

## 1982 to 2022 - 40 years of birding in the beautiful Vale.

Rob Prudden



01. The Avon floodplain at Lower Moor looking across to Haines Meadows, with Bredon Hill in the background 18.04.2017. Gary Farmer

I have been birdwatching along the river Avon near Pershore, Worcestershire since 1982 and have recorded many changes over that time, both in the habitats present and the birds found in the area. Most of my observations follow national trends of species declining or being lost altogether, and in some cases new species arriving. The river corridor has changed greatly during the 40 years that I have been walking the area. Fields of wet grassland have given way to the growing of maize and other crops to feed the bio-digesters; glasshouses have sprung up to provide us with out of season vegetables; the area of old gravel workings and associated scrub, once so important as habitat for birds has been tidied up and the resident birds have been replaced by static homes for semi-resident humans.

This report is a summary of 40 years of my observations along the Worcestershire Avon in the Vale of Evesham, mostly around the Lower Moor area on the north side of the Avon and Haines Meadows at Wick on the South side of the river (01). It includes notes on the management (historic and present-day) that has affected the habitats and species found here today. I have noted mammals, reptiles and amphibians, but my main interest has been the birdlife of the area. I have records of 207 species of birds from my patch, the vast majority observed by me between 1982 and 2022, along with one or two significant records either just before my time, such as a **Gannet** *Morus bassanus* at the gravel pits in 1977, and records just outside the patch such as the only record in the river valley of a **Dotterel** *Charadrius morinellus* in an area towards Fladbury, known as The Porters in 2003. Some of the species are long-established residents, some just appearing once or twice on migration, others are new colonists, but all have made for forty years of enjoyment and a fascination for this beautiful part of the Vale of Evesham.

#### Areas of interest

##### Gravel Pits

Although the focal point of the area is now the wetlands and meadows below Lower End Farm (SO973468) and Haines Meadows at Wick (SO969467), the nearby gravel pits at Lower Moor were of most interest during the period 1976 – 2000. Here sand and gravel extraction commenced in the 1930s, gaining momentum to a peak around 1940 when huge amounts of aggregate were needed to build

both Throckmorton and Honeybourne airfields as part of the war effort. At the time the gravel pits' owners were paid the miserly sum of half an old penny per ton for the very best sand and gravel available on site (P. Stubbs *pers. comm.*). Post war, demand dropped considerably with extraction returning to a more measured pace, hence after fifty to sixty years of steady, but continuous excavation over an ever-larger area, a myriad of diverse habitats had evolved. This included water in varying depths, from several metres in the larger pits, down to much shallower areas in the numerous smaller ponds that were dotted around the site. Surrounding areas had developed into a habitat mosaic of bare sandy and stony open ground, hawthorn scrub, ancient overgrown hedges, coppices, reed beds, marshland and open damp rank vegetation. In c1990 a slow transitional period began, gaining momentum over the following ten years. Much disturbance was caused to existing habitats as the site changed from a working gravel pit to the leisure park which exists today. Most of the deep water has remained, but with constant human disturbance and loss of breeding habitat the area has lost the majority of its wildlife.

##### River Meadows

The demise of the extensive gravel pits and its myriad of habitats was a great loss to the wildlife of the area, but fortunately in c2000, with the assistance of local landowners and the availability of Countryside Stewardship Scheme funds, an area below Lower End Farm could be farmed less intensively and in a more wildlife-friendly manner, more in line with practices of days gone by. These meadows are kept wet through much of the year and a sunken area in the middle of one of the fields provides ideal feeding and roosting habitat for gulls, waders and ducks. Water levels are maintained on the meadows via a sluice controlling water in the adjacent Lench Ditch. The area is now a fine representation of wet, cattle-grazed, and hay-cropped floodplain meadows with hedgerows, ditches, the river and its banks all adding to its diversity. Management of the grassland is aimed at retaining suitable habitat for wintering and migrating wading birds and ducks, as well as providing habitat for breeding species such as **Lapwing** *Vanellus vanellus* and more recently **Avocet** *Recurvirostra avosetta* (attempted breeding 2021). Generally the grasslands are not species-rich but they are improving and one meadow holds a good population of Tubular Water-dropwort *Oenanthe fistulosa*.

In centuries past the Avon valley would have been quite different with large areas of marshland dotted along its whole length from where it rises from a spring at Naseby, Northamptonshire, to its convergence with the Severn at Tewksbury, Gloucestershire, c96miles (154kms). With continuous drainage over many years, hay cropping on the meadows became a more viable option in many areas and floodplain meadows were a particularly valued part of the agricultural system, where regular silt deposition from river floods replenished nutrients removed with the hay crop. Grassy bunds are still evident in this part of the Vale and are remnants of a time when the floodwater would have been managed to feed the grass and warm the soil for a head start of new growth in the spring. The moist, fertile soils also encouraged strong growth after the hay cut, allowing grazing of the aftermath from August into October. The bunds also acted to combat excessive flooding in this low-lying area where ruined crops and drowned livestock were commonplace. A floodwater management scheme was implemented by the innovative and successful Captain Ernest Bomford who joined forces with Evesham engineer Raymond Webb. Five hundred men armed with no more than picks, shovels and the assistance of farm horses, were employed to build a bund alongside the river. The structure ran from Fladbury Mill for nearly three miles to the east end of the Lench Ditch at Lower Moor. Amazingly the project was completed, including sluice gates, in just eight weeks. Most of the bunding is still in place in 2022, although it has been damaged in some areas and it has many breaches cut through so no longer functions. Water was also pumped on to the meadows from the river by a large tractor-driven pump following an early hay cut. After the induced flooding had totally irrigated chosen areas, narrow channels were cut through the bund to drain excess water back to the river. This procedure would then encourage a second good hay crop later in the year. Traditionally cattle grazed the meadows through the autumn, with sheep taking over in the winter if the fields were not too wet. River meadows were often managed by commoners as Lammas meadows, with grazing rights being open to all after the hay had been cut and taken off site. Cattle grazing continues at Lower Moor and Haines Meadows (02) and is important for keeping a diverse sward and reducing scrub encroachment (although this valuable habitat is encouraged in a few areas). Although the industrial revolution brought mechanisation and new forms of power, horses were still a major form of transport and were vital for working farms and even industry. Hay from the Severn and Avon valleys found a strong market in many towns, cities and industrial manufacturing areas, where huge amounts were needed to feed the thousands of animals still in use. Along the Fladbury to Lower Moor meadows, hay was cut then taken to Spring Hill Farm where twenty to thirty horses were stabled at one time. Most of the hay was stored for use on the farm or elsewhere locally, although any excess could be transported to markets further afield.



