pinkfoot recorded at Lower Moor from mid-December, considered to be a wild bird which had overshot an influx into the north and east Midlands, stayed until 22 January, associating with feral Greylags and Canada Geese.

White-fronted Geese: At Bredon's Hardwick, five arrived with eight Bewick's Swans on 8 February, at a time of departures from Slimbridge; two geese departed overnight with the swans, leaving three which remained until 5 April. There is no reason to think these were anything other than wild birds. Those that remained appeared to become part of the feral Greylag flock and to become imprinted.

There were no other records of wild Whitefronts coming up the Severn from the estuary, as used to occur in previous times when numbers of wild geese were larger at Slimbridge.

Canada Goose: At Gwen Finch, Nafford, 58 on 15 March. At Bredon's Hardwick, still 110 on 21 March. As usual, numbers in Gloucestershire in the New Year were lower than the 500 recorded in autumn, presumably as birds returned to nesting grounds in the Midlands. There was no doubt much interchange between Ashleworth and Coombe Hill, particularly in time of flooding in the second half of January and mid-February. At Ashleworth, 170 were grazing at the edge of the floodwater on 15 January, 259 on 13 February, 70 on 23 February, not more than 21 in March. At Coombe Hill, about 100 had roosted on 12 January, about 200 on 2 February, less than ten in March; at Cobney Meadows, a pair on the nesting island from 25 March. At Walmore, 21 on floodwater on 14 January, first there for some time; up to 37 in late January; one or two pairs there in late March.

Barnacle Goose: At Bredon's Hardwick, one on 21 and 22 March.

Egyptian Goose: Two had been regularly recorded in south Worcestershire in November-December 2007. Two, no doubt the same birds, were regularly noted at Bredon's Hardwick for most of January, and there were records of singles at Lower Moor and Clifton GP in late January. A pair was seen feeding on maize stubble with wild swans at Hasfield from 1 to 5 February, with a single until 7 February. No doubt the same birds were on the floodwater at Coombe Hill on 2 February.

Ducks

Shelduck: As usual, some occurred inland, presumably coming from the estuary, in the early months of the year, but numbers were nowhere near three figures sometimes noted in flooded conditions.

In Worcestershire: at Grimley, a drake on floodwater on 26 January, one on 3 March; at Hill Court, Longdon, four on 27 March; at Gwen Finch, seven on 9 March, one on 15 March; larger numbers at Bredon's Hardwick - 21 on 9 February, 25 on 12 February, 20 on 31 March.

In Gloucestershire: only one record at Ashleworth, a single on 31 March; at Coombe Hill, two on 1 January, nine on 3 February, 16 on 16 February; two apparent pairs on scrapes on 27 February, but maximum of only four during March; at Cobney Meadows, nine on 25 March. Near Longford, four on 29 January. Nearer the estuary, numbers were larger: at Minsterworth Ham, 14 on 1 February, two on 27 March; at Walmore, eight on 5 January, ten on 17 January, thirteen on 11 February, eight on 24 February and March, with 17 on 23 March; at Rodley, 11 on 2 January, 17 on 9 January, feeding on agriculturally improved grassland; 19 on 19 January, 38 on grass on 23 February, twelve on 21 March; no doubt there is interchange between Walmore and Rodley.

Hybrid Shelduck: At Rodley, the Australian x Paradise cross seen there in 2007 was again present on 23 February; it was at Walmore on 23 March.

Mandarin Duck: More records from Worcestershire (all in March) than from Gloucestershire: at Powick Ham, a drake on 27 March. At Beckford GP, five (three drakes) on 16 March. At Eckington on the Avon, four on 28 March. At Walmore, one on 27 January, a pair on 23 March

Surface-feeding ducks

Duck numbers in the Ashleworth/Coombe Hill area were relatively low, with no more than 1,500 in January, but a short peak of 3,500 on 6 February on receding floodwater. At times of high flood (especially in mid January) when the water was too deep for these birds to feed, many apparently moved to Longdon Marsh (where flooding is not so deep and where there was a total of about 1,000 ducks on 22 January). Total numbers dropped to 700-800 in late February, probably 500-600 in early March.

Wigeon: At Longdon Marsh, 590 on 22 January, 750 on 24 January; ten at Hill Court on 27 March. At Gwen Finch, 12 on 7 February, 24 on 21 March; at Kemerton 85 on 9 January, 60 on 21 February. At Bredon's Hardwick, 235 in early February, then much higher numbers of up to 700 on 12-14 February (birds displaced from Ashleworth/Coombe Hill?).

