

Notes on birds in the Severn and Avon Vales (the “Severn Hams”), Gloucestershire and south Worcestershire April 2008 – June 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); Ryall (on the east bank opposite Upton); new pits just south of the M50 at Ripple; and Mythe hook, just in Gloucestershire. Upton Warren Nature reserve, north of Droitwich, is outside the area covered by 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, flowing via the Longdon Brook to the Severn, just above the Mythe north of Tewkesbury; the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust has a major reserve south of Marsh Lane.
- 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, 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, and just to the north Throckmorton tip, where the lagoons sometimes attract water birds. Just to the east of Bredon is Kemerton Lake (Worcs), a restored gravel pit in the valley of the Carrant Brook, which flows through Cowfield Marsh into the Avon just above Tewkesbury.
- The “Severn Hams” between Tewkesbury and Gloucester, in which the main wetland areas are: Ashleworth and Hasfield Hams; Coombe Hill Canal and Meadows, including Cobney Meadows at the western end (Coombe Hill Canal is a long disused and overgrown canal, which runs through the centre of Coombe Hill Meadows); and the Leigh Meadows alongside the River Chelt and Leigh Brook above Wainlodes; Barrow Ponds are created by the artificial damming of a small tributary of 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, and its valley extends north past Newent. At Sandhurst, Maisemore and at Walham Pools near Gloucester there are a number of abandoned overgrown riverside brick-pits, artificial excavations in the floodplain.
- 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 (a “river flood”), 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.

Weather and flooding: general

April opened fairly mild, with cloud and anticyclonic conditions in the first few days, but colder from 5 to 15 April; unseasonal falls of snow on 6 April (the heaviest of the winter), even though they melted rapidly, must have been a shock to the system of migrants newly arrived from Africa; there was a dusting of fresh snow on the Cotswolds and Forest of Dean early on 7 April, with a sharp frost on 8 April; cold north westerly winds and frequent morning frosts continued till 15 April, after which there were strong easterly and north-easterly winds, blowing clockwise round an anticyclone over Germany, which continued until 19 April, decreasing in strength on 20/21 April and giving way to warmer westerly depressions on 22 April; Atlantic fronts from the west, with rain, sometimes in heavy showers, in the last week of April, especially in the last few days of the month. Nationally, April rainfall was near average, and slightly above average in southwest England and Wales. Weather continued showery and variable in the first week of May, then the first real summer weather - warm sunny, anticyclonic with light south-easterly breezes – occurred from 6 May lasting until 14 May; the first rain for some time, with winds still predominantly easterly, fell on 15-17 May; it was sunny though colder (winds still easterly) from 18-31 May, with fairly heavy rain on several days round 25 May. In late May and the first week of June there was a period of cloudy days with occasional showers, winds generally easterly still as Atlantic fronts failed to overcome the continental high pressure; bright and fine from 7 to 10 June, then winds going southwesterly with variable weather and some rain until 21 June, when winds were unusually strong for June; the last ten days of June had strongish southwest winds with some bright periods, but often cloudy with showers. Nationally weather in June was very close to the average for the last thirty years, though rain in the southwest and Wales was only 68% of the average.

Spring floods, even slight ones, are disastrous for ground-nesting birds (even though they may attract passing migrant water birds). In April 2005 and 2006 there had been floods in early April, but not in 2007, nor indeed in 2008. May 2005 had been dry, but there were light but highly damaging floods in late May 2006 and mid-May 2007; this year water levels raised slightly in late May, but there were no serious effects, nor was the unusual river flood of June 2007 repeated. In early April, most of the meadows were clear of flooding, but with a fair amount of surface water, as the mid-March flood and the high Severn levels of late March subsided; surface water continued to decrease until about 25 April, but with the heavy showers in late April, the level of the Severn rose and water levels rose in several of the meadows as local streams could not discharge into the Severn; waters dropped again in the first days of May and continued to decline gradually until mid-month; however the rain of the last ten days of May raised levels of rivers and streams again, and both Severn and Avon were quite high in the last few days of May, dropping again in early June, and down to normal summer levels by the middle of the month. In general, the meadows remained very wet on the surface, probably because of poor drainage caused by the lack of worms following last summer’s floods; hay cutting in riverside meadows was late, partly because of the wet ground, partly because of the lack of prolonged spells of fine hay-making weather in mid-June, partly also because of later hay-cutting dates established under DEFRA and Natural England stewardship arrangements for farmers. Some lucky farmers managed to get some hay cut at the end of June.

Conditions at the main sites

Upham Meadow, Twyning: Grass growth was not very well advanced on 24 May, and bare patches remained where floodwater had remained after last year’s summer floods; in the following week the Avon rose, causing ditches to back up and flood parts of the meadow; this may perhaps have flooded nests and young of some ground-nesting birds. The Avon had dropped by 19 June, but only a little hay had been cut by 25 June.

Ashleworth/Hasfield Hams: The top board in the sluice, which maintains high winter water levels on the reserve, had been removed on 31 March, and the next three were taken out on 5 April (bringing the level down to 7.98m. to 7.82 on 8 April, and dropping to 7.34 on 19 April, when the two remaining boards were removed, and to 7.23 on 22 April); levels however rose in the last few days of April and

early May, as local streams backed up and reflooded the reserve (level up to 7.76 on 3 May); water levels had dropped again by 10 May (level down to 7.20 again); water flowed back in to the reserve through the sluice (7.70 on 30 May), but dropping again in June; only relatively small areas of hay had been cut by the end of May. Water levels remained low in June, but the damp weather and hay making restrictions meant that little hay had been cut by the end of June.

Coombe Hill: In early April, the scrapes were full, and there was some surface water remaining on the fields, but no real flooding; levels gradually dropping during April, until they rose slightly again at the end of the month, before retreating throughout May. In general, meadows extremely wet, draining poorly – probably because last summer's floods had killed all the worms. Almost no hay had been cut by the end of June.

Leigh Meadows: No flooding in April, or May, though the Chelt was high in late May. Some silage cut in early June north of Leigh Brook, but in the main fields along the Chelt, no hay had been cut before the end of June.

Walmore Common: No flooding during April, but still plenty of water on the surface. At the end of May there was still shallow water in the pools on the Common.

Bird records

The periods of easterly wind from 15-21 April (even though they were cold) and from 6-9 May apparently caused a number of birds of continental origin to drift eastwards to the Severn Hams, notably Grey Plover, Yellow and White Wagtails in April and Wood Sandpiper, Temminck's Stint and Black Tern in May. The late hay-making should have provided a boost for successful breeding by ground-nesting birds, but Lapwings, Curlews and Redshanks all seemed to fare badly on Greenfield sites, though numbers of calling Quail were unusually high.

Grebes

Little Grebe: Breeds at the few sites in the Vale with permanent water. At Nafford, one on 29 June. Three pairs bred at Kemerton. At Ashleworth, up to three in the first half of April, and one in summer plumage on 22 and 24 April, but no proof of breeding. At Coombe Hill, where nesting was first proved in 2006, one in summer plumage from 5 to 8 May, one on 17 June; breeding not proven. At Port Ham, a first breeding record when a pair with four chicks was seen on 19 June. At Over Ponds, one on 27 April.

Great Crested Grebe: Nests only in areas of deep water. Two pairs nested at Kemerton, raising three young. In Worcestershire there were up to six in May, nine in June at Bredon's Hardwick.

In Gloucestershire one on 24 May on the Avon by Upham Meadow. At Ashleworth, one on 5 April (before water levels dropped!). At Coombe Hill, one on Long Pool on 5 April.

Cormorant: Numbers at Bredon's Hardwick, the main loafing spot, usually decline in summer: monthly maxima of 17 on 20 April, nine on 8 May and ten on 29 June. Occasionally seen in the vale, no doubt on route to and from Bredon's Hardwick: at Upham Meadow, one flying down the Avon on 31 May.

Little Egret: As usual in the last few years, recorded fairly regularly in summer, especially at Coombe Hill, though not invariably present there. In Worcestershire: at Holt, seven on flooded fields on 21 May, one on 8 June. At Grimley, one from 24 to 30 May. At Clifton GP, one on 28 May. At Ryall GP, one on 23 June. At Longdon Marsh, one on 15 June. At Harvington, near the Avon, one on 15 April. At Gwen Finch, one on 4 May.