02. Cattle grazing helps to keep a diverse sward and reduces scrub encroachment. Haines Meadows 04.10.22. Gary Farmer

### Changes to farming and land management

In the early to mid-1900s the areas around Lower Moor were farmed in a relatively low intensive manner, with grazing and hay cropping on the river meadows, while on surrounding higher ground ancient and modern orchards grew a mix of plums, apples, cherries & pears. The areas' light easily worked soil was also ideal for market gardening, producing a diverse array of crops including asparagus, onions, soft fruits, hops, root vegetables and mixed salad crops. Wheat and barley were also grown on a small scale. Most fields tended to be small and hedged on all sides with wide wildflower-rich grassy margins, while annual weeds grew abundantly within the crops, providing seed for farmland birds including **Corn Bunting** *Emberiza calandra*, **Grey Partridge** *Perdix perdix* and **Turtle Dove** *Streptopelia turtur*. Unfortunately, this diversity has all but disappeared with changes in line with modern farming practices to favour the growing of monocultures in ever larger fields treated liberally with insecticides, herbicides and artificial nitrogen-based fertilizers, bringing about the decline or total loss of many meadow flowers and arable weeds. Cutting of hay gave way to ever earlier cutting for haylage and silage giving little time for ground-nesting birds to raise their broods. At Haines Meadows in Wick, this directly contributed to the loss of **Curlew** *Numenius arquata* (03) from the area. Field margins are now neat and tidy, weed free or even non-existent. Many trees and most of the hedges have been grubbed up or flailed to within an inch of their lives. The less diverse array of habitats has of course led to a huge reduction in both diversity and abundance of species of flora and fauna in recent times.



03. Changes from summer hay-cutting to earlier silage-cutting contributed to the loss of Curlew as a breeding species in the area. Gary Farmer.

Today around fifty acres of grassland at Lower Moor and nearly 60 acres directly opposite at Haines Meadows, Wick, are owned and managed by Vale Landscape Heritage Trust (VLHT) who have been working to bring back more traditional grassland management to the area. Several meadows are cut for hay late in the summer, with aftermath grazing by cattle and/or sheep when practicable. The remaining areas are managed by cattle grazing alone. There are low areas, managed as wader scrapes on both sides of the river. At Haines Meadows, investigations are ongoing in view of installing a wind-powered water-pump to better manage the water levels on the scrape there.

### Vulnerable habitats

The wader scrape in the centre of Lower Moor river meadows attracts a wide variety of birds and provides vital roosting and feeding areas for migrating waders and wildfowl. Many people

enjoy walking the edge of the fields and birdwatchers are drawn from all over the county when rarities turn up. It is owned by VLHT and has been managed under a Higher-level Environmental Stewardship agreement for ten years (and now a Mid-tier Countryside Stewardship agreement), so I thought it was a secure place for wildlife for the foreseeable future. Imagine my horror then, when on the 24<sup>th</sup> June 2018 I visited the site and found the scrape completely dry. I immediately investigated and found that a neighbour had cut the Lench Ditch through to the river in an attempt to drain their arable field. Without consultation (or permission) they had drained the lifeblood from the river meadows and associated wetland. Phone calls were made to Natural England, Environment Agency (EA), Wychavon council, even the Police as the clearance associated with the drainage work affected trees during the bird-nesting season. There was a universal 'washing of hands' and we thought that all of the years of work carried out to create a wildlife haven had been undone overnight. It was only when an EA officer took a personal interest that a light appeared at the end of the tunnel. Talks were arranged with VLHT, their neighbour and the EA and a plan was put in place to install a barrier in the ditch closer to VLHT's land. This work was supported by funds from Severn Waste Services (SWS) and a solid barrier was installed preventing any further draining of the wetland, while our neighbour could continue to try to drain their field. Then during the Covid pandemic (2020/21) people were encouraged to exercise outdoors. It was good to see so many people enjoying walking the permissive route at Lower Moor but numbers increased dramatically and people (and dogs) were wandering across the fields, using the area as a public park, disturbing the wildlife and increasing the risk of conflict between visitors and cattle. SWS came to the rescue again with a grant to install a fence along the riverside (04), providing a safe, pleasant permissive walking route for people while leaving the wildlife and livestock relatively undisturbed. These incidents really brought home just how vulnerable these special sites really are.

#### Access

None of the areas mentioned in this report have open access but there are many Public Rights of Way (PRoW) and permissive routes around the north side of the river including Lower Moor. Access on the south side of the river is more restricted but there are a few PRoWs giving access to some of the areas mentioned. If visiting the area, please always keep to these permissive and public routes to avoid trespassing and avoid disturbing the wildlife.



04. The newly fenced permissive route at Lower Moor 14.05.20. Gary Farmer.

#### Wildlife observations

##### Mammals

As with all of our wildlife nationally, we have seen changes in populations and distribution of mammals over the last few decades and the fortunes of species in the Vale reflect that. **Foxes** *Vulpes vulpes* and **Badgers** *Meles meles* are still common in the area and are regular night-time visitors to the meadows. The regularity of **Mink** *Neovison vison* sightings has dropped but they are still seen throughout the year, whereas **Otters** *Lutra lutra* are being seen more frequently, often in daylight (05). Their spraints have been found on several occasions and at one favoured sprainting spot, amongst the many fish scales the remains of Signal Crayfish *Pacifastacus leniusculus* have been found.



05. Otters *Lutra lutra* are being seen more frequently, often in daylight. Gary Farmer

On one memorable occasion in June 2021, just pre-dawn at Haines Meadows in the half-light, an Otter appeared swimming along the reedy edge of the river calling continuously. After about 5 minutes it became aware of my presence and dived, heading a little further up river, given away by a trail of bubbles before it re-surfaced and swam under the exposed roots of a large riverbank Alder *Alnus glutinosa*. The area was difficult to view but it did appear that there may be more than one animal. Sitting partly obscured by riverside vegetation no more than 15metres away from the tree, I found myself surrounded by curious cattle. This was mildly un-nerving but it proved fortuitous as the Otter seemed to accept me as part of the herd and swam out into full view on several occasions. As the light improved it ran up the riverbank closely followed by two pups, and once on top of the bank the three animals 'play fought', rolling about together for several minutes. **Stoats** *Mustela erminea* were often seen in the past but I have not seen one for many years now, and **Weasels** *Mustela nivalis* were also once common but are now only seen occasionally. On 12<sup>th</sup> July 2021 an adult Weasel was rescued after becoming badly entangled in netting at Lower End Farm. The release was not easy with the petrified animal snapping, biting, scratching & squealing continuously before being given its freedom. **Fallow Deer** *Dama dama* are scarce visitors to the area, occasionally roaming from Bredon Hill. On 20<sup>th</sup> January 2018 a mobile herd of around 40 individuals were seen on arable land at Wick Grange Farm (T. Meikle *pers. comm.*). Small numbers of **Roe Deer** *Capreolus capreolus* (06) are resident along the meadows on both sides of the river with the highest count being 13 in a wild-bird feed crop at Cooks Hill on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2021. **Muntjac** *Muntiacus reevesi* has increased and this diminutive deer is now resident in scrub and coppices all around the area. **Moles** *Talpa europaea* are reasonably common, mostly on drier ground above the floodplain. **Hedgehog** *Erinaceus europaeus* was once a common resident but has become very scarce. **Common Shrew** *Sorex araneus* and **Pygmy Shrew** *Sorex minutus* are rarely seen residents but their remains are found in owl pellets. Their larger cousin the **Water Shrew** *Neomys fodiens* is occasionally seen in damp areas alongside the river and other nearby water courses. **Brown Rat** *Rattus norvegicus* is occasionally seen along water courses or around nearby human habitation. The **House Mouse** *Mus musculus* is also

found around nearby human habitation and remains have been identified from owl pellets. **Wood Mouse** *Apodemus sylvaticus* is a fairly common resident, whereas **Harvest Mouse** *Micromys minutus* appears to be scarce, but nests have been found on a few occasions in recent years including the 24<sup>th</sup> September 2014 when a fresh nest was found in a patch of Reed Canary Grass *Phalaris arundinacea* alongside the car park at Lower Moor. Then on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2021 whilst mowing paths into a two-acre plot that has been allowed to revert to scrub at Haines Meadows, at least five nests were located. On 14<sup>th</sup> September 2022 cattle grazing exposed a nest in a patch of rushes *Juncus* at Lower Moor (07).



06. Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus* is resident along both sides of the river and numbers appear to be increasing. Lower Moor 21.06.22. Gary Farmer



07. Harvest Mouse *Micromys minutus* nests have been found in recent years including at Lower Moor 14.09.22. Rob Prudden.

The once common **Water Vole** *Arvicola amphibius* has followed national declines and has not been seen on my patch for many years, but **Field Vole** *Microtus agrestis* is still common in most areas and is an important prey item; remains of this species have been found in every **Barn Owl** *Tyto alba* pellet dissected from local owl boxes. **Bank Vole** *Myodes glareolus* remains have also been found in Barn Owl pellets, but the live animals are rarely seen. **Grey Squirrel** *Sciurus carolinensis* is no longer confined to wooded areas and has become a very common resident in any habitat, and we regularly have to evict them from owl boxes in the winter. **Brown Hare** *Lepus europaeus* was once common and seen all around the area but disappeared in the 1980s due to poaching and persecution. Thankfully this species has returned and a small healthy (but still

vulnerable) population has again built up on the south side of the river. **Rabbits** *Oryctolagus cuniculus* are found on the light sandy soil above the floodplain. I am not aware of any **Bat** surveys from the area but unidentified species are still seen regularly in the summer months.

#### Reptiles & amphibians

Over the years many people have claimed to have seen **Adders** *Vipera berus*, but no sightings have ever been verified. Some of the sightings have typically turned out to be dark & well marked **Grass Snakes** *Natrix helvetica* which remains a fairly common species, often seen swimming in the river or other nearby water courses. **Common Lizards** *Zootoca vivipara* (08) have only been noted on three occasions but may well be overlooked. Recent residential developments on sandy ground will have removed habitat and they would without doubt have been much more numerous in the past. The most recent record was from a garden wall in Bridge Street near the railway line on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2016. **Slow-worm** *Anguis fragilis* was once a common reptile here, especially on the warm, sandy ground but is now scarce due to loss of habitat.



08. Common Lizard *Zootoca vivipara* has only been noted on three occasions but may well be overlooked. Gary Farmer

The **Common Frog** *Rana temporaria* is still relatively common though much reduced in numbers. Frog spawn can be found in shallow temporary pools at Lower Moor: the resulting mass of tadpoles make easy feeding for resident **Kingfishers** *Alcedo atthis* and nowadays the visiting **Little Egrets** *Egretta garzetta*. **Toads** *Bufo bufo* are still present in the area but in the past large numbers would cross Bridge Street on damp evenings in early spring as they headed for traditional breeding pools. Most of these pools have now been filled in, hence numbers of Toads have dropped. **Smooth Newt** or Common Newt *Lissotriton vulgaris* is present but rarely seen.

#### Birds

I have records for 207 species of birds along my patch of the river Avon and have included here notes on some of the more interesting/significant species including rarities, new species and lost species. The great majority of records are from my own observations over the 40 years between 1982 and 2022 with just a handful from other observers, or from outside the area or from just before 'my time'. During the period in question, numbers of most species have reduced considerably, with some suffering catastrophic declines. These downturns make grim reading, with some once locally common species including **Turtle Dove**, **Corn Bunting**, **Willow Tit** *Poecile montana*, **Tree Sparrow** *Passer montanus* and **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos minor* now all but extinct in the whole of Worcestershire. Other species that have shown significant losses and appear to be in serious decline include **Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava*, **Spotted Flycatcher** *Muscicapa striata*, **Marsh Tit** *Poecile palustris*, **Nightingale** *Luscinia megarynchos*, **Whinchat** *Saxicola rubetra*, **Little Owl** *Athene noctua* and **Curlew**. Whether any of these will still be part of the

Worcestershire avifauna in another twenty years must be in serious doubt. In the Lower Moor/Wick recording area declines have followed county and national trends, but have also been influenced by local habitat loss as the area has changed considerably, generally to the detriment of most species but not all. Modern farming practices must shoulder much of the blame, both locally and globally, while other more complex factors in wintering areas or on migration routes also have an impact on seasonal visitors. But it is not all about loss; a few species are doing ok and there are even a few new species now visiting the area. However there is no getting away from the fact that the losses way outnumber the gains.

Fifty years ago, **Curlews** were reasonably common all along the Avon valley. Three or four pairs bred annually on the meadows at Lower Moor during the 1950s and early 60s with several other pairs at Wick (F. Roberts *pers. comm.*). Since the early 1980s, one or two pairs have continued to linger during the breeding period, with the last breeding success being at Wick in 2005. The pair were seen with a fledged juvenile at Lower Moor river flash on 18th June that year. A single pair continued nesting at Wick most years up until 2012. This pair were rarely if ever successful and failure has often been down to silage/early hay cutting in June. The grasslands at Haines Meadows were purchased by VLHT just too late to save the last breeding pair, but the meadows are now managed sympathetically in the hope that Curlews will return to nest one day. Small numbers of northerly- bound passage Curlew still visit in the early spring period and also very occasionally one or two birds visit in winter. **Redshank** *Tringa totanus* is a regular spring and autumn passage migrant and an occasional winter visitor. Up until 2012 at least one pair lingered during the spring and early summer period and attempted to breed on several occasions. An exceptional number appeared on 9th April 2002 when 12 birds were feeding around the river flash at Lower Moor. A nest with four eggs was found at Wick on 19th May 2010 but this was predated shortly after that date.

**Snipe** *Gallinago gallinago* bred in the area in the past but the last drumming and presumed breeding birds were heard around the meadows in 1987. This species is now a winter visitor and a spring and autumn passage migrant. Up until the early 1980s, counts of 1,000+ were not unusual around the river meadows during the winter months. Around 100 Snipe were regularly seen in November and December up until c2012 but these numbers continue to fall. The most recent big counts were on 17th August 2013 after the flash had been kept wet throughout the summer period for the first time and 42 birds were feeding in the muddy surrounds. Then a good count for recent times was 65 in a nine-acre pasture at Lower Moor on 13th September 2013.



09. Avocets *Recurvirostra avosetta* first appeared at Lower Moor in 1996 and have become regular visitors in recent years. Gary Farmer.

While many species are in decline, a few have recently started arriving in the Avon valley. **Avocet** (09) was first recorded from the area on a cold wet day on 19th May 1996, when a single bird visited a flooded gravel pit in the early morning (D. Radcliffe *pers. comm.*). It stayed until about 17:30hrs before flying off north-north-east.