At Ashleworth, 600+ on 4 January; 390 grazing on the edge of floodwater on 15 January, 800 in early February, 650 on 9 February, 350 on 16 February; from late February many grazed on fresh grass along the road at the edge of the reserve; highest counts were of 400 on 23 February and 5 March, 300 on 22 March; 40 grazing on 31 March. At Coombe Hill 360 on 1 January, 800+ on 3 February, 1250 on 6 February, very few in mid to late February and early March, as all were at Ashleworth; up to 70 in late March. At Castlemeads, one on 2 March. At Minsterworth Ham, 360 on 1 February. At Walmore, 360 on floodwater on 14 January, 390 on 20 January.

Gadwall: At Kemerton, two on 9 January, five on 8 February.

At Ashleworth, 28 on 9 January, maxima of 20 in February, four in March. At Coombe Hill, two on 13 January, then unusually high numbers in February: 25 on 2 February, 50 on 3 February, 40 on 6 February, 14 on 25 March. At Port Ham, three on 7 March, seven on 14 March. At Minsterworth, six on 1 February. At Walmore, five on floodwater on 14 January, eleven on 19 January, seven on 20 March, one on 21 March.

Teal: On the floodwater at Longdon Marsh, 120 on 22 January, 200 on 24 January; five at Hill Court on 27 March. At Gwen Finch, 120 on 15 January, at Bredon's Hardwick maxima of 59 in February, 45 in March. At Kemerton, 33 on 8 February.

At Ashleworth, monthly maxima of 220 on 1 January, 400 on 6 February and 70 on 8 March. At Coombe Hill, 100+ on 8 January, 400 on 6 February, 150 on 1 March, still 110 on 25 March and 40 on 31 March. At Leigh Meadows, two on 8 March. At Castlemeads 10 on floodwater on 14 January, 35 on several dates in March. At Sudmeadow, six on the marsh on 25 February, eight on 3 March, three on 27 March. At Minsterworth Ham, 206 on 1 February. At Walmore, 100+ on 5 January, 280 on floodwater on 14 January, 320 on 27 January, 200 on 2 February, still 290 on 24 February decreasing to 150 on 1 March, 19 on 29 March and only ten on 31 March.

Mallard: At Longdon Marsh, 40 on 22 January. At Ashleworth, maxima of 50 in January, 90 in February, 20 in March. At Coombe Hill, maxima of 140 in February, 40 in March. At Minsterworth, 20 on 1 February. At Walmore, 220 on floodwater on 14 January, 140 on 27 January, 10 on 16 February, 35 on 21 March.

Pintail: In recent years, concentrations reaching the level of international significance (more than 600 individuals) have frequently been recorded, especially in conditions of declining flood. After poor counts in late 2007, numbers fell only just short of this level in January and February 2008.

In Worcestershire: at Clifton GP, 24 on 27 January; at Longdon Marsh 10 on 13 January (from Hill End), 100 on 16 January, then in flooded conditions 220 on 17 & 22 January, 475 on 24 January and 500 on 27 January at the height of the flooding. It is assumed that these were birds dispersing from the Ashleworth / Coombe Hill area where the water was too deep for them to feed. At Bredon's Hardwick, two on 9 March.

In Gloucestershire, where there is no doubt interchange between Coombe Hill and Ashleworth, the maximum January count was of 70 on 1 January. Then at Ashleworth, 350 on a dropping flood at Hasfield on 5 February, 250 on 6 February, decreasing (in higher water conditions) to 110 on 9 February, but 350 on ice on 19 February, 60 on 23 February, 45 on 8 March, 25 on 22 March. At Coombe Hill, 110 on 2 February, 230 on 3 February, 45 on 6 February, then twelve or less until the end of March. At Minsterworth, 20 on 1 February. At Walmore, 15+ on 17 January, 68 on 18 January, 25 on 19 January, 43 on 27 March.

Garganey: At Walmore an early pair in light flooding on 21 March.

Shoveler: Numbers remained high into March, when many other ducks were departing. At Longdon Marsh, 60 on 22 January, at Hill Court 35 on 27 March. At Kemerton, eight on 13 February.

At Ashleworth, monthly maximum of 65 on 29 January, 80 on 9 February; unusually high numbers in February: 200 on 16 February, 220 on the ice on 19 February, then 50 on 28 February, 70 on 5 March, 73 on 29 March. At Coombe Hill, maxima of 35 in February, 20 in March. At Castlemeads, eight on 2

March. At Port Ham, five on floodwater near Gloucester city centre on 14 January, two on 4 February. At Minsterworth, 75 on 1 February, 73 on 18 March. At Walmore, the highest numbers were on floodwater in January: 26 on 14 January, 25+ on 17 January, 31 on 27 January, two on 24 February.

Diving ducks

Few diving ducks occur in Gloucestershire, where water at riverside sites is usually shallow and not suitable for diving birds; even on floodwater, the only diving ducks seen in any numbers are Tufted Duck and Pochard. In Worcestershire on the other hand, the deeper riverside gravel pits attract a greater number and variety of diving ducks, no doubt birds moving south from midland reservoirs.

Pochard: At Kemerton, 23 on 9 January, 21 on 8 February, 39 on 26 February.