At Ashleworth, one on 22 and 23 April. At Coombe Hill, up to three throughout June. At Castlemeads/Port Ham, up to three on many dates from 24 April to 30 June; at Sudmeadow, one on 30 June.

Grey Heron: Away from the two or three usual heronries ones and twos in many sites throughout the period: Longdon Marsh, Nafford, Bredon's Hardwick, Upham Meadow (one on 31 May being mobbed

by a Lapwing); Ashleworth and Coombe Hill, up to three throughout the period; Broadboard Brook, Longford (one on 24 April); Walmore (three on 2 May).

White Stork: Rarely recorded: one made a brief appearance at Ashleworth on 8 May.

Mute Swan: Breeding birds: In Worcestershire: two pairs at Lower Moor, raising five and three young; two pairs at Gwen Finch, raising three and four young. In Gloucestershire: at Upham Meadow, a pair nested at the southern tip of meadow and had five cygnets in late May and June; at Ashleworth, one nest along the main ditch and a second less obvious nest; both incubating in late April and May, two pairs of adults seen with five and four young from 9 June. At Coombe Hill, the pair that has nested by the Wharf for some years (including darvic ringed male 3AY) were nest building (not very seriously) on 3 April; serious nest construction on 8 April, female sitting on 13 April, sitting throughout April, seven recently hatched cygnets seen on 27 May, still seven on ditch on 26 June. Another one, sitting tight on 5 April in a new (very insecure) site on the southern towpath of canal, had abandoned on 7 May. Another pair was looking territorial on Cobney Meadows on 5 April. At Handkerchief Pool, female was sitting hard on 5 April and early May. At Walmore, three pairs on 8 April.

Non-breeders: Flock of up to ten birds along Avon by Upham Meadow on 25 May. The flock of 29 at Ashleworth included 23 first year birds on 5 April and had increased to 33 on 8 April, still 36 on 27 April; about 30 flew to roost at dusk (risking hitting power cables in the half light), apparently on the Severn below Wainlodes on 1 May; 34 on 3 May. The flock, numbering 16, mainly immatures, had moved to Coombe Hill by 20 May, decreasing to eight on 7 June, five on 26 June. At Walmore, at least 16 non-breeders on 2 May.

Geese

White-fronted Goose: At Bredon's Hardwick, the three which had arrived in February were last noted on 5 April

Greylag Goose: More and more birds are being noted in summer; there has been a major increase in Worcestershire (given that the first county breeding record was only in 2001) and Greylags appear to dominate and oust Canada Geese. In Worcestershire, Bredon's Hardwick is no longer the only breeding site; three pairs bred at Lower Moor, raising 17 goslings, while five pairs bred at Kemerton raising 21 young; at Bredon's Hardwick, six with four goslings on 8 May, seven with 11 goslings on 13 May, 20 with at least one brood of goslings on 25 June.

At Tirley Court, three adults with eight goslings on 20, four goslings on 31 May. At Ashleworth and Coombe Hill, no breeding noted, but occasional records, usually in single figures, throughout the period, but sixteen at Coombe Hill on 20 May, ten on 27 May and 7 June; a pair there, each with a broken wings throughout.

Canada Goose: In Gloucestershire, wintering birds depart in February or early March, and only small numbers remain to breed. At Gwen Finch, 14 birds and three nests in April. At Bredon's Hardwick 40 on 6 April, a crèche with at least ten goslings on the fishing pool, and at least three broods on the main pool, both on 25 June

At Twyning Fleet, a pair with goslings on 24 May; at Upham Meadow 35 on 20 April, and ten in late May plus a pair with four goslings, 20 on 19 June. At Tirley Court about ten on 7 May, one with goslings. On the Severn above Haw Bridge five adults tending a crèche with nine goslings on 24 June. At Ashleworth, up to six were present from April to June, including a pair in which both birds had a broken right wing, and at nearby Stonebow, a pair with eight goslings in June. At Coombe Hill, there were up to half a dozen in April, a pair with five goslings from 27 May to late June; on Cobney Meadows, a pair nested on the flight pond as last year, the female sitting on 19 April, hatched with five goslings from 7 May, had probably joined crèche at Haw Bridge from 27 May. At Walmore, a pair on 8 April, 14 coming to roost on 2 May, but no proof of breeding.

Brent Goose: Unlikely record of a bird of the Dark-bellied race at Ryall GP from 15 to 26 May!

Barnacle Goose: A feral group of a dozen birds appears to be based mainly at Tirley Court, where three pairs bred in 2007, and odd birds turn up throughout the vale. In Worcestershire: at Gwen Finch,

one on 2 May. At Bredon's Hardwick, ten on 20 April, one on 23 May. In Gloucestershire: at Tirley Court, eight present on 7 May, six on 20 May, four on 31 May, but no proof of breeding. At Ashleworth, seven flew over on 3 May, probably birds from Tirley.

Ducks

By early April, most of the wintering surface feeding ducks, which winter in good numbers (especially at Longdon, Ashleworth and Coombe Hill), have left, though some diving ducks stayed on late in Worcestershire; the main interest concentrates on the small numbers of nesting ducks (Shelduck, possibly Teal, Mallard and the increasing Tufted Duck) and passing or possibly nesting Garganey.

Shelduck: In Worcestershire, bred at Lower Moor (nine ducklings on 19 May, all predated by 3 June) and (as in 2007) at Longdon Marsh (eleven ducklings seen on 23 June, ten fledged, perhaps accounting for records of immatures elsewhere); other records: at Holt, one on 4 May; at Clifton GP, two or three from 26 April to 9 May; at Ryall GP, five flew over on 27 April; at Gwen Finch, three on 12 April and 18 May; at Bredon's Hardwick, three on 8 May.

In Gloucestershire: at Ashleworth, two in the first half of April, two pairs on 3 May, one pair on 10 May, two on 20 & 24 May; a single at Hasfield on 17 June. At Coombe Hill, one or two apparent pairs until 19 April, five birds on 26 April and 3 May, a pair plus an adult male on 7 May, but five on 8 May, up to three for the rest of May, with an immature female on 27 May, up to three in the first half of June, with a pair on 7 June; at Cobney Meadows, a pair in early May. At Leigh Meadows a pair on 29 May. At Castlemeads a pair on 12 May. At Sudmeadow, three on 5 May flew back downriver. At Walmore, seven on 7 April, three on 8 April and 2 May.

Mandarin Duck: In Worcestershire: on the Avon, two near Birlingham on 2 and 6 May, and one near Pershore on 11 May. A female with three ducklings on the Severn near Worcester on 26 June. In Gloucestershire: at Quedgeley, a female on 29 June.

Surface-feeding ducks

Wigeon: The odd few summered. At Bredon's Hardwick, 35 on 6 April, a female on 27 April, one on fishing pool on 25 June.

At Ashleworth, still 65 on 8 April, three on 30 April, up to three in May, a pair from 3 to 14 June and a female until 28 June. At Coombe Hill, one until 17 April.

Gadwall: In Worcestershire, two pairs nested at Grimley gravel workings, raising at least eleven young. Up to four at Ashleworth and Coombe Hill until 11 April.

Teal: No indication of breeding this year. At Bredon's Hardwick, 12 on 6 April. At Ashleworth, 90 on 11 April, still 76 on evening of 22 April, only 20 on 24 April; male on 9 June. At Coombe Hill, 88 on 2 April, 15 on 19 April, a pair on 7 June, again (showing no signs of breeding) on Long Pool on 21 June. At Walmore, 60 on 7 April, only two left on 2 May.

Mallard: At Upham Meadow, females with one large and six small ducklings on 31 May. At Ashleworth, 20+ on 5 April, 15 on 23 June. At Coombe Hill, 20 on 18 April including a female with about six tiny ducklings, 25 on 7 June, a female with seven growing ducklings on 21 June. At Walmore, ten on 2 May plus two females with tiny ducklings.

Pintail: At Gwen French, two on 18 April. At Ashleworth, the last record was of six on 8 April and at Coombe Hill of two on 11 April. At Grimley two on 23 June were perhaps early return migrants?