There were no other sightings until a particularly early migrant was at the river flash mid-afternoon on 21st February 2004. The next record was of a pair that arrived at 09:50hrs on 2nd May 2006, staying all day before leaving north at c16.00hrs. There was one record in 2008 and then no further sightings until a pair turned up at Lower Moor's river flash on the evening of 13th May 2014 remaining all the following day (14th May). One of these birds carried a colour ring on its left leg (Black on White 64), a stained, gold looking BTO ring was on its right leg. 'Black on White 64' was again present on 21st & 25th May 2014 and investigations found this bird was ringed in its first calendar year at Noorderleeg, Wester Dobbe, Holland on 24th June 2008. It was subsequently seen at Zwarte Haan, Holland on 4th September 2008, then at Blacktoft Sands, Yorkshire on 8th May 2009, Halsham, East Yorkshire on 3rd June 2013, Clifton Pits, Worcestershire on 27th April 2014, Upton Warren on 6th May 2014, then Lower Moor on 13th, 14th, 21st and 25th May 2014. There were no other reports of this bird. An adult with three juveniles appeared early morning on 21st June 2014, staying all day and into the evening. Interestingly all the breeding birds and juveniles from Upton Warren were accounted for, so these birds must have come from further afield. There were single almost annual records of passage birds following this, with an increase in occurrences in 2020. In 2021 three pairs were at Lower Moor's river flash on 25th and 26th March. They were joined on 27th and 28th by a seventh bird, and five were still present on 29th then four on 30th, back to seven on 31st and a site- busting record of 10 on 1st April. Numbers continued to fluctuate until just one bird remained on 25th April. During the above period Avocets were constantly being harassed and driven off from Upton Warren by breeding **Black Headed Gulls** *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*: presumably this was the source of the Lower Moor birds (J Belsey *pers. comm.*). In 2021 an adult passed through with five juveniles on 24th August. In 2022 a pair was present from 12th to 16th March, three pairs from 19th to 22nd, a single pair from 23rd to 26th, two pairs from 27th to 14th April, five pairs on 15th and 16th, a pair on 17th, three pairs on 18th, then a pair from 29th April to 1st May.



10. Spoonbill was a new species for the area when this one dropped in at Lower Moor 01.09.21. Tom & Sally Hutchinson.

There is only one brief record of **Spoonbill** *Platalea leucorodia* (10) from the area; an adult was present at the river flash at c15.30 on 1st September 2021 (T. & S. Hutchinson *pers. comm.*) but had gone by the time I arrived there at c16.00. Evidently an adult had left Middleton Lakes in the Tame Valley earlier in the day then it was seen at Slimbridge on 5th. Three species of egrets have recently been recorded in the area, with the first being the only record so far of **Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis* when two full summer plumaged birds were seen perched on a small tangle of scrub near the centre of the large lake at the gravel pits on 24th June 2017 (Bob Heson *pers. comm.*). The next species to be found was a **Great White Egret** *Ardea alba* at the river flash each afternoon between 14th and 18th

November 2017, leaving just before dark each evening to roost nearby. Presumably the same bird was seen at the gravel pits from 18<sup>th</sup> until 20<sup>th</sup> November (R. Stallard *pers. comm.*). On 6<sup>th</sup> November 2019 one drifted over the hay field at Lower Moor at 09.25, it then flew over to Wick circling over the area before dropping down in to the river channels briefly, taking flight and heading over the gravel pits and disappearing into the distance. On 21<sup>st</sup> August 2020 a very confiding Great White Egret was fishing from the riverbank at Wick and on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2020 four were seen with a single Little Egret flying high overhead from the west and away up stream. The Little Egret looked tiny in comparison to its much larger cousins. On 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2021 one Great White Egret roosted at Haines Meadows (Wick) Tear Drop and was then seen flying off downstream at 07.30 next morning. One flew up the river with a **Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea* at 07.15 on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2021 and one dropped in at the river flash at 08.10 on 10<sup>th</sup> August 2021 staying for c5minutes before flying off high to the south. Its height above ground, large size and whiteness against a clear blue sky meant it was still visible some three miles away over the river below Tiddesley Wood. On the 1<sup>st</sup> May 2022 two birds were seen high up, flying strongly east at 06.15. Little Egret was first recorded on 26th April 2000 when an adult was flushed from the gravel pits, it then relocated to the river flash where it remained until dark. The species has now become much more abundant nationally, hence small numbers are now seen annually in the area, many of these being juveniles in the late summer period. I have seven records, all from the winter months mostly during flood conditions; single birds on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2007, 15<sup>th</sup> December 2010, 31<sup>st</sup> December 2011, 17<sup>th</sup> January 2017, 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2018, 26<sup>th</sup> November 2020 (with four Great White Egrets) & most recently on 29<sup>th</sup> December 2021.

**Lapwing** is an occasional breeding species and regular visitor in varying numbers. Small numbers bred annually on the Lower Moor river meadows up until the mid-1980s, with the last record of two pairs sitting on eggs in the 9acre meadow on 21<sup>st</sup> May 1982. Single juveniles were fledged at the Lower Moor river flash in 1999, 2001 and 2013, and out of the blue 10 pairs presumed to be second brooding failed breeders from elsewhere nested in salad onion crops near the Coventry Water Bridge in 2010. One or two pairs still bred with some success on arable land alongside the river at Wick from 2010 to 2020. Three two-day-old chicks appeared at Lower Moor flash on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2019, one of these had disappeared by 26<sup>th</sup>, but the surviving two went on to fledge by mid-July. The highest ever count of Lapwings was after heavy flooding when c3500 birds were loafing on sodden muddy fields near the Coventry Water Bridge on 22nd January 2008. Flocks of up to c1000 were seen annually along the river meadows during the winter months although numbers have dropped dramatically in recent times, and anything over 150 is now noteworthy. Meanwhile **Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus* has become a breeding species since c2000 and a single pair have bred annually at the gravel pits with some success. Small numbers pass through on spring and autumn passage with the highest count being 10 together at the river flash on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2014. **Water Rail** *Rallus aquaticus* is a winter visitor along the river meadow ditches and in Severn Trent Water's (STW) reed-bed from September to March. It is an occasional breeding species, proof of which came on 8th July 1999 when an unfledged juvenile was seen at STW's reedbed. Its relative the **Corncrake** *Crex crex* was lost well before my time in the Vale but it is a significant species here because the last breeding record for Worcestershire was at Wick in 1967, a record for 1968 in Warwickshire being the last breeding record of Corncrake in the West Midlands (Lord & Munns eds 1970).

During the 1970s & 80s the lower Avon Valley in Worcestershire was the national stronghold for **Marsh Warbler** *Acrocephalus palustris*, holding 75% of the UK population (42-47 singing males in 1983). Approximately twenty small, sometimes tiny, sites were given Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) status and managed specifically to aid the Marsh Warblers' breeding success. Several of these sites were at Lower Moor alongside the river, and the Lench and Oxtan Ditches, and a small, but healthy population bred here. Marsh Warblers are now extinct as a breeding species in Worcestershire with the last known nesting attempt recorded in

1993, although a male did pair with a female Reed Warbler and fledged young in 1995. A single male returned and sang in the three years from 1996 to 1998 but failed to find a mate. Due to the extinction of the species as a breeding bird in Worcestershire, SSSI status was removed from all of the birds' previously designated sites in the county in 2012. During the final years of the Marsh Warbler's decline, **Cetti's Warbler** *Cettia cetti* arrived in the area and was first recorded in bramble and hawthorn scrub at the gravel pits on the 11th October 1992 and remained there until the 7th February 1993. It was 2010 before the next bird arrived, when a male took up territory from 10<sup>th</sup> April and was last heard on 22<sup>nd</sup> May. Since then there have been several other birds staying for varied amounts of time with the most recent sighting being 9<sup>th</sup> January 2022. How long will it be before this species stays to breed?