At Ashleworth, just two on floodwater on 9 & 12 February. At Coombe Hill, singles in January, one on floodwater on 3 February, four on 25 March. At Walmore, one on 20 January.

Tufted Duck: At Hill Court reservoir, 10 on 27 March. At Kemerton, 39 on 9 January, 79 on 8 February.

Fair numbers appeared on the February and March floodwaters at Ashleworth and Coombe Hill. At Ashleworth, up to seventeen throughout February, 17 on 18 March, 22 on 31 March. At Coombe Hill, two on the Long Pool on 8 January, 27 on floodwater on 3 February, smaller numbers on floodwater in February and March, but 30 on 29 March; at Cobney Meadows, 15 on 25 March. At Port Ham, three on 2 March. At Walmore, four on 27 January.

Red-crested Pochard: At Kemerton, a male on 2 January, two including a drake from 31 January to 16 February.

Goldeneye: At Grimley, one to six present (in varying combinations of ducks and drakes) from 5 January to 2 March. At Clifton GP, a drake on 5 & 6 January and 23 February, three on 24 February, a drake from 16 to 29 March.

Goosander: At Clifton GP, three (one drake) on 27 January.

Smew: At Kemerton, a male on 2 January.

Raptors

Marsh Harrier: A female or juvenile chasing Starlings by the flooded Leadon near Over on 18 January.

Sparrowhawk: Many records from Gloucestershire. At Ashleworth, one on 16 & 28 February. At Coombe Hill, singles in January, February and March; a big female doing aerial display on 31 March. At Cobney Meadows, one on 4 January. At Wainlodes a large female (the same bird as at Coombe Hill?) disturbed several hundred thrushes from trees when it flew over on 8 January; one flew across the Severn on 18 March. At Port Ham, a male on 14 March chasing a Snipe.

Buzzard: Also many Gloucestershire records. At Ashleworth, Coombe Hill and Cobney Meadows one or two throughout the period. At Walmore one on 21 March.

Kestrel: Singles at Ashleworth, Coombe Hill, Wainlodes and Walmore throughout the period.

Merlin: More from Worcestershire: at Grimley, singles on 23 & 24 January, 19 & 21 March; at Ryall GP, a female on 10 February; at Bredon's Hardwick, a male on 7 March. In Gloucestershire, a male at Walmore on 5 January and one at Cobney Meadows on 11 March.

Peregrine: A series of records from both counties. In Worcestershire: at Grimley, two on 20 January, then singles on several dates in February and until 19 March (the birds from Worcester Cathedral?). At Clifton GP, one or two on several dates in January, until 16 February. At Longdon Marsh, two on 17 & 24 January. At Kemerton, one on 19 February. At Bredon's Hardwick, one on 2 January & 7 March.

At Ashleworth, one was stooping at Lapwing on 6 February, one on pylons on several dates from 13 February to 25 March. At Coombe Hill, one on 3 January and 3, 6 & 12 February, a male on 6 March, two on 11 March, an immature on 16 March, one on 31 March. At Walmore, an adult male and immature female on 5 January, an adult on 14 January. At Rodley, two on 19 January.

Gamebirds and Rails

Water Rail: At Grimley, four on 23 February, two on 24 February.

At Ashleworth, one on 12 January. At Coombe Hill, one heard on 15 February, one on 16 & 26 February. At Over Ponds, one squealing on 26 February. At Quedgeley, one on 6 January, 24 March. At Walmore, one heard on 14 January.

Moorhen: Up to five regularly recorded throughout the period at Ashleworth and Coombe Hill.

Coot: At Bredon's Hardwick, six on 27 March. At Kemerton, 80 on 8 February.

In Gloucestershire, only small numbers on winter floods, increasing as spring approached. At Ashleworth, five on 4 January, 20 through February and on 23 February, when they were very aggressive, forming territory; 30 on 5 March, 40 on 18 March. At Coombe Hill, 30+ on floodwater on 2 February, 20 on 6 February, 30 on 25 March, 40 grazing on 29 March, 32 on 31 March.

Waders

Few waders winter in the vales; the main interest in this period was the return of waders that breed in the vales as spring approached, and the onset of spring passage by waders that nest much further north.

Oystercatcher: A species that has appeared as a breeding species in the last ten to fifteen years, especially in gravel pits in Worcestershire. Ones and twos returned to the breeding areas as early as late January, frequent from mid-February. At Holt, the first one appeared on 12 February, then two on 23 February and in March. At Grimley one on 22 January and mid-February, two from 16 February to the end of March, occasionally three (perhaps there are birds moving through?). At Kemerton, one on 16 February, two on 17 February. At Bredon's Hardwick, one from 27 January and occasionally in February, two on 22 March. Two on Upham Meadow in Gloucestershire (probably the Bredon's Hardwick birds) on 29 March.