Garganey: After an early record at Walmore on 21 March, most records were from between 20 April and 20 May, most of them in Worcestershire; no sign of breeding this year. In Worcestershire: at Holt a drake from 2 to 20 May. At Grimley, a drake on 27 April and 6 May (the Holt bird); a different bird on 9 May. At Ryall GP, a drake on 10 and 16 May. At Gwen Finch, a female on 30 April. At Kemerton, two drakes on 19 April. In Gloucestershire: at Ashleworth, a pair on 22 April; and at Coombe Hill, a pair on 22 April and a male on 26 April.

Shoveler: At Nafford, six on 20 April and a male on 18 May. At Ashleworth, 45 on 8 April, two on 13 May. At Coombe Hill, still 30 on 17 April, 10 + on 19 April, then a pair on 7 June.

Diving ducks

Pochard: At Longdon Marsh, two on 27 May. A male and two females at Throckmorton on 28 May. At Kemerton, three pairs bred (two successful, raising seven and two young). No Gloucestershire records.

Tufted Duck: At Grimley, two to three pairs nested, hatching at least 20 young, all of which were probably predated by Lesser Black-backed Gulls which visit the site from their Worcester city centre breeding sites. At Nafford, eight on 6 April, one on 29 May. At Bredon's Hardwick, eight on 6 April, three on 29 May, at least six on fishing pool, and at least two males on the main pool, on 25 June.

On the Avon at Upham Meadow, two on 19 June. At Tirley Court, a pair on 20 May. At Ashleworth, before the water levels decreased, 17 on 5 April, 5+ on 8 April. On the scrapes at Coombe Hill, up to 23 in early April, with much courtship chasing; five on 17 April; up to six during May, including a pair on the scrapes on 8 May, five on 7 June, two males in late June but no proof of breeding by the end of the month; a pair at Cobney Meadows on 7 May. At GLS pond a pair on 8 May.

Goldeneye: At Clifton GP, a late drake recorded throughout April, and until 31 May.

Common Scoter: At Kemerton, four (two drakes) on 20 April.

Raptors

Red Kite: More and more records of this spreading species. In Worcestershire: at Grimley, one on 22 May; at Gwen Finch, one on 9 and 14 June; at Lower Moor, one on 15 May. In Gloucestershire: at Sandhurst, one over the Severn on 11 May; over the A38 south of Tewkesbury, one on 18 May; at Ashleworth, one on 19 June; at Coombe Hill, one on 29 June.

Marsh Harrier: At Port Ham, one on 11 April.

Sparrowhawk: Widespread but poorly recorded: at Ashleworth, a second year male netted on 10 May; at Coombe Hill a female displaying on 3 April, one on 7 and 21 June.

Buzzard: Extremely widely spread. At Upham Meadow, one on 24 May, four soaring on 31 May, one on 19 June. At Ashleworth, two or more throughout the period; at Coombe Hill, up to four throughout the period; at Cobney Meadows, one on 1 May; at Leigh Meadows, one on 26 June; at Walmore, one on 23 May.

Osprey: Migrants recorded only in Worcestershire: at Bredon's Hill, one on 14 April; at Clifton GP, one on 13 April, another on 4 May.

Kestrel: Widespread but poorly recorded. At Wainlodes, one apparently nesting on 20 May.

Merlin: At Coombe Hill, a late female landed by the scrapes for ten minutes on 18 April.

Hobby: A gratifyingly large number of records of this species; early records are likely to be of birds moving through the area on passage; records after mid-May suggest that there must be a healthy breeding population in the vales. Worcestershire Severn: at Grimley New Workings, an early bird on 10 April, then singles on 15 and 24 May; at Holt near Worcester, one was seen on 30 April, another on 20 June; at Clifton GP, two on 27 April, one on 5 and 15 May; a first summer bird on 15 June; at Ryall GP, two on 3 May and 14 June, a first summer bird on 15 June, singles on 16 and 24 June; and at Longdon Marsh, one on 15 June. Worcestershire Avon: at Throckmorton, one on 17 June; at Lower Moor, singles from 22 May to 24 June; at Gwen Finch, one on 7 May, one on 29 May, one hunting on 2 and 20 June; at Birlingham, up to three from 26 April to 20 June; at Comberton, an adult on 15 and 16 June; at Conderton one on 26 and 27 April; at Kemerton, singles on 27 April, 15 June; at Eckington, one on 13 May; at Rectory Farm, two mobbing a Buzzard very aggressively on 25 June; and at Bredon's Hardwick, one on 4 May.

In Gloucestershire: at Ashleworth, singles on 22 April, 3 and 5 May, two on 7 May, were all chasing flying insects at midday; one perching on a pylon early on 10 May, two on 24 May, one on 31 May, two on 18 June; at Coombe Hill, one on 18 June; at Longford, one on 28 June; at Llanthony Weir in Gloucester, one on 14 May; and at Walmore, three chasing insects on 5 May.

Peregrine: At Grimley, one on 24 April, one on 14 June. At Lower Moor, one on 9 & 16 April, 22 May.

At Ashleworth, a male on the pylons on 5 and 22 April, singles on 14 - 18 June. At Leigh Meadows, a male and a female on the pylons on 28 April. At Walmore, a female hunting on 7 April.

Gamebirds and Rails

Crane: At Longdon Marsh, three adults (fourth modern day record) on 20-22 April; three heading inland towards SE on 12h50 at Eastington (near Slimbridge) on 22 April were very probably the same birds. Three seen again over Clifton GP on 5 May

Quail: A particularly good year, perhaps because of the late hay cut? Birds were heard calling repeatedly, particularly at Ashleworth from late May and throughout June, where up to three were reported calling at the same time and where they presumably bred, and at other sites too. In Worcestershire: at Longdon, one calling on 7, 8 June, two (one calling) on 10 June. In Gloucestershire: at Ashleworth, one heard on 29 May; on 2 June 2+ calling in the morning, 3+ in the evening; one from 3-5 June; on 7-8 June one heard in mid afternoon; one on 9 and three on 15 June in the evening; on 23 June calling in the morning and from two places in evening; in morning on 24 June, in evening (once only) of 29 June; at least one singing strongly from 0500 to 0730 on 30 June. At Coombe Hill, one singing on 7 June. At Leigh Meadows, one calling on 29 June.

Water Rail: Widespread but discreet, few records: at Grimley, one calling on 13 April; at Lower Moor, heard calling throughout April; at Gwen Finch at least two pairs bred; at Kemerton, male heard squealing throughout period; at Coombe Hill, one calling on 27 May and 4 - 10 June.

Moorhen: A very common breeder, though only a few records. Five pairs bred at Nafford. At Ashleworth, one building nest by scrape on 23 June. At Coombe Hill, 5+ on 3 April, three on 17 April, five on 26 April. At Walmore, one or two on 2 May.

Coot: Only breeds in a few spots where there is permanent water. Four pairs bred at Nafford. On the Avon by Upham Meadow, one on 24 May. At Tirley Court, a pair with large young on 20, 31 May. At Ashleworth, 20 on 8 April, decreasing with falling water levels to two on 24 April. At Coombe Hill, 30 on 4 April, 18 on 8 April, 15 on 19 April, 25 on 7 May with two occupied nests on Long Pool; on 8 May, 25 including a nest with four freshly hatched chicks by the Wharf, still present on 20 & 27 May; still 25 on 25 May with at least one sitting on Long Pool; total of 20 with two nests on 7 June; 20 with one still incubating but no chicks on 21, 26 June. At Port Ham a pair with two chicks on 19 June. At Sudmeadow, a pair with six chicks on the Plantation Pool on 24 April.

Waders

Waders are of particular interest in this period in the Severn and Avon vales. In the first place, birds normally move through en route to their breeding grounds, far to the north, a movement which may continue until early June for species like Ringed Plover that breed near or beyond the Arctic Circle; secondly, a number of key species (notably Lapwing, Curlew, Snipe and Redshank and more recently also Little Ringed Plover and Oystercatcher) are typical nesting birds of the meadows (and also of more artificial sites like gravel pits); finally, by the end of June, many waders are already on return passage, either because they were not sexually mature or because they are failed breeders.