**Spotted Flycatcher** was another sad loss from the area. Once a common summer visitor during the 1970s and 80s, it nested in many village gardens and double figure family groups were often seen around the gravel pits or in river meadow hedgerows in the autumn. Spotted Flycatcher was still a reasonably regular sight in the early 2000s as a breeding species but it is now a scarce, less than annual autumn passage migrant. The last four records, all single birds, were in the hedgerow of the 9acre field at Lower Moor on 17<sup>th</sup> August 2010; the same hedge as above on 19<sup>th</sup> August 2012; in willows alongside the Lench Ditch near the Concrete Bridge on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2013; and in the 12acre (flash field) near the river on 18<sup>th</sup> August 2015.



11. Corn Bunting was once a common breeding bird in the area but is now rarely seen and "the future for this species in the south of the county looks bleak". Gary Farmer.

**Corn Bunting** (11) was lost during the same period. An area to the east of Lower Moor alongside the railway known as "The Porters" had been a traditional breeding site for this species for as long as could be remembered with 20 to 30 pairs in the 1970s, dropping to seven or eight pairs by 2001. A small number of breeding pairs held on until a large glasshouse complex was erected in the breeding area in the winter/spring of 2009/10 leading to their demise, with the last record from that area of two males singing briefly in 2010. As late as August 2000 a post-breeding flock of around 75 birds was regularly seen around fields on the north side of Lower Moor village, but the creation of the bypass in that area saw numbers plummet. Another traditional stronghold with up to 10 breeding pairs was Wick. On one memorable occasion on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2007 eight Corn Buntings flew across to Lower Moor and were seen mobbing a **Cuckoo** *Cuculus canorus* which took refuge low down in cover alongside the flash, with the angry ensemble continuing noisy and expressive mobbing for several minutes before returning back across the river to Wick. Numbers here continued to fall with only eight singing males still holding territories during the 2010 breeding season. Up to 12 birds were found in a winter feed crop in December. Just one male sang in the summer of 2011, this then improved in 2012 with four males during the breeding season. A flock of 23 birds were on winter feed crops on 27th January 2012, with four males singing in the following breeding season. Only four birds were seen in the winter of

2012/13. A single male was singing from a retained field strip on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2013. A male was singing from the top of a hedge along the main track to the river at Wick on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2014. The future for the Corn Bunting in the south of the county looks bleak. Hopefully the same fate is not awaiting the **Redstart** *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* which tends to be an occasional spring migrant, with post-breeding birds arriving in the last week of June/first week of July (my earliest record is the 19<sup>th</sup> June in 2011). I see them daily in old hawthorn hedges around the river meadows through into October, and day counts of up to 10 birds were not unusual in the past although numbers have dropped significantly in recent times. I had a pleasant surprise when a female with two young juveniles were in a hedge adjacent to the nine-acre field at Lower Moor on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2014: presumably they had bred locally as they were barely fledged.

The **Turtle Dove** is possibly the saddest loss of all, as it was once a common sight and its purring song was a major part of the summer soundtrack until the last returning male sang briefly from an ancient Poplar tree at the rear of Lower End Farm at 06.30 on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2014 (Table 01). Prior to that, flocks of 20 to 30 were regularly seen around the gravel pits and on nearby sandy arable land in the 1970s and early 1980s. At the time many typical annual arable weeds grew in amongst the salad crops, these included Fumitory *Fumaria sp*, Groundsel *Senecio sp*, Scarlet Pimpernel *Anagallis arvensis* and Speedwell *Veronica sp* all of which are favoured seed sources for this species. In the 1980s numbers started to drop significantly and were in freefall by the early 2000s. Having said that two or three pairs still bred on the south side of the river in rank Hawthorn scrub alongside the Water Bridge till the mid-2000s. By 2019 the species was near to extinction in the whole of Worcestershire.

Year	First arrival date	Highest count	Date of highest count	Last recorded date
1997	3 <sup>rd</sup> May	7	August	4 <sup>th</sup> September
1998	31 <sup>st</sup> May	8	July	6 <sup>th</sup> September
1999	23 <sup>rd</sup> May	5	June	4 <sup>th</sup> September
2000	April 29 <sup>th</sup>	6	24 <sup>th</sup> June	27 <sup>th</sup> August
2001	2 <sup>nd</sup> May	4	27 <sup>th</sup> June	14 <sup>th</sup> September
2002	30 <sup>th</sup> May	7	23 <sup>rd</sup> June	4 <sup>th</sup> September
2003	27 <sup>th</sup> April	6	19 <sup>th</sup> June	3 <sup>rd</sup> September
2004	29 <sup>th</sup> April	4	16 <sup>th</sup> June	23 <sup>rd</sup> August
2005	6 <sup>th</sup> May	7	4 <sup>th</sup> September	25 <sup>th</sup> September
2006	29 <sup>th</sup> April	7	3 <sup>rd</sup> July	26 <sup>th</sup> August
2007	24 <sup>th</sup> May	3	11 <sup>th</sup> June	22 <sup>nd</sup> August
2008	27 <sup>th</sup> May	4	19 <sup>th</sup> June	?
2009	6 <sup>th</sup> June	2	16 <sup>th</sup> June	2 <sup>nd</sup> July
2010	1 <sup>st</sup> May	3	14 <sup>th</sup> July	?
2011	For the first time no Turtle Doves this year			
2012	Just a single record when a bird dashed through over the river from Wick then away across the flash field to the north on 1st July.			
2013	No Turtle Doves this year			
2014	A male sang briefly from an ancient Poplar tree at the rear of Lower End Farm at 06:30am on 1st July. This was the last record of Turtle Dove from the area.			

Table 01. The demise of Turtle Doves at Lower Moor

**Cuckoo** is a decreasing summer visitor and spring migrant. During the 1980s and early 90s the gravel pits were a favoured site and double figures were resident in the area, often calling from the skeletal remains of stricken English Elms *Ulmus procera* during the early summer months. Now no more than two pairs are active around the river meadows during spring/early summer. Adults normally leave by the end of July while juveniles are occasionally seen in August or early September.