Little Ringed Plover: A migrant which arrives from sub-Saharan Africa from mid-March, with some birds staying to breed, notably in gravel pits in Worcestershire. At Grimley, the first four on 15 March, two on 18 & 21 March. At Clifton GP, one on 16 March. At Ryall GP, one on 15 March. At Throckmorton tip, one on 25 March. The only Gloucestershire record was one at Coombe Hill, not until 29 March.

Ringed Plover: Normally occurs as a spring passage migrant. One at Grimley on the unusually early date of 19 February, one on 24 March. At Coombe Hill, one on 29 March.

Golden Plover: One of the few waders that winters in the vales. Numbers inland in Gloucestershire have declined dramatically in recent years, though several thousand are now recorded regularly on the estuary at Slimbridge, with some on the Cotswolds. Wintering numbers have clearly held up much better in south Worcestershire, notably along the Avon. By the Severn: at Clifton GP, 80 on 26 January; at Ryall GP, as many as 500 on 27 January. Along the Avon: near Lower Moor, 75+ flew over on 19 January; 2100 in the area on 22 January, 50 on 30 January; 550 on 6 February, 200 on 9 February. At Wick east of Pershore 400 on 5 February. Near Pershore, 25 on 25 February. At Fladbury 60 on 6 January. At Gwen Finch reserve, 33 on 11 January.

By February and more so in March, passage migrants, sometimes in summer plumage begin to occur: 30+ (many in summer plumage) near the A38 south of Ryall on 21 March. The only Gloucestershire records were of six at Coombe Hill on 12 February and singles there on 16 & 19 February.

Lapwing: As with Golden Plover, large numbers winter on the estuary, though flocks occasionally occur in the vales, particularly on a dropping flood. But passage back through the vales to the breeding grounds begins early, and migrants are in evidence in February. Furthermore, some breed in the vales, and are indeed one of the earliest to lay eggs, so birds arrive early and breeding activity is already seen from mid-March.

In Worcestershire: 1000 at Ryall GP on 27 January; at Bredon's Hardwick, 260 on 15 January, up to 130 in February; in the Carrant Catchment, 150-200 through the winter. In Gloucestershire: at Tirley, 45 on 23 January; at Ashleworth, a flock of 250 on 29 January was the largest all month; present in February with a maximum of 60 on 9 February; at Coombe Hill, a flock of 730, no doubt migrants, on 6 February; 600+ on 15 February, 300 on 16 February; flock of 40, mainly migrants, on 27 February; only 35 on 8 March, probably not migrants, remains of previous flock. Over Sudmeadow, 65 heading upriver on 27 February, no doubt migrants. At Minsterworth, 20 on 1 February. At Walmore 34 on 16 February, 45 on 10 March; 22 on 21 March included some migrants and some displaying. At Rodley 160 on 9 January.

Breeding activity: at Hill Court, Longdon, five pairs displaying on 27 March. At Staunton, five pairs displaying over a cereal crop on 18 March, one female sitting on 29 March. At Ashleworth, one displaying on high ground behind the reserve from 23 February into March; another small group on the meadows giving display calls on 28 February, eight birds displaying there actively from 5 March and still displaying there on 31 March, despite the rise in water levels. At Coombe Hill, one male was doing brief display flights round the scrapes on 27 February; all Lapwings had disappeared in heavy flooding on 18 March, just two were left doing aerial acrobatics round the edges of flood on 25 March, 20 round scrapes appeared to have resumed breeding activity on 29 March, but were not very active on 31 March; none on the Southern Meadows or Cobney Meadows in late March. At Leigh Meadows, no breeding activity on 8 March. At Walmore about ten beginning display on 20 March, 15+ displaying on 31 March.

Dunlin: Occasionally occurs in winter, often associating with Lapwings; moves northward through the area as a migrant from March. Few records this year: at Gwen Finch one on 28 March; at Bredon's Hardwick five on 15 February; at Coombe Hill, two with Lapwings on 27 February, one on 11 March.

Ruff: Winters around the Severn estuary and occasionally occurs in the vales in shallow flood conditions; moves north from March, particularly if there is shallow flooding. Very few records this year: one record: four at Coombe Hill on 15 February.

Jack Snipe: A winter visitor, very discreet and undoubtedly under-recorded.

In Worcestershire: at Grimley, one on 26 January; at Clifton GP, one on 13 January, ten on 20 January; at Ryall GP, one on 10 February; at Castlemorton Common, two on 6 January, five on 27 January, three on 17 February, four on 25 March; at Kemerton, up to seven in January, three on 8 February, maximum of eleven in March, with up to 15 elsewhere in the Carrant catchment; at Bredon's Hardwick, three on 8 February. In Gloucestershire: at Ashleworth, one on setaside on 5 February, at least seven on 5 March; at Hasfield Ham, one on 1 March; at Port Ham, two on 23 March; at Hempsted (near the Severn) two on 15 January & 26 March; at Quedgeley, one on 24 February; at Walmore, one on many dates in March, up to 23 March.