Oystercatcher: Many more records from Worcestershire gravel workings, past and present, where several pairs nest and some had arrived as early as January or February: at Grimley, four on the new workings and two on the old on 1 April, two from 2 to 16 April, five on 26 May; two pairs attempted to breed but one was flooded out, the other raising two young out of three hatched (adults with two fully fledged young on the old workings on 5 June); six flying south on 6 June. At Clifton GP, two on 26

April and 3 May, one on 24 May, two on 26 May. At Throckmorton Lagoons, a pair fledged four young. At Kemerton, where they generally attempt to nest, two on 12 April. At Rectory Farm a pair is reported to have nested successfully in a bean field. At Bredon's Hardwick, where they have nested in the past, two on 7 April, two with a nest on 20 April, two on 2 May, one up to 29 May. The only Gloucestershire record was of one over the Avon at Upham Meadow on 25 June, perhaps a bird from Bredon's Norton.

Avocet: A species recorded more recently since it began to breed at Upton Warren in the last few years: at Throckmorton, one on 3 June.

Little Ringed Plover: Another species recorded much more frequently at Worcestershire gravel workings than in Gloucestershire; some birds had been recorded from mid March and many early April records were no doubt of birds passing through the area; at Grimley, up to six from 1 to 21 April; four pairs attempted to nest, two of them successfully (eight birds, including three fully-fledged young, on 25 June); at Holt near Worcester, two on 13 April and 3 May; at Clifton GP, where they have bred, up to four from 12 April to 26 May; at Ryall GP, ten on 28 April, 5+ on 3 May, one on 1 June, and at least six pairs bred successfully; at Longdon Marsh, one on 21 April, two on 26 May; and at Lower Moor, a pair laid four eggs, but were flooded out around 25 May.

In Gloucestershire, all records were from Coombe Hill where they did not breed this year; on northward passage, one on 8 April, three on 17 April, eight on 18, seven on 19 April, five on 20 April, two on 21 April, one on 26 & 28 April; three on 5 May were more active after dark, two on 6 May, one vocal on 7 May, one on 9 May; then a gap, with the first returning migrant on 26 June and a juvenile on 28 June.

Ringed Plover: This species generally considered to be essentially coastal, nevertheless regularly appears on spring passage along the Severn and Avon; indeed there was something of a rush in late May (mainly in Worcestershire): at Holt two on 3 May, eight on 24 May, then 13 on 25 & 26 May; at Grimley, up to three on many dates from 13 April to 15 May, then seven on 16 May, two on 24 May and one on 29 May; at Clifton GP, two 9 May, up to three from 24 to 31 May; at Buryend Flash, Upton Ham, three on 25 April and one on 27 April; at Ryall GP, one on 16 May, nine on 24 May, eight on 26 May, one to three until the end of the month; at Longdon Marsh, 17 on 26 May, two on 27 May; at Lower Moor, two on 13 May, up to six from 14 to 26 May; at Kemerton, one on 20 April; finally at Bredon's Hardwick, one on 15 May.

All Gloucestershire records came from Coombe Hill: singles on 17 to 19 April and 6 May, two on 13 & 24 May, with five on 27 May.

Golden Plover: Good numbers still winter in Worcestershire, but April records are usually of birds moving through from further south: at Wyre Piddle near Pershore, 210 on 9 April; at Kemerton, 50 flew over on 12 April.

Grey Plover: A rare visitor to the vales: at Coombe Hill, one in winter plumage on 18 & 19 April; what may well have been the same bird was recorded at Bredon's Hardwick on 20 April.

Lapwing: Breeding activity had already been noted from mid-March as this is one of the earliest nesting waders. In Worcestershire, some were recorded nesting on gravel pits along the Severn: at Grimley, at least ten pairs attempted to nest and at least eight young fledged; at least five pairs at Ryall Pits; probably also on arable fields; along the Avon: at Throckmorton Lagoons, three pairs raised seven young; between Fladbury and Pershore (where the species has been recorded nesting on arable land) in the past no breeding Lapwings were recorded; at Rectory Meadows near Bredon's Norton, the farmer reported that good numbers (up to a dozen pairs) had nested successfully in a bean-field. At Black Lane Farm near Bromsberrow (actually in Herefordshire), a pair of Lapwings bred.

In Gloucestershire, Lapwings nested for the first time for many years on grassland at Upham Meadow, on a bare patch left by last summer's floods: a pair with three young on 24 May, two adults and at least two chicks still present on 31 May. At Staunton, where five pairs had been displaying over a cereal field in March, three apparently nesting on 19 April, one on 1 May, two on 5 May appeared to have young, one in display on 20 May, not found after 24 May, perhaps all unsuccessful? At Ashleworth, display over Hasfield Ham and Colways on 8 April, but none at Colways on 19 April and the Hasfield

birds appeared to have abandoned on 3 May. At Coombe Hill, up to 14 birds were involved in courtship and pair formation until at least 26 April, suggesting that early clutches may have been predated; a nest with one egg found on 17 April; during May, the birds behaviour suggested that there may have been five pairs with young, though no young were seen, and few probably fledged (had they perhaps suffered from shortage of invertebrate food?): on 7 May four males and two females round scrapes (one of females apparently with young the other had maybe lost hers), in addition another female probably with young on main field, maybe two more pairs behind Long Pool; on 20 May one displaying over scrapes, one displaying on southern meadows; on 27 May, none round scrapes but two of three females elsewhere appeared to have young; on 7 June, two on southern meadows appeared to have young. On Cobney Meadows, odd birds present but no sign of breeding. None found at Wallsworth. At Walmore, breeding success appeared to be much better: aerial display on 7 April, 30 present on 8 April; on 2 May, about 20 birds some doing aerial display some with alarm calls as though they had young, and one female seen with two tiny chicks; on 5 May, estimate of eight pairs with at least 13 tiny chicks from six pairs; on 23 May, still at least 12 adults present, and three broods of growing chicks seen.

Migrant birds: 14 on a cut hayfield near Chaceley on 24 June were undoubtedly post-breeding migrants, as were seven at Coombe Hill on 26 June.

Dunlin: Occurs regularly in small numbers on spring passage, once again with greater numbers noted in Worcestershire: at Grimley, singles from 4 to 20 April, increasing to eight on 27 April, with six on 28 April, then up to three on many dates until 27 May; at Clifton GP, two on 5 & 28 May; at Ryall GP, two on 13 April and one on 20 April, then a flock of 24 (!) on 27 April, three on 28 April; then a gap until 24 May, with up to seven seen between that date and 1 June; at Buryend Flash, Upton, one on 25 April; at Longdon Marsh, three on 27 May; at Lower Moor, one on several dates between 16 & 27 April, with four on 25 May; at Bredon's Hardwick, two on 16 May.

In Gloucestershire, all records came from Coombe Hill: two on 17, one on 20 April, two on 28 April, a little party of six in summer plumage, obvious migrants, on 5 May; two with Ringed Plovers on 27 May. Then, after a gap, the first returning migrant on 26 June; one on 28 June.

Little Stint: An adult at Lower Moor on 16 May was the only record.

Temminck's Stint: Two recorded at Lower Moor on 17 May; few records at any period in the vales.

Knot: A maritime species, sparingly found inland: at Clifton GP, one in summer plumage on 4 May.

Sanderling: Another species more often found on the coast: one at Grimley on 16 May, and one at Bredon's Hardwick on 28 May

Ruff: Remarkably, only a single record of two at Longdon Marsh on 26 May.

Jack Snipe: Several unusually late records of a species considered to be mainly a winter visitor to the area: at Grimley, one on 8 April, and at Castlemorton Common on 20 April. In Gloucestershire: at Ashleworth, one flushed on 22 April; at Coombe Hill, two flushed on 17 April; at Hempsted one on 11 April; and at Walmore, one on 8 April.

Snipe: Sadly, this year again produced no records of drumming Snipe, despite long evening and night observation stints at formerly favoured haunts. The only records were of birds flushed or calling (often at dusk), and these related no doubt to migrants on their way north: at Lower Moor, two on 19 April; at Gwen Finch, one on 29 April; at Kemerton, three on 18 April, one on 29 April; at Ashleworth, eight by day on 8 April; at least 15 with much calling at dusk but no drumming on 22 April; three or four calling but no drumming, just as the bats came out on 24 April & 1 May; at Coombe Hill, two or three calling but not drumming just after dark from 4 to 18 April, six by day on 19 April, one on 21 & 26 April; at Hempsted, 15 on 11 April; at Walmore, one on 7 April, 23 on 8 April, one flushed on 2 May.