Owls have had mixed fortunes along the river valley and surrounding area. **Tawny Owl** *Strix aluco* is a fairly common breeding resident although numbers have much reduced. They are most apparent from December to February when males are particularly vocal, calling through the day. Forty years ago, at the

start of my observations **Little Owl** was also a common resident with several pairs breeding. By 2012 the species had declined markedly and become scarce, and sadly the last site records were single birds seen alongside the river at Wick in 2018/19. In contrast, **Barn Owl** is a bit of a success story in the Vale and can be seen throughout the year. This species has bred annually since at least the mid-1990s with more than one successful pair most years, aided by careful monitoring of breeding boxes. A pair bred in a natural hole in an ancient Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* alongside the river at Wick from 2001 to 2004, but the tree was destroyed by high winds, so a box was installed nearby. A juvenile ringed at Wick on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2014 was picked up dead as a road casualty at Whitchurch Herefordshire on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2015, 225 days and 51 kms, but was this natural dispersal or could it have been the victim of a collision with and movement by a vehicle? In 2017 an impressive three pairs bred in boxes within a single square mile in the Lower Moor/Wick area and from these three boxes nine large owlets were ringed. On 11<sup>th</sup> August 2017 a juvenile ringed (GV30896) at Wick on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2017 was found dead along the main access track to the meadows. It had survived just 51 days and moved 0kms from its ringing site. A juvenile ringed (GV46492) at Wick on 5<sup>th</sup> July 2017 was picked up dead as a road casualty near Foxcote Manor, Withington in Gloucestershire (SP028162) on 10<sup>th</sup> April 2018, having survived for 279 days and travelled 27kms. On 5<sup>th</sup> November 2020 the Lower Moor meadows were in flood and the cattle had become stranded on two small areas of relatively dry land alongside the river. A decision was made to supplementary feed, hence in complete darkness at 21.00hrs large hay bales were taken on to the site via the permissive path alongside the Lench Ditch. With 99% of the site under two feet of water and while creeping along the fence line in the 10acre meadow, a Barn Owl was highlighted in the tractor's headlights. The owl was very mobile, hunting from fenceposts and hovering over the water's edge to pick off rodents etc. attempting to escape the deluge and reach dryland. The ghostly whiteness of the bird, black of the night and gentle lapping of the water was a very evocative scene. On 11<sup>th</sup> January 2021 while annual owl box checks and maintenance were being carried out, two owls were flushed from a box at Wick. Roughly twenty-five pellets of varying sizes were taken away from the box for analysis, and they contained the remains of 79 small mammals of 6 different species; these were mostly Field Voles with five or six Bank Voles, 10 Wood Mice, two House Mice & 19 Shrews (mostly Common with a few Pygmy Shrews), the remains of one very-large dung beetle *Geotrupes spiniger* (11) was also found in a dissected pellet. Numerous moth larvae were found to be feeding within the pellets, and these were grown-through and identified by Tony Simpson as *Monopis laevigella* (G. Farmer pers. comm.). A juvenile Barn Owl ringed (GV63758) on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2021 at Glenmore Farm, Wick, (Box 8) was then found dead as a road casualty on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2022 at Greatworth in Northamptonshire (SP5742), having travelled 62kms and survived 232days.



12. The remains of *Geotrupes spiniger* and Pygmy Shrew skull from a dissected Barn Owl pellet. 11.01.21, Haines Meadows. Gary Farmer.

**Short-eared Owl** *Asio flammeus*. Records are few and far between in the Vale, with several being found at Lower Moor and Haines Meadows. One was flushed from a strip of rushes at the north end of the 9acre meadow early afternoon on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2011 and circled the area several times before landing in the western flash field. Unable to find suitable cover and not being able to settle due to continuous harassment from gulls the owl finally flew off high west while still being mobbed. One was flushed from rough grassland in the 4 acre meadow late morning on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2012. It then dropped down at the south end of the 2 acre field where it was seen perched at 15.30. On another occasion one was seen around the 4 acre on 10<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> March 2013. Another was sighted over the western fields on both Lower Moor and Haines' sides of the river from 11.32 to 11.42 on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2017. The bird was mobbed continuously by corvids and Black Headed Gulls, the continuous mobbing forced the bird to leave the area high to the north-west. One was seen hunting over a wild-bird winter feed crop at the bottom of Bakers Hill, Wick mid-afternoon on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2018 (R Kings).

**Long-eared Owl** *Asio otus* is an even rarer visitor to the river meadows, with just two records to date. In 2017 a single bird roosted in a large willow pollard (11) alongside the river at Wick opposite Osier Island. First noted on 1st February, it was present in the same tree daily before leaving overnight on 13<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> March. The following year on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2018 amazingly one roosted in a Holly tree in a small rear garden on Bridge Street in Lower Moor village. First seen at mid-day it was alert, being very aware of passing trains, wind gusts and even a gardener working just over the fence only fifteen feet away! The bird was still present at last light but not seen the following day.



13. Long-eared Owl at Haines Meadows 02.03.17. Andy Warr.

Sixty years back, "Sea Gulls" inland were an unusual sight, commonly leading to comments of "must be rough at sea", but this has since changed dramatically with all larger towns and cities now having resident breeding populations. From 1980s to 2016 large numbers of the commoner species fed daily at the nearby Hill & Moor landfill site throughout the year, joined in winter months by birds from large traditional roosts some distance away, such as the estuary in Gloucestershire, Westwood Pool near Droitwich and

Bartley Reservoir in the West Midlands. Movements from further afield at Draycote Water in Warwickshire and Farmoor Reservoir in Oxfordshire also occurred. At the landfill site during the winter months seven to eight thousand birds were regularly present, with this number swelling to 15,000+ on some Sundays in late December and early January (the only day when scaring tactics were not employed!). Many of these birds spent the day loafing on the river meadows after displacement from the landfill site, several thousand could be present and the highest count was c5,200 gulls on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2012. Ringing of juveniles at breeding colonies or with the use of Cannon Nets at landfill sites meant good numbers were being fitted with metal BTO rings and in some cases, coloured "Darvik" rings inscribed with large numbers and letters, allowing them to be read in the field. Several of the colour rings have been noted at Lower Moor and have included birds from ringing schemes across the UK, as well as from sites further afield in Spain, Portugal, Holland and France. On 21<sup>st</sup> February 2005 freak blizzard conditions occurred and with heavy leaden skies, it appeared night-like at only 14.00hrs. The snowstorm persisted until dark leading to c500 gulls roosting at the flash overnight. From the mid-2000s through to the end of 2016 roosts of c1,000 strong formed nightly at the river flash, an equal number at the sailing lake and over 2,000 birds at the great lake at the gravel pits. Roosting locally saved energy expended commuting to distant roost sites and enabled feeding at the landfill site in daylight at both ends of the day before and after scaring tactics were deployed. October 2016 tipping of general refuse reduced significantly: instead it was transported to a new incinerator facility at Hartlebury. Gull numbers loafing at the river meadows during the daytime dropped by c95% within just a few days. Obviously this was bad news for the gulls but potentially good news for ground-nesting birds. In all I have records of fourteen species of gull from my patch, some very common and others only seen once or twice. **Lesser Black-backed Gull** *Larus fuscus* is a common winter visitor, counts reaching c3,500 birds congregating on the small river flash when the landfill site was still accepting food waste. A colour ringed bird (Black on Orange EY68) was first seen as an adult at Lower Moor on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2005 returning in all subsequent winters until it was last seen on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2015, making it at least 14 years old. The bird was originally ringed near Rotterdam in the Netherlands. The first breeding record of Lesser Black Backed Gull was of a pair on the shingle ridge in the centre of great lake, fledging two juveniles by mid-August 2017. **Herring Gull** *Larus argentatus* is another common gull seen throughout the year with 5,000+ noted during the winter months when the Landfill Site was still accepting food waste. Although now amber listed, Herring Gulls became the commonest species of gull during the winter months. On 17<sup>th</sup> January 2003 an adult Herring Gull was seen in distress at the river flash having become entangled in a plastic bag which had filled with water preventing its hostage from taking to the air. The gull was caught and found to have a BTO ring attached (GG52721), details of which were as follows: Ring fitted at Pitsea Marshes Basildon Essex on 25<sup>th</sup> January 1992 and recorded as c3years 8months old. The time between ringing and recapture was 10 years and 360 days The approximate age of the bird was 14 years 8 months, proof of the longevity of these gulls. **Black Headed Gull** is scarce during the summer months, but numbers increased to c3,000 in the winter months when there was easy feeding at the landfill site. On 8<sup>th</sup> February 1997 a ringed Black-headed Gull (ES27678) was found dead in the north east corner of the great lake and had been ringed at Hempsted Landfill Site near Gloucester on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1996, surviving only 89 days and travelled just 34kms. In winter 2003 and 2004 a wing-tagged bird (Green U8, ring number 3570053) was seen at the river flash on several dates. It had been tagged from a nest on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2000 in a colony near Westernieland, north of the Netherlands. In 2015 two pairs nested on dead willow stumps in the middle of great lake, this being the first known breeding record for the area. Subsequently breeding has occurred annually, with up to 10 pairs from 2019 to 2021. **Common Gull** *Larus canus* appears in small numbers throughout the year. Several hundred pass over the area annually on northerly spring passage in March and April. Up to 50 **Great Black-backed Gull** *Larus marinus* were regularly seen loafing at the river flash during the winter months after feeding up at the landfill site but this species