Snipe: A common winter visitor to the vales, more obvious than Jack Snipe; there is often a considerable movement through the area from March onwards, and a few used to stay to breed. Fewer records are available from Worcestershire, but the species is no doubt just as common there as it is in Gloucestershire. At Kemerton, 42 on 9 January, 40 on 8 February.

In Gloucestershire: at Ashleworth there were ten on 4 January, a lot calling at first light on 8 January, 25 on 12 January; six on setaside on 5 February, 30+ dotted over frozen fields on 16 February, 20 on 23 February, 30 on 28 February, 40 spread widely in icy conditions on 5 March, 30 on 25 March. Coombe Hill used to be one of the best sites in the Severn Vale for Snipe, but held less this year, probably because of deeper water on the Long Pool; about 25 round edges of flooded meadows on 12 January, six on 27 February, five on 29 March; at Cobney Meadows, where conditions were more favourable with lower water levels, 60 on flooded fields on 4 January, 35 on 8 January, but none on 12 January when these fields were deeply flooded; ten on falling flood on 5 February, 40 on 28 February

& 5 March, 25 on 14 March. On Port Ham, two on 3 February, 16 on 23 March, 30 on 29 March. At Sudmeadow, four on 25 February, ten on 3 March, two on 27 March. At Hempsted, near the Severn, 47 on 15 January, two on 26 March. At Lower Parting, one on 3 March. At Quedgeley, one or two in early January. At Walmore, eleven on 5 January, two or three on 16 February, 56 on 1 March, 30 on 23 March. At Rodley, 63 on 19 January.

Woodcock: Records come only from Worcestershire. At Grimley, singles on 24 February & 6 March. At Castlemorton Common, two on 6 January. At Lower Moor, one on 30 January. At Bredon's Hardwick, two on 8 February. At Kemerton, four on 28 January.

Black-tailed Godwit: As in the last few years, flocks, no doubt migrants of the Icelandic sub-species, en route to their breeding places, were seen on floodwater in late March. At Walmore, a flock of 42 with six bright males, clearly migrants, were feeding actively then flying round excitedly, on floodwater on 20 March; not found again on 21 March. At Coombe Hill, a flock of six migrants was feeding greedily at the edge of the flood on 25 March, none of them in very bright plumage; three on 29 March, one an Icelandic male.

Curlew: Winters on the estuary in large numbers, but occurs only very rarely in the vales in winter. It returns from wintering grounds to breed in the vales (mainly in Gloucestershire) from mid February. Some migrants move through the area on their way to breeding sites further north.

The only Worcestershire record was at Kemerton, with three on 15 March. In Gloucestershire: at Upham Meadow up to 17 in the second half of March, with some display; at Ashleworth, one was calling (not displaying, so probably a migrant), at the edge of water on 28 February; one doing bubbling display call at last on 25 March, another on 31 March, probably two pairs present. At Haw Bridge, one was bubbling on 28 February; just one was left on the edge of the flood on 18 March. At Coombe Hill, the first bird of the spring was on 6 February, five on 15 February; one with display song on 27 February; several flocks of migrants in late February/March, (e.g. 20 on 16 February, 17 on 23 February, 22 on 26 February and 1 March, 31 on 5 March, 17 on 14 March, ten on 25 March); from 1 March, two to three pairs, potential breeders, bubbling, in addition to migrants, at Coombe Hill and Cobney Meadows. At Leigh Meadows, two pairs on 8 March. At Walmore (where they are infrequent) two, presumably migrants, on 20 March, one on 23 March.

Redshank: Winters on the estuary, but very infrequent as a wintering bird in the vales. Breeding birds normally return to the meadows from mid-February, and there is some passage in February and March.

In Worcestershire, one bird wintered for the third year in succession at Grimley, where there were records throughout January, February (with two on 18 February) and until 6 March, when there were two. At Clifton GP, a single on three dates in January. At Ryall GP, three on 1 March were perhaps migrants. At Bredon's Hardwick, where good numbers used to breed, two on 27 February.

In Gloucestershire, only one record at Ashleworth on 31 March - maybe dispersed from Coombe Hill. At Coombe Hill, one on 9 February, then two on 14 March; in heavy flooding on 18 March, still two round the edge of the flood, one on 25 March; on 29 March when floods had subsided, three were present, two of them mating. At Cobney Meadows, two (not displaying) on 28 February, absent in early March, but two on 14 March, three with some display on 25 March. At Walmore three showing some signs of display from 21 March.

Green Sandpiper: This species winters in small numbers throughout the vales, and is recorded much more frequently and in higher numbers on Worcestershire gravel pits.