Return passage: one on 31 May at Coombe Hill was perhaps an early return migrant, like singles on 18 and 28 June, and one at Ryall GP on 23 June.

Black-tailed Godwit: After the flush of migrants (no doubt Icelandic breeders) in late March, numbers in April and May were modest. In Worcestershire: at Grimley, one on 16 April, two on 6 May; at Longdon Marsh, two on 2 May; one flew south along the Avon near Strensham on 26 April. In Gloucestershire, one at Coombe Hill on 1 & 15 April, two on 19 April, eight on 28 April.

Three early return migrants on 27 June at Upton Warren, four on 29 June.

Curlew: Birds had returned to the usual breeding sites from late February, and in addition, flocks of up to twenty passing migrants had been recorded in March. No further records of migrants in April. Breeding appeared to be proceeding normally, and indeed the late hay cutting should have created ideal conditions for successful production of young. However, a major exodus of adults began in late June, (well before normal fledging time for the young) and by early July hardly any Curlews were left on the breeding grounds; it is suggested that this early departure was caused by a shortage of food, the result of the heavy floods in June and July 2007 which drowned many worms and other invertebrates. There were many more records from Gloucestershire than from Worcestershire.

In Worcestershire, along the Severn: at Upton Ham, two pairs were on territory, but no young seen; at Longdon Marsh, display on 11 April and 10 May; along the Avon: between Fladbury and Pershore, curlews were recorded sporadically but do not appear to have nested; around Eckington Bridge up to six pairs were claimed but this density seems unlikely; at Bredon's Hardwick, one bubbling in meadows behind pool on 25 June.

In Gloucestershire, the situation at the usual breeding sites was as follows: At Upham Meadow, fourteen on 6 April, eight on 20 April, considered to be potential breeders; four nesting pairs, probably with no young yet, on 24 May; five pairs, two apparently with young, on 31 May; only two pairs obvious, both probably with young, on 19 June; probably four pairs, behaving as though they had young, on 25 June. At Fleet Lane (Avon Meadows), two pairs on sheep fields on 24 May, one calling on 19 June. At the Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, four on 13 April, a pair probably with young on 19 June. At Forthampton, none found on 31 May. At Chaceley, one on 24 June. At Staunton, none on 21 April. At Ashleworth/Hasfield, two pairs bubbling from 8 April onwards, one bird on 10 May, actively chasing crows as though it had young; two heard on 27 May and in the first half of June; two birds (probably a pair with young) calling anxiously on 23 & 24 June; two pairs, one feeding on cut hay field, on 29 June; at least one pair bubbling a little on 30 June. At Coombe Hill, at least 16 birds came to roost round the scrapes in the evening on 4 April, generally arriving in pairs and bubbling loudly – they appeared to be nesting in the general area and coming to a communal roost - surprising there should be so many; only about five, some bubbling, by day on 5 April; about six came to roost on evening of 13 & 18 April, four on 26 April, two on 5 May, bubbling loudly; in April, May and until the end of June, there appeared to be one pair north of the canal, another on the Southern Meadows and one or two more on Cobney Meadows, where two were bubbling and chasing crows on 1 May, though they were much quieter in May and June. At Leigh Meadows, maybe two pairs bubbling on 28 April, 29 May; only one discreet bird was left on 29 June. At Wallsworth, none on 24 April. For the first time for many years, bubbling display call was heard at Minsterworth Ham on 20 April.

Return migration began early: at Ashleworth on the morning of 23 June two parties of seven birds in all flew downriver, very high, calling; the same evening eight, feeding together on a cut hayfield, must have been migrants, and only two were left the next evening. One which flew SSE over Quedgeley on the morning of 27 June, and one over Hardwick on 29 June may also have been migrants making for the estuary.

Whimbrel: Recorded on northward passage only, mostly in the last ten days of April and the first ten days of May, with many more records in Worcestershire. At Holt, one on 28 May. At Grimley, two on 21 & 22 April, six on 26 April, four on 3 May, nine on 5 May. At Clifton GP, two on 4 May, one flew north on 28 May. At Ryall GP, two on 26 April, one on 16 May. At Buryend Flash, Upton, one on 27 & 28 April. At Eckington, three flew up the Avon on 20 April. At Kemerton, one on 20 April, two flew through on 21 April. At Bredon's Hardwick, one flew over on 21 April, one on 24 April, one flew over on 26 April.

The only Gloucestershire records were at Coombe Hill: one calling in agitatedly late in the evening of 5 May, three on 6 May.

Redshank: Breeds in damp hay meadows and in Worcestershire gravel pits. In Worcestershire: At Upton Ham, two pairs bred and fledged young were seen; at Ryall Pits one pair bred and fledged young were seen; at Lickmoor Wetland, a new site created to compensate for habitat change on the Croome Estate, Redshanks were noted in 2007 without breeding being proved, but a pair bred successfully this year. Along the Avon, around Lower Moor flash, a pair of Redshanks were present until 11 June and mating was seen but there was no proof of nesting; a pair of Redshanks were reported near Eckington Bridge, but again, breeding was not proved; at Rectory Meadows, maybe one pair on 24 May; doesn't appear to have bred this year at its former stronghold of Bredon's Hardwick.

In Gloucestershire: at Upham Meadow, probably three pairs on 24 May and 31 May, when one appeared to have young; on 19 June two pairs, apparently with young; all had left by 25 June. None at Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, on 19 June. At Ashleworth, none throughout the period. At Coombe Hill, one or two pairs seemed to be breeding round the scrapes in April, with numbers up to six on the evening of 4 April and then three or four for the rest of the month, last record a single on 6 May; another pair seen at Cobney Meadows on 5 April and 1 May. But none of these birds were seen later in May, and breeding appeared to have failed – again perhaps because of the lack of invertebrates. However, at Gwen Finch, a pair successfully raised three young, while at a new Worcestershire site, Lickmoor near High Green (Severn Stoke) a pair raised two young. At Leigh Meadows, no sign of breeding in April or May. At Walmore, two bubbling on 7 April, but no later records and breeding probably failed.

Signs of early return migration appeared from late June: at Bredon's Hardwick, one apparent migrant on 25 June; at Coombe Hill, a pair of summer plumage adults with no sign of breeding behaviour, undoubtedly migrants, on 21 June, gone by 26 June.

Greenshank: Steady passage from mid-April to mid-May. In Worcestershire: at Grimley, one on 14 & 23 May; at Ryall GP, one on 4 May; at Gwen Finch, a late bird on 26 May; at Bredon's Hardwick, one on 20 April, two on 2 May.

In Gloucestershire: at Ashleworth, one on 3 May; at Coombe Hill, one or two from 18 April to 3 May, with three on 26 April, then one on 13 May, and a very late bird on 4 June; at Cobney Meadows, one on 1 May.

Green Sandpiper: Many reports of departing winter visitors and passage birds, mainly in the first half of April, with almost no May records. In Worcestershire: at Grimley, up to three from 1 to 22 April; at Holt, one on 17 April; at Clifton GP, one on 13 & 20 April; at Longdon Marsh, one on 8 April; at Lower Moor, one on 16 April. In Gloucestershire: at Ashleworth, one on 19 & 22 April; at Coombe Hill, singles on 4, 9 & 26 April; one at Cobney Meadows on 5 April; at Leigh Meadows, one on 28 April; at Horsbere Brook, Longford, two on 9 April; at Sudmeadow, one on 9 April; at Walmore, where this species is surprisingly unusual, one on 8 April.

This is one of the earliest returning migrants, normally occurring from mid-June; one bird on 30 May at Ryall GP was probably a very early returning migrant; at Holt, singles on several dates from 13 - 29 June; at Grimley, one on 14 & 26 June, two on 29 June; at Clifton GP, one on 15 & 22 June; at Ryall GP, the first three on 14 June, ones and two later in the month. In Gloucestershire: at Coombe Hill and Cobney Meadows, the first four returning migrants were seen on 21 June; two more on 26 June.

Wood Sandpiper: Much less common than the previous species, not recorded every year at spring: at Ryall GP, one on 4 May; at Coombe Hill, one on 6 May, and one at Lower Moor from 8-10 May - probably the same bird? Another at Holt on 18 May. Return migration was noted early: two at Holt with a Green Sandpiper on 13 June.