is now an uncommon visitor. **Yellow-legged Gull** *Larus michahellis* is generally scarce in the county, although the species could be seen daily in small numbers at Lower Moor with other large gulls during the winter months but is now no more than a scarce & irregular visitor. **Mediterranean Gull** *Larus melanocephalus* has never been a regular visitor and remains surprisingly scarce in the area. The first site record was a second summer individual on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2001, followed by a juvenile on 7<sup>th</sup> August the same year. There have been single birds recorded just sixteen times in all, with most just staying briefly. The most recent and longest staying bird was a juvenile at the river flash from 30<sup>th</sup> July to 6<sup>th</sup> August 2021 (G. Peplow pers. comm.). A first-summer **Little Gull** *Hydrocoloeus minutus* was seen around the river flash from 24<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> April 2001, but there were no further records of this species until 2017 when a first-summer bird was feeding around the river flash from 15<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> June 2017. There have only been a handful of records, with the most recent being an adult flying over from the sailing lake to great lake on 15<sup>th</sup> May 2020 (P. Fladbury pers. comm.). **Iceland Gull** *Larus glaucooides* is a scarce winter and spring visitor, and I have 14 records starting from 2002 for my patch. They arrive usually as just individual birds, but in the winter of 2008/09 unprecedented numbers of Iceland Gulls arrived in Britain, with c20 different individuals identified at the Hill

& Moor Landfill Site area, and at least five of these birds were seen at the river flash during this period. The most recent record is of a juvenile roosting overnight on floodwater moving between Wick or Lower Moor from at least 25<sup>th</sup> December 2020 to 16<sup>th</sup> January 2021. An even less frequent visitor is **Glaucous Gull** *Larus hyperboreus* having only been recorded on five occasions visiting Lower Moor with other large gulls between 2008 and 2012. A winter plumaged adult **Laughing Gull** *Leucophaeus atricilla* was loafing with large numbers of other gulls around the flooded river meadows briefly on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2005. The rare American vagrant **Ring-billed Gull** *Larus delawarensis* has been identified on three occasions between 2005 and 2008. There are two records for **Caspian Gull** *Larus cachinnans*, both first-winter birds, one on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2002 the other on 18<sup>th</sup> January 2009 (G. Peplow pers. comm.). The last gull species on my list is the **Kittiwake** *Rissa tridactyla* : more at home on the coast it has been seen on nine occasions between 29<sup>th</sup> March 1996 and 19<sup>th</sup> February 2014. These were all individual birds except when four adults arrived late morning on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2005.

The above notes cover just a few of the species I have records for but include many of the significant species. Below is a list of all species recorded on my patch in the last 40 years (Table 2)

B–breeding. S–summer. W–winter. P–passage. A–all year. (*)–number of records if relevant. M–max single count if relevant. LB–Lost breeder/has bred in the past.			
Mute Swan <i>Cygnus olor</i> A. B	Osprey <i>Pandion haliaetus</i> P. (10)	Arctic Tern <i>Sterna paradisaea</i> (4)	Firecrest <i>Regulus ignicapilla</i> (1)
Bewick Swan <i>Cygnus columbianus</i> (8) P.W	Kestrel <i>Falco tinnunculus</i> B	Black Tern <i>Chlidonias niger</i> (8)	Spotted Flycatcher <i>Muscicapa striata</i> LB
Whooper Swan <i>Cygnus cygnus</i> (2) W	Merlin <i>Falco columbarius</i> P. W	Stock Dove <i>Columba oenas</i> B. M-c475	Pied Flycatcher <i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i> (1)
Bean Goose <i>Anser fabalis</i> (1). W	Hobby <i>Falco subbuteo</i> S	Woodpigeon <i>Columba palumbus</i> B	Long-tailed Tit <i>Aegithalos caudatus</i> B
Pink-footed Goose <i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i> (8). W	Peregrine Falcon <i>Falco peregrinus</i> A	Little Owl <i>Athene noctua</i> LB	Marsh Tit <i>Poecile palustris</i> LB
White Fronted Goose <i>Anser albifrons</i> . (18). W	Water Rail <i>Rallus aquaticus</i> B. W	Tawny Owl <i>Strix aluco</i> B	Willow Tit <i>Poecile montanus</i> (2)
Greylag Goose <i>Anser anser</i> B. M-420	Corn Crane <i>Crex crex</i> LB-1967	Long-eared Owl <i>Asio otus</i> (2)	Coal Tit <i>Periparus ater</i> W
Canada Goose <i>Branta canadensis</i> B M-1,246	Moorhen <i>Gallinula chloropus</i> B	Short-eared Owl <i>Asio flammeus</i> (5)	Blue Tit <i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i> B
Barnacle Goose <i>Branta leucopsis</i> W	Coot <i>Fulica atra</i> B	Swift <i>Apus apus</i> S	Great Tit <i>Parus major</i> B
Brent Goose dark-bellied <i>Branta bernicula</i> . (2). W	Crane <i>Grus grus</i> (2)	Alpine Swift <i>Tachymarptis melba</i> (1)	Nuthatch <i>Sitta europaea</i> (2)
Egyptian Goose <i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i> (5)	Oystercatcher <i>Haematopus ostralegus</i> P. B	Kingfisher <i>Alcedo atthis</i> A	Tree Creeper <i>Certhia familiaris</i> B
Shelduck <i>Tadorna tadorna</i> P. LB	Avocet <i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i> (21) P	Hoopoe <i>Upupa epops</i> (2)	Jay <i>Garrulus glandarius</i> A
Mandarin Duck <i>Aix galericulata</i> LB	Little Ringed Plover <i>Charadrius dubius</i> P. LB	Green Woodpecker <i>Picus viridis</i> B	Magpie <i>Pica pica</i> B
Wigeon <i>Mareca penelope</i> W. (c750)	Ringed Plover <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i> P	Great Spotted Woodpecker <i>Dendrocopos major</i> B	Jackdaw <i>Coloeus monedula</i> B
Gadwall <i>Mareca strepera</i> P	Dotterel <i>Charadrius morinellus</i> (1)	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker <i>Dryobates minor</i> (6)	Rook <i>Corvus frugilegus</i> A
Teal <i>Anas crecca</i> W. (356)	Golden Plover <i>Pluvialis apricaria</i> W. M-2,200	Skylark <i>Alauda arvensis</i> B	Carrion Crow <i>Corvus corone</i> B
Mallard <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i> B	Grey Plover <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i> (2)	Sand Martin <i>Riparia riparia</i> P	Raven <i>Corvus corax</i> A
Pintail <i>Anas acuta</i> W.	Lapwing <i>Vanellus vanellus</i> B. W	Swallow <i>Hirundo rustica</i> S	Starling <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> B. W. M-c1,500
Garganey <i>Spatula querquedula</i> P (6)	Knot <i>Calidris canutus</i> (3)	House Martin <i>Delichon urbicum</i> S	Rose-coloured Starling <i>Pastor roseus</i> (1)
Shoveler <i>Spatula clypeata</i> W	Little Stint <i>Calidris minuta</i> (5)	Tree Pipit <i>Anthus trivialis</i> (1)	House Sparrow <i>Passer domesticus</i> B
Red-crested Pochard <i>Netta rufina</i> (8)	Pectoral Sandpiper <i>Calidris melanotos</i> (3)	Rock Pipit <i>Anthus petrosus</i> (1)	Tree Sparrow <i>Passer montanus</i> LB
Pochard <i>Aythya farina</i> P. W. (56)	Dunlin Regular <i>Calidris alpina</i> P	Water Pipit <i>Anthus spinoletta</i> (2)	Chaffinch <i>Fringilla coelebs</i> B. W
Pochard x Ferruginous Duck hybrid. (1)	Curlew Sandpiper <i>Calidris ferruginea</i> (1)	Meadow Pipit <i>Anthus pratensis</i> P. M-c150	Brambling <i>Fringilla montifringilla</i> W