At Holt, two on 15 March. At Grimley, up to two throughout January, up to four in February, five in March. At Clifton GP, one or two on many dates in January and February, up to five in March. At Ryall GP, one on two dates in mid-February. At Lower Moor, one on two dates in January. At Bredon's Hardwick one on 30 January and 9 February.

Fewer records in Gloucestershire: At Coombe Hill, one on 5 & 9 January (and probably the same bird at nearby Cobney Meadows on 4 January and Leigh Meadows on 5 January), two on 28 February, three on 5 March, one on 11, 25 & 29 March. At Port Ham, one on 7 March, two on 23 March, one on 24 & 29 March. At Sudmeadow, one on 1 January, 1 & 6 February, 27 March.

Common Sandpiper: One on the Severn near Lower Parting, Gloucester, on 7 January, a most unusual observation for this species which is normally a summer visitor and passage migrant in UK.

Gulls

The records below do not pretend to give a full account of the many gulls which occur on landfill sites such as GLS or Throckmorton, and which pass over the vales on their way back to the estuary roost.

Mediterranean Gull: At Powick Ham, a second summer bird was present on 19 March, while at Bredon's Hardwick there was a first winter bird on 7 March.

Black-headed Gull: At Coombe Hill, 100 on falling flood on 6 February.

Common Gull: At Coombe Hill, 10 on falling flood on 6 February. At Ashleworth, 70 on floodwater on 25 March.

Lesser Black-backed Gull: At Coombe Hill, 40 on falling flood on 6 February, 50 in same conditions on 25 March.

Herring Gull: At Coombe Hill, 15 on falling flood on 6 February, 10 in similar conditions on 25 March.

Yellow-legged Gull: At Kemerton, one on 24 March. At Gloucester Landfill Site, one on 6 February.

Great Black-backed Gull: Unusual inland. At Kemerton, one on 15 March. At Bredon's Hardwick, an immature on 24 February, 25 March. At Coombe Hill, one on 1 January, two in first winter plumage on 25 March.

Kittiwake: At Grimley, one on 16 March, unusual so far inland for this maritime species.

Pigeons

Stock Dove: At Tirley, 15 on 27 March. At Ashleworth/Hasfield, good numbers on maize stubble with wild swans in early February: 100 on 3 February, 64 on 10 February, 50 on 13 February. At Coombe Hill, two on several dates in March.

Owls

Barn Owl: At Grimley, one hunting on 4 February.

At Tirley, one by day on 22 March. At Port Ham, one flushed from tree on 23 March.

Little Owl: At Ashleworth, one on 16 February. At Cobney Meadows, one in daylight on 4 January. At Highnam near River Leadon, two calling on 11 February. At Stonebench near Elmore, one calling on 7 January. At Walmore, one calling on 11 February.

Tawny Owl: At Tirley, one calling on 21 January. At Elmore one on 5 January.

Long-eared Owl: None found in hedges where roosts have occurred in past winters.

Kingfisher

At the Ashleworth outfall to the Severn, one on 28 February. At Port Ham, one on 14 January, three squealing on 7 March. At Sudmeadow, one on 1 & 12 January, 31 March. At Quedgeley, two on 6 January, one on 24 February & 24 March. At Walmore, two on 5 January, one on 11 February. At Rodley, one on a fencepost by stream on 2 January, first time noted here; again on 9 January.

Woodpeckers

Green Woodpecker: Frequent.

Great Spotted Woodpecker: At Ashleworth, two or three drumming in fine weather on 9 February, one on 16, 24 February, two on 28 February, one on 5, 31 March, all drumming. At Coombe Hill, one drumming on 8 March. At Cobney Meadows, one drumming on 4 & 6 January. Near Wainlodes, one drumming on 12 January.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker: At Grimley, one calling on 26 January, 2 February, 1 March. At Kemerton, one on 23 & 30 January, and one in Kemerton village on 27 January.

Passerines

Skylark: Not so many in Gloucestershire since last summer's floods. At Ashleworth, six on set aside on 12 January; one singing on 6 February, one or two on 23 February, up to five singing in late February and March. At Coombe Hill, one singing briefly on 27 February, more strongly on 8 March, two or three on 29 & 31 March. At Cobney Meadows, one singing on 25 March. At Leigh Meadows, one singing on 8 March. At Walmore, two on 16 February, one singing on 31 March.

Sand Martin: First spring migrants noted on same date in Worcestershire and Gloucestershire: at Holt, six on 15 March, two on 17 March. At Grimley, four on 15 March, seven on 16 March, 12 on 17 March. At Clifton GP, seven on 16 March, 15+ on 22 March, nine on 23 March. At Ryall GP, two on 15 March. At Kemerton, six on 15 March, three on 20 March. At Bredon's Hardwick, two on 22 March. In Gloucestershire: at Ashleworth, six on 15 March, 16+ on 16 March. At Coombe Hill, 14 on 16 March, eight hawking insects over floodwater on 18 March. At Quedgeley, three on 21 March.