Common Sandpiper: As usual, indications of northward spring passage mainly in April. In Worcestershire: at Holt, one on 25 May; at Grimley, singles from 8 to 19 April, four on 20 April, one or two from 21 to 25 April, two from 14 - 16 May, one on 1 June; at Clifton GP, one on 26 April, two on 27 April; at Ryall GP, one on 12 April; at Lower Moor, one on 14 May, two on 15 May; at Kemerton, one on 12 April; and at Bredon's Hardwick, one on 7 & 20 April, three on 26 April.

In Gloucestershire: on the Avon near Upham Meadow, three on 24 May; at Coombe Hill, two on 8 April, one on 9 & 11 April; at Lower Parting, one on 4 May; at Sudmeadow, one on 5, 8 May.

Returning migrants: first on Severn above Haw Bridge on 24 June; two at Grimley on 29 June.

Gulls and Terns

Mediterranean Gull: An adult at Bredon's Hardwick on 23 May.

Little Gull: At Bredon's Hardwick, one on 17 April.

Lesser Black-backed Gull: A pair nested on the island at Bredon's Hardwick, two small chicks on 25 & 29 June, while two pairs raised five chicks at Kemerton.

Yellow-legged Gull: At Grimley, a second year bird on 24 May and 2, 3, 5 June; third year bird on 13 June.

Kittiwake: At Bredon's Hardwick, one on 2 May.

Common Tern: Some migrants pass northwards through the Severn Vale in spring; a few pairs stay to nest mainly in Worcestershire. At Grimley, the first one on 16 April, another flew north on 20 April, up to five in late April, last one on 9 May; at Clifton GP one on 4 & (briefly) 28 May; at Throckmorton, two on 4 June; at Lower Moor, two over sailing lake on 24 June; at Kemerton, one on 20 April, three on 5 & 7 May; at Bredon's Hardwick, where they have nested in recent years, one on 27 April, three Common/Arctic on 28 April, two on 2 May, 14 on 5 May, two on 16 May, two (apparently with a nest) on 18 May; one on 25 & 29 June.

At Coombe Hill, three on 13 May; a pair had attempted to nest on an island in the scrape for the first time in 2007; this year, a pair appeared rather late in the season (after an unsuccessful attempt elsewhere?) on 4 June and settled to nest, mobbing passing corvids; a Raven was seen to take an egg on 10 June.

Arctic Tern: At Kemerton, one from 25 to 27 April; at Bredon's Hardwick, one on 5 May.

Little Tern: A scarce passage bird (moving from Severn to Wash?); at Grimley, singles on 24 April and 7 June; at Bredon's Hardwick, singles on 27 & 28 April and 5 May.

Black Tern: A good number of records, for a species not recorded every year in spring in the vales; the records round 7 May coincided with a period of easterly winds. In Worcestershire: at Grimley singles on 9 & 16 May and 2 June; at Throckmorton, one on 5 May, ten on 7 May, nine on 8 May; at Kemerton, two on 29 April & 7 May, one on 9 May; at Bredon's Hardwick, 19 on 4 May, singles on 7 & 15 May.

In Gloucestershire: at Coombe Hill, eight flew north on the morning of 8 May

Pigeons

Stock Dove: At Upham Meadow, two on 24 & 31 May; at Ashleworth, two prospecting for nests on 8 April, six on 10 May; at Coombe Hill, six on 5 April, two on 7 June..

Turtle Dove: A respectable number of records of this declining species from Worcestershire, but by contrast not a single one from Gloucestershire: One singing near Holt on 11 May. One singing at Grimley on 5 & 11 June. At Ryall GP, one on 30 May. At Throckmorton, one on 3 June, two from 4 to 17 June. At Lower Moor, one on 27 May, two on 2 June and two more at nearby Wyre Piddle on the same date; one near Fladbury on 5 June; one near Lower Moor on 7 June, two on 17 June, three on 18 June, two on 24 June; two along Avon between Lower Moor and Fladbury on 13 June. At Ripple, two to three singing on 15 June.

Cuckoo

Worcestershire records: at Holt, one on 25 April; at Clifton GP, one on 27 April; at Gwen Finch, three on 30 April.

Gloucestershire: at Upham Meadow, one on 24 May; at Ashleworth, two on 22 April, one singing on 23 April, two on 25 April; two or three singing and chasing one another on 3 May, three or four on 10 May, two singing on 23 & 29 May June; still singing on 24 June; at Coombe Hill, one singing on 8 May, female bubbling on 20 May, one singing 27 May, two on 7 June, four very active, singing and chasing one another on 21 June; at Port Ham, a female calling on 17 June. At Walmore, one singing on 23 May.

Owls

Barn Owl: Bred along the Avon, east of Pershore. At Coombe Hill, one flew past the hide at dusk on 5 May.

Little Owl: Bred at Lower Moor and Kemerton. At Ashleworth, one by Stonebow on 7 & 8 June.

Tawny Owl: At Ashleworth, one calling at first light on 3 May.

Short-eared Owl: At Clifton GP, one on 10 May

Swift

Several relatively early birds were recorded in April this year. In Worcestershire: at Castlemorton Common, one on 26 April; at Grimley, 10+ on 26 April, ten on 27 April; at Clifton GP, four on 27 April.

In Gloucestershire: at Coombe Hill, an early bird on 17 April, 12 on 26 April, large numbers on 28 April, 40+ on 3 May; 50+ hawking insects on 20 May; about 400 passed over to the east on 24 May, 30 hawking on 7 June. The first of the year at Sudmeadow on 3 May. At Ashleworth, one or two on 3 May, 20 hawking high on 23 June.

Kingfisher

Recorded regularly at favoured sites along the Severn and Avon: In Worcestershire, throughout the period at Lower Moor, Gwen Finch, Kemerton and Bredon's Hardwick. In Gloucestershire: at Upham Meadow, one on 19 June. Above Haw Bridge, one on 24 June. At Ashleworth (probably flying in from a nest in the banks of the nearby Severn), one on 7, 8 & 14 June. At Sudmeadow, one on 24 May. At Lower Parting, one on 4 May.

Woodpeckers

Great Spotted Woodpecker: At Tirley, one drumming on 3 April. At Ashleworth, one drumming on 3 April, again on 3 & 10 May. On Alney Island, Gloucester, four fledglings on 9 June.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker: Only two records of this retiring species: At Grimley a male on 14 May. At Coombe Hill, one on 18 June.

Passerines

Skylark: As a ground-nesting species, locally breeding Skylarks may have suffered from last summer's floods, but many singing birds were found, and there was little solid evidence to show any decrease. At Upham Meadow, two or three were singing from 24 to 19 June. At Ashleworth, one or two were singing on 8 April, up to five on 3 May, a couple on 10 May, plenty still singing in late June. At Coombe Hill, two singing on 3 April, one or two on 26 April, two or three on 27 May, five on 21 June; at Cobney Meadows, two singing on 1 May, two or three singing in early May. At Leigh Meadows, two were singing on 28 April, and many still singing on 29 June. At Broadboard Brook, two noted singing on 24 April. At Walmore, five on 2 May.

Sand Martin: After records in both counties from mid March, further passage was noted in Gloucestershire in April: at Ashleworth, about 20 on 5 April, seven on 12 April, five on 19 April; at Coombe Hill, 200 on 9 April, hundreds by day in easterly winds on 17 April, 20 + on the evening of 18

April, 75+ by day on 19 April, 200 feeding in light rain by day on 21 April; at Cobney Meadows, 20 on 19 April, 70+ on 20 April.

As well as nesting in Worcestershire gravel pits, several colonies exist in the muddy banks of the Severn in Gloucestershire. At Forthampton about ten were round the usual colony site on 31 May, but numbers nesting are minimal this year because of a landslip along the river banks caused by last year's floods. The small colony above Haw Bridge does not seem to be occupied this year, but at the colony south of Haw Bridge, there were at least 20 birds on 7 May and 15 on 7 June; on 29 June two feeding over the scrapes at Coombe Hill, probably birds from the Haw Bridge colony. At Minsterworth Ham, the river bank colony was occupied on 20 April and 15 birds were excavating nesting holes on 8 May.