Swallow: First summer record at Grimley, one on 25 March.

Meadow Pipit: Some wintering, passage (often with wagtails) in March. At Tirley, 21 on 27 January. At Ashleworth, five on 5 February, flock of 30 on 16 February, single figures in late February and early March, then twenty on 9 & 25 March, ten on 31 March. At Coombe Hill, five on 12 January, two on 27 February, five with migrant wagtails on 8 March, five on 29 March; at Cobney Meadows, one on 4 January, 50 on 29 March. At Leigh Meadows, 20 with wagtails on 8 March. At Port Ham, three on 3 February. At Castlemeads, 16 on 6 January.

Water Pipit: Following an unusual number of records in autumn 2007, the single bird that was seen at Grimley from 9 November until the end of December remained throughout January and February, last seen on 27 February.

Rock Pipit: After records at Grimley in October 2007, one of the Scandinavian sub-species was seen there from 22 to 25 March.

Grey Wagtail: At Ashleworth, one on 22 & 29 January. At Leigh Meadows, a female on 6 January. At Port Ham, one on 26 February, two on 6 March. At Castlemeads one on 6 January. At Sudmeadow, one on 1 January.

White/Pied Wagtail: White Wagtail, the continental subspecies, occurs on spring passage in small numbers, while Pied move through on passage, and also nests locally. At Holt, one White on 26 March. At Grimley, a White on 24 March, two on 26 March, one on 30 March.

At Tirley, a flock of 22 Pied on 24 March on a ploughed field. At Ashleworth, 25 Pied on 5 January, three Pied on 28 February, five on 5 & 22 March. At Coombe Hill, five Pied on 27 February; a flock of 35, clearly migrants, mostly adult Pied but with one White, on 8 March; 15 Pied with one White on 31 March. At Leigh Meadows, 50 migrant Pied on 8 March.

Black Redstart: At Grimley a series of records, apparently of the same immature male, which in between times took refuge in the village: on 3 February, from 16 to 21 February, from 4 to 8 March and 21 to 25 March.

Stonechat: Many wintering birds recorded in January and February, rather fewer records in February, presumably as birds departed to breeding areas: at Holt, one on 17 February. At Grimley up to three throughout January and February, last record of one on 3 March. At Clifton GP, two in January, last record one on 24 February. At Ryall GP, one on 10 February. At Castlemorton Common one was seen on 6 & 27 January. At Lower Moor, four on 22 January, one on 9 February, two on 25 March. At Bredon's Hardwick, one on 2 January. At Kemerton, one on 16 February.

At Ashleworth, two on 4 January; then a pair on 28 February and 1 March, the first for some time - perhaps migrants - still there on 5 March, three on 9 March. At Coombe Hill, a female on 14 March, a female on 16 March. In the Sudmeadow area, two pairs were seen on 7 January, one pair on 1 & 6 February. At Walmore, two on 9 & 19 January and three on 11 February. At Rodley, one on 19 January.

Wheatear: Good numbers of early spring migrants in Worcestershire: at Holt, one on 17 & 26 March; at Grimley, one on 16 March, then up to four until the end of the month. At Clifton GP, one on 16 & 29 March. At Ryall GP, one on 23 March. At Bredon's Hardwick, two on 25 March.

In Gloucestershire, three at Tirley on 24 March and one at GLS on 26 March.

Fieldfare: At Holt, 800+ on 19 January. Big flocks in orchards and parkland at Kemerton through January and February – max 400 on 6 January.

In Gloucestershire, numbers were rather low in February and early March, but there were some sizeable flocks in late March, presumably of migrants passing through on their way back north. At Tirley, 100 on 20 January. At Ashleworth, 100 on 6 February, only five on 23 & 28 February, then 75 on 22 March and 120 on 25 March. At Coombe Hill, 20 on 2 February, 60 passing through on 6 March, only one on 18 March. At Cobney Meadows, 50 on 4 January; fair flock of 210 on 25 March, 600 on 29 March. At Leigh Meadows, 100 on 6 January, 25 on 8 March. At Wainlodes, 200 flushed by Sparrowhawk on 8 January; big flock of 400 on grass in falling flood on 5 February. At Rodley 50 on 23 February.

Redwing: As for Fieldfare, numbers picked up in mid/late March. Big flocks in orchards and parkland round Kemerton through January and February – maximum of 500 on 23 February. At Tirley, 200 on 20 January, 300 on 23 January. At Ashleworth, 30 on 4 January, 100+ on 5 February, only 10 on 16 February, 20 passing through on 6 March, 150+ on 9 March, 40 on 25 March. At Coombe Hill, 20 on 2 February, only five on 8 March, only one on 18 March. At Cobney Meadows, 20 on 4 January, 40 on 25 March. At Leigh Meadows, 300 on 6 January, fair flock of 75 on 8 March. At Wainlodes, 100 flushed by Sparrowhawk on 8 January; 100 with big flock of 400 Fieldfares on grass in falling flood on 5 February, 40 on 29 March. At Rodley, 20 on 23 February.

Blackcap: At Tirley, one in a garden on 12 January. At Coombe Hill, one in subsong on 25 March.

Chiffchaff: At Kempsey Sewage Treatment works, two on 5 January, including a colour ringed bird caught in winter 2006/07. A wintering bird at Ashleworth on 9 January.

At Tirley, one singing on 27 March. At Ashleworth, one singing on 25 March, three or four on 31 March. At Coombe Hill, two on 6 March, two short bursts of song on 8 March, one briefly in song on 14 March, three on 16 March, then up to eight singing well for the rest of the month. At Cobney Meadows, two seen on 25 March. At Wainlodes, one singing on 18 March.

Goldcrest: At Ashleworth, one singing from Meerend Thicket (where there are no conifers) throughout February and March.

Firecrest: One caught and ringed at Upton on Severn Sewage Treatment works on 21 March.

Long-tailed Tit: At Ashleworth, 10 on 5 February, 20+ on 9 February, 10 on 23 February, ten on 5 March. At Coombe Hill, ten on 6 February, five on 27 February, ten on 29 March.

Treecreeper: At Coombe Hill, one on 6 March, one singing on 29 & 31 March

Jay: At Coombe Hill, two on 15 February.

Rook: At Wainlodes, 200 feeding on grass in falling flood on 5 February.

Raven: Near Eldersfield, 20 on 24 March.

Breeding was confirmed at a Gloucestershire site in the Severn Vale where it has long been suspected, thus explaining the increasing number of records. At Ashleworth, two on 1 January, one on 29 January, 9 February, one flying over high on 28 February, and again on 5 & 7 March. At Wainlodes, one calling on 2 February & 18 March. At Leigh Meadows, one flying over on 8 January, 9 February. Opposite GLS, where they occur in good numbers, 40+ on 8 January.

Starling: Roosting in Gloucester area: flock of 500+ over Longlevens on 9 January.

At Wainlodes, flock of 1,500 on grass in falling flood on 5 February, 500 on 29 March.

Brambling: At Holt, one on 26 January. At Grimley, two on 26 January, one on 19 February, four on 24 February, a female on 1 March. At Upton Sewage Works, three on 23 March. At Ashleworth, one on 22 January.

Siskin: At Holt, up to 60 throughout January, 20+ on 17 February, three on 17 March; regular at Grimley, with counts of 70+ on 6 January, 40+ on 24 February, 30 on 16 March. At Kemerton, singles on 16 February, 15, 24 & 30 March. Fewer records from Gloucestershire: at Stonebench near Elmore, 30 on 5 January. At Walmore, four on 5 January.

Linnet: At Ashleworth, flock of 30 on maize stubble on 2 February, 22 March.

Lesser Redpoll: Also recorded more frequently in Worcestershire: at Holt, up to four on many dates in January, two on 10 February, one on 17 March; at Grimley, five on 6 January, 25+ on 2 February, singles on many dates in February with eight on 12 February, several on 13 March, last one on 27 March. At Lower Moor, three on 22 January. In Gloucestershire, eight on a bird table at Twyning on 14 February.

Bullfinch: Regularly recorded (up to five) throughout the period in thick hedges and thickets associated with blackthorn at Kemerton, Ashleworth and Coombe Hill; at Cobney Meadows, two or three on 4 January. At Quedgeley, a male and a female on 24 March.

Yellowhammer: Not a common bird in the riverside meadows of Gloucestershire, preferring higher ground. Near the Red Lion camp site at Wainlodes, the unusual number of 40 on 3 January. On the Apperley side of Coombe Hill, on higher ground, at least three singing on 18 March.

Reed Bunting: Most appear to leave the vales in Gloucestershire in winter and return in early spring. At Ashleworth, one heard on 4 January, one on 5 February, at least five, much more active, and several actually singing on 9 February; up to seven singing in late February, seven on 9 March. At Coombe Hill, one heard on 12 January, two on 6 February, at least four males beginning to sing on 27 February, four or five singing throughout March. At Leigh Meadows, one or two singing on 8 March. At Port Ham, five on 29 March. At Quedgeley, two males on 24 March. At Walmore Common, two or three singing on 31 March.

Corn Bunting: At Lower Moor, ten on 16 January, one on 22 January, seven on 6 February. No records at all from Gloucestershire.

These are unconfirmed records, compiled by M. Smart from his own observations and those of David Anderson, Gordon Avery, Les Brown, Colin Butters, John Clarke, Mervyn Greening, Andy Jayne, Julia Newth and Lawrence Skipp, with some cherries picked from the Mike King's Gloster Birder and Brian Stretch's Worcester Birding websites. Thanks to information from the Worcester Birding website, much more information on Worcestershire is included in this report than in previous reports.