Swallow: After the first record in late March, passage was noted in early April. In Worcestershire: at both Bredon's Hardwick and Kemerton, two on 1 April. In Gloucestershire: at Ashleworth, about five on 5, 12 & 19 April. At Apperley, one on 5 April. At Coombe Hill, about ten on 5 April; 20+ on 9 April; hundreds by day in easterly winds on 17 April; ten on the evening of 18 April, 40+ on 19 April; at Cobney Meadows, 20 on 19 April. At Walmore, five on 7 April.

House Martin: The first record was at Grimley New Workings, one on 2 April. In Gloucestershire: at Ashleworth, one on 5 April; at Coombe Hill, one on 9 April, and one or two with other hirundines on 17 April, five on 20 April; at Haw Bridge, a couple collecting mud on beach below Sand Martin colony on 7 June.

Meadow Pipit: No suspicion of breeding in the vales, just a few records of passage migrants: at Ashleworth, five on 8 April; at Coombe Hill, a couple on 3 April, three or four on 19 April.

Water Pipit: After records of a bird wintering at Grimley New Working (last observed on 27 February), one on 9 April.

Yellow Wagtail: Many records of birds on spring passage, mainly in mid to late April (sometimes in appreciable flocks), particularly during the period of easterly winds from 15-21 April: there was little indication of breeding in the riverside meadows by a species once regarded as a typical breeding bird of hay meadows, but which has now largely moved to arable crops to nest. In Worcestershire: at Grimley, one on 14 April, 18 on 16 April, 20 on 20 April, four on 21 April, two on 27 April, two on 5 May, one on 10 & 27 May. At Holt, seven on 19 April, six on 20 April, ten on 21 April, one over on 8 May. At Clifton GP, one on 12 April, eight on 13 April, 15+ on 20 April. At Ryall GP, one on 12 April, 23 on 20 April. At Eckington, five on 20 April. Two which were noted along meadows by the river Avon near Lower Moor on 13 June may perhaps have been nesting? Two at Ripple GP on 15 June. Several at Bredon's Hardwick on 22 June.

In Gloucestershire: at Upham Meadow, the only record was of a male displaying on onion fields above hay meadow on 24 May. At Staunton, a female in a cereal field, perhaps preparing to nest, on 5 May, there again on 20 & 27 May, two on 31 May. At Ashleworth, one on 12 April. At Coombe Hill, a male on 9 April, two on 18 April, eight on 20 April, five on 21 April, one on 28 April. On the Oxleaze, Port Ham, three on 16 April. At Over Farm near Gloucester, at least one pair breeding in fields alongside the Microlight landing strip.

White/Pied Wagtail: The flocks of Pied Wagtail, the British subspecies, which move through the area in early spring are usually accompanied by a few of the continental subspecies, White Wagtail, and a number had already been recorded in March. As usual, there were more records in April, notably during the mid-month easterly winds. In Worcestershire: at Grimley, one White on 4 April, a male on 5 & 6 April, singles from 14 to 18 April, 10+ on 19 April, 12 on 20 & 21 April, six on 26 April, two on 27 & 28 April. At Holt near Worcester, six White on 6 April, one on 13 to 19 April, two on 20 & 21 April, three on 30 April. At Clifton GP, three on 12 April, six on 13 April, five on 20 April. At Ryall GP, nine on 20 April. At Bredon's Hardwick, two on 14 April.

In Gloucestershire: At Coombe Hill, six Pied on 8 April, four on 17 April, two on 19 April; two White on 19 April, three on 20, 21 April; a very late White on 24 May.

Nightingale: Remarkably few records of a species the western limit of whose breeding range must be near the line of the Severn. At Clifton, one singing by night on 10 May, and at Ripple GP, two singing on 15 June. At Strensham, two singing on 2 & 10 May.

Black Redstart: A single record at Grimley of one on 20 April.

Redstart: One of the key species of Severn Vale willows and hedges, normally arriving in early April. In Worcestershire: at Grimley, singles from 12 to 22 April; at Bredon's Hardwick, the first male on 7 April.

In Gloucestershire: At Ashleworth, one on 15 April, one giving alarm call on 19 April, at least six calling on evening of 22 April, two singing on 23 April, three singing on 27 April, three or four singing on 10 May; ringing activities provided proof of breeding: on 24 June, six caught, mostly adults, some not yet moulting – are they going to try for a second brood? On 30 June one adult and one juvenile caught. At Coombe Hill, two on 21 April, at least six singing on 7 May, at least five singing males on 27 May, one on 7 June; one with alarm call on 21 June. At Wainlodes, one singing on 7 May. At Leigh Meadows, two or three (song and calling) on 28 April and 29 May. At Walmore, a pair on 18 April.

Stonechat: A species which winters in small numbers throughout the vale, mostly departing by the end of February. No records of breeding in the vale this year.

Whinchat: Only records on spring passage were in Worcestershire, one at Grimley on 27 April, one near Kemerton on 13 May.

Wheatear: At least 43 detected in Worcestershire as a whole on 27 April (which seems to have been a key date for records throughout the vales), mainly after rain showers: how many more undetected? Records from the vale: in Worcestershire: at Grimley, three on 5 April, five on 6 April, six on 27 April; at Holt, five on 27 April; at Clifton GP, two on 27 April; at Kemerton, a male on 12 April.

In Gloucestershire: at Coombe Hill, one on 28 April; at Leigh Meadows, where they are rarely recorded, one on 28 April; at Port Ham, one on 27 April; at Walmore on 8 April, a group of four males, the first here for several years; they were more common in the past when the grass was more heavily grazed.

Fieldfare: A few records of late stragglers in Gloucestershire: at Ashleworth, flock of 40 on 8 April, 35 on 12 April; at Wainlodes no sign on 5 April of the flock of 600 seen on 29 March; at Coombe Hill, 60+ arrived high from the west on 3 April; at Longford, 60 on 22 April.

Redwing: As for Fieldfare, a few records of wintering birds departing late: at Ashleworth, two on 8 April; at Wainlodes no sign on 5 April of the flock seen on 29 March.

Mistle Thrush: At Rectory Farm in Worcestershire, a dozen, probably a family party, on 25 June.

Cetti's Warbler: At Defford a male was singing throughout the period, for the second year running; at Strensham, one was singing on 10 May; at Kemerton, one was singing on 10 & 17 May; and at The Mythe, near Tewkesbury, one on 13 April.

Grasshopper Warbler: In Worcestershire: at Castlemorton Common, one on 26 April; and at Kemerton, one reeling on 27 April.

In Gloucestershire, there were only isolated records of singing birds this year and no indication of breeding in the vale: at Ashleworth, one reeling from a hedge on the morning of 10 May, not found again that evening; at Longford, one reeling on 22 April.

Sedge Warbler: A common breeder in rough vegetation in damp places through the vales, generally arriving in the second half of April. Ringing data from Ashleworth indicate that breeding populations of this species were much more severely affected by the summer 2007 floods than other species: there was a sharp and statistically significant decrease in the number of adults caught by the end of May (showing poor production of young in summer 2007).

In Worcestershire: at Grimley, one on 30 April; at Gwen French, two singing on 18 April. Highest counts of singing birds: at Lower Moor, seven on 27 April, at Gwen Finch nine on 29 April and at Kemerton five on 10 May.

In Gloucestershire: at Upham Meadow, two or three in song from 24 May to 19 June. At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, only one on 19 June. At Forthampton, one singing on 31 May. At Ashleworth on 22 April one singing; on 3 May, eight or ten singing and seven caught, including retraps from 2004 and 2005; on 10 May six singing, seven caught included four retraps (2004, 2005, 2007 and 2008) plus two new birds with high fat scores that were probably passing migrants; on 23 June, one or two singing; on 24 June, only four adults caught; on 29 June, only one singing; on 30 June, a little song, four caught, all adults. At Coombe Hill, two singing in subdued mode on 19 April, one on 20 April, 12+ along canal on 3 May, about ten singing on 7 May, five singing on 20 & 27 May, four on 7 June. At Leigh Meadows, one singing on 29 May & 29 June. At Port Ham, eight singing on 27 April, still singing on 2 May; at Castlemeads/Port Ham, two on 13 May; at Over Ponds, two singing on 27 April, one on 21 May, one singing 29 June. At Sudmeadow, the first singing male this year was on 3 May. At Walmore, one or two singing on 2 May.

Reed Warbler: In Worcestershire: At Grimley, two singing on 12 April, six on 15 April. Highest counts of singing birds at Gwen French reserve, 42 and at Kemerton, 30 both on 10 May.

In the Gloucestershire sector of the vales (where there are few reed beds, which is maybe why they seem to arrive later and in smaller numbers): at Upham Meadow, just one singing on 31 May, 19 & 25 June. At Forthampton, one singing on 31 May. At Ashleworth (where they nest in withies), the first singing bird was heard on 10 May, two singing on 23 June; two caught (one a British control) on 24 June, still some song; at least one singing on 30 June. At Coombe Hill, first heard singing from withies on 8 May; one singing on 20 May, at least four singing on 27 May & 7 June, but only one on 21 June. At Port Ham, one singing on 4 & 13 May. At Sudmeadow, one was singing and another caught on 5 May. At Walmore, two or three singing on 2 May.

Lesser Whitethroat: In Worcestershire: at Grimley, one on 30 April; at Holt, one on 25 April; at Castlemorton Common, one on 26 April.

In Gloucestershire: at Forthampton, one singing on 31 May. At Ashleworth, one on 15 April, two singing on 22 & 27 April; on 3 May, an adult was trapped; unusually large numbers (six adults) caught on 10 May, some song; unusually, there was quite strong song in late June, perhaps from birds attempting a second brood: two singing on 23 June, one adult caught on 24 June; one singing strongly on 29 June; one singing, one juvenile caught on 30 June. At Coombe Hill, one was singing on 26 & 28 April and 2 May. At Sudmeadow as many as five caught on 5 May, one still singing on 17 June.

Whitethroat: At Grimley, one on 24 April. At Clifton GP, one on 13 April.

At Staunton at least three singing in hedges on 5 & 7 May. At Ashleworth, first one on 15 April; this species has appeared more frequently in recent years in the lower, wetter parts of the site, and this tendency continued this year: three singing in lower areas of reserve on 3 May, three adults trapped, one of them (very heavy at 17gms) was probably a passing migrant; on 10 May, three or four singing, none trapped; on 23 June, two or three singing; on 24 June, good numbers caught (two adults and nine juveniles), some song still; one 29 June one or two singing still; on 30 June, four caught including three juveniles. At Coombe Hill, one singing on 19 April, five singing on 20 April, five singing on 7 May, six on 20 May, five on 7 June, still plenty of song on 21 June. At Leigh Meadows, three or four singing on 28 April, one or two on 29 May, 29 June. At Port Ham, song on 2 May; on Alney Island an adult feeding two fledglings on 9 June. At Sudmeadow, one singing on 20 & 21 April, several on 5 May.

Garden Warbler: In Worcestershire: at Holt, one on 24 May. At Throckmorton, two on 12 June. At Lower Moor, where the first record was on 2 May, two were present on 27 May, and four males were singing on 13 June, two pairs bred successfully. At Nafford Lock, two pairs bred successfully.

A scarce species in the Gloucestershire sector of the vale: at Ashleworth, one singing on 25 April and an adult trapped on 3 May, one on 20 May. At Coombe Hill, one on 27 May. At Sudmeadow, one trapped and another singing on 5 May.

Blackcap: At Upham Meadow, one singing on 31 May, one or two on 19 June. At Tirley, one singing on 3 April. At Ashleworth, one singing on 3 April, one in subsong on 5, one singing on 8 & 22 April, two singing in Meerend Thicket on 3 May, one on 10 May; on 23 June, two or three singing; some song on 24 June first juvenile of year caught on 30 June. At Coombe Hill, one in subsong on 5 & 8 April, one or two singing strongly on 17 & 19 April, one on 26 April, three still singing on 7 June, a family party of four on 21 June. At Leigh Meadows, one singing on 28 April, 29 May.

Chiffchaff: Gloucestershire records (following numerous records from 8 March onwards): At Tirley, one singing on 3 April. At Ashleworth, one singing on 3 April, about three singing on 5, 8 & 22 April; one adult, two juveniles caught on 24 June. At Coombe Hill, 12+ singing on 3 April, three or four on 5 April, 5+ on 8 April, five on 17 April, then many records of singing birds until 21 June. At Sudmeadow, a bird of the subspecies *abietinus*, unusual at this time of year, on 21 April. Walmore, two or three on 7 April.

Willow Warbler: At Grimley, two on 2 April.

At Tirley, one singing on 4 April. At Ashleworth, distinct increase by 8 April with six in song, five on 22 April, more Willow Warblers singing than Chiffchaffs on 3 May, one caught; four or five on 10 May, one retrap; on 23 June four or five still singing; on 24 June three juveniles caught; on 30 June, two adults and two juveniles caught. At Coombe Hill, one singing on 5 April, two on 8 April, eight on 20 April, about four singing on 20 May, four on 7 June. At Leigh Meadows, two or three singing on 28 April, one or two on 29 May. At Sudmeadow, first of year on 9 April.

Goldcrest: One singing in Meerend Thicket near Ashleworth, an unusual site, on 22 April and 8 May.

Spotted Flycatcher: Several records of this declining species in Worcestershire, but none in Gloucestershire: At Holt, one on 16 June. At Grimley, two on 29 June. At Gwen Finch, one on 12 May. Two at Sheriff's Lench near Lower Moor on 7 June. Two at Birlingham on 12 June.

Treecreeper: At Haw Bridge, song on 5 April; at Coombe Hill, one singing on 3 April & 27 May.

Jay: At Coombe Hill, one on 20 May. At Leigh Meadows, two on 28 April.

Jackdaw: At Kemerton, 120 feeding on cherries on 27 June. At Coombe Hill, lots of young apparently recently hatched on 21 June.

Carrion Crow: At Coombe Hill, at least 50 prowling round Lapwing nesting area on evening of 18 April, thirty on 19 April.

Raven: In Worcestershire, a pair bred at Wood Norton, east of Fladbury; one at Longdon Marsh on 18 May. In Gloucestershire, a long-suspected nest, at last confirmed on higher ground overlooking Coombe Hill meadows, produced three young. The comings and goings of the adults explain many of the following sightings. At Staunton, two soaring on 5 May. At Ashleworth, two flew over on 3 May. At Coombe Hill, one on 17 April, three (an adult and two juveniles) on 10 June, two on 26 June; one on Cobney Meadows on 15 April. At Walmore, where they are much more frequent, one on 2 May, and at least 60 going to roost on the Grange Court side on the evening of 23 May.

Yellowhammer: At Staunton, one singing in agricultural land on 5, 7 May. At Longford, one on 28 June.

Reed Bunting: No indication from ringing at Ashleworth that numbers of this species had been affected by the summer 2007 flood. About ten pairs bred at Lower Moor. On 17 May, 12 singing males at Gwen Finch and two at Kemerton. At Upham Meadow, three or four singing on 24 May, six or seven on 31 May, about ten present on 19 June, still some song on 25 June. At the Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, about five present on 19 June. At Forthampton, one or two singing on 31 May. At Ashleworth, one or two singing on 5 April; maybe six singing on 3 May, when only one bird was

caught, a retrap; on 10 May, only two or three singing, and three caught (two retraps); on 23 June lots feeding young in the hedges and long grass; on 24 June, ten caught (mainly juveniles) - they have clearly done better than Sedge Warbler; on 28 June some song, lots in hedges; on 30 June, 23 caught, mostly juveniles confirming successful breeding season. At Coombe Hill, two or three singing on 3 April, 5+ on 8 April; six males on 22 April; two or three singing on 5 May, about five singing in late May and early June. At Leigh Meadows, one or two but no song on evening of 28 April, two or three singing on 29 May, many about, one or two singing, on 29 June. One in Italian Rye Grass field at Broadboard Brook Longford on 24 April, four on 28 June. At Castlemeads/Port Ham, a female on 24 April, three males on 27 April, four males singing on 21 May. At Sudmeadow, one singing and two caught on 5 May, one singing on 8 May. At Walmore, four or five on 2 May.

Corn Bunting: This once widespread bird of hay meadows is much more frequent in Worcestershire than Gloucestershire; it seems to breed very late, dangerous if hay is cut early! At Holt, one or two from 28 May to 11 June. At Upton Ham, two singing on 8 & 12 June. At Lower Moor, two on 13 June.

At Upham Meadow, none found in what is normally a stronghold during four visits in May and June. At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, two singing on 19 June.

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