Tufted Duck <i>Aythya fuligula</i> B. W	Ruff <i>Calidris pugnax</i> P	Yellow Wagtail <i>Motacilla flava flavissima</i> LB. M-21	Greenfinch <i>Chloris chloris</i> B
Scaup <i>Aythya marila</i> (2)	Jack Snipe <i>Lymnocyrtus minimus</i> W	Blue-headed Wagtail <i>Motacilla flava flava</i> (1)	Goldfinch <i>Carduelis carduelis</i> B
Common Scoter <i>Melanitta nigra</i> (3)	Snipe <i>Gallinago gallinago</i> P. W. LB	Pied Wagtail <i>Motacilla alba yarrelli</i> B. P	Siskin <i>Spinus spinus</i> W
Goldeneye <i>Bucephala clangula</i> W	Woodcock <i>Scolopax rusticola</i> W	White Wagtail <i>Motacilla alba alba</i> P	Linnet <i>Linaria cannabina</i> B. W M-770
Smew <i>Mergellus albellus</i> W. (6).	Black-tailed Godwit <i>Limosa limosa</i> P. M-19	Wren <i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i> B	Twite <i>Linaria flavirostris</i> (1)
Red-breasted Merganser <i>Mergus serrator</i> (1)	Bar-tailed Godwit <i>Limosa lapponica</i> (2)	Waxwing <i>Bombycilla garrulus</i> (5). W. M-16	Lesser Redpoll <i>Acanthis cabaret</i> W
Goosander <i>Mergus merganser</i> W.	Whimbrel <i>Numenius phaeopus</i> P	Dunnock <i>Prunella modularis</i> B	Common or Mealy Redpoll <i>Acanthis flammea</i> (3)
Ruddy Duck <i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i> LB-2011	Curlew <i>Numenius arquata</i> LB. P	Robin <i>Erithacus rubecula</i> B	Crossbill <i>Loxia curvirostra</i> (1)
Red-legged Partridge <i>Alectoris rufa</i> A	Spotted Redshank <i>Tringa erythropus</i> (2)	Nightingale <i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i> (1)	Bullfinch <i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i> B
Grey Partridge <i>Perdix perdix</i> LB	Redshank <i>Tringa totanus</i> P. W	Redstart <i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i> P. B?	Hawfinch <i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i> (1)
Quail <i>Coturnix coturnix</i> (2/3)	Greenshank <i>Tringa nebularia</i> P	Black Redstart <i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i> (1)	Snow Bunting <i>Plectrophenax nivalis</i> (1)
Pheasant <i>Phasianus colchicus</i> A	Green Sandpiper <i>Tringa ochropus</i> P. W	Whinchat <i>Saxicola rubetra</i> P	Yellowhammer <i>Emberiza citrinella</i> B
Little Grebe <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i> LB	Wood Sandpiper <i>Tringa glareola</i> (11)	Stonechat <i>Saxicola rubicola</i> W	Reed Bunting <i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i> B
Great Crested Grebe <i>Podiceps cristatus</i> B	Common Sandpiper <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i> P	Wheatear <i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i> P	Corn Bunting <i>Emberiza calandra</i> LB
Gannet <i>Morus bassanus</i> (1)	Turnstone <i>Arenaria interpres</i> (2)	Blackbird <i>Turdus merula</i> B	
Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i> W	Arctic Skua <i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i> (1)	Fieldfare <i>Turdus pilaris</i> W. M-1,000+	
Shag <i>Gulosus aristotelis</i> (1)	Mediterranean Gull <i>Ichthyaeetus melanocephalus</i> (16)	Song Thrush <i>Turdus philomelos</i> B. P	<b>Exotics/Escapees</b>
Bittern <i>Botaurus stellaris</i> (2)	Little Gull <i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i> (5)	Redwing <i>Turdus iliacus</i> W. M-1,000+	Black Swan.
Cattle Egret <i>Bubulcus ibis</i> (1)	Black-headed Gull <i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i> A. M-3,000	Mistle Thrush <i>Turdus viscivorus</i> B	Swan Goose (Chinese Goose).
Little Egret <i>Egretta garzetta</i> W	Laughing Gull <i>Leucophaeus atricilla</i> (1)	Cetti's Warbler <i>Cettia cetti</i> (7)	Bar Headed Goose
Great White Egret <i>Ardea alba</i> (8)	Ring-billed Gull <i>Larus delawarensis</i> (3)	Grasshopper Warbler <i>Locustella naevia</i> S. LB	Snow Goose
Grey Heron <i>Ardea cinerea</i> A. M-20	Common Gull <i>Larus canus</i> A	Sedge Warbler <i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i> B	Ross's Goose
White Stork <i>Ciconia ciconia</i> (3)	Lesser Black-backed Gull. <i>Larus fuscus</i> W	Marsh Warbler <i>Acrocephalus palustris</i> LB	Lesser Canada Goose types
Glossy Ibis <i>Plegadis falcinellus</i> (3)	Herring Gull <i>Larus argentatus</i> A.W M-c5000	Reed Warbler <i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i> B	Ruddy Shelduck
Spoonbill <i>Platalea leucorodia</i> (1)	Caspian Gull <i>Larus cachinnans</i> (2)	Blackcap <i>Sylvia atricapilla</i> B	Ruddy Shelduck/Shelduck hybrid
Honey-buzzard <i>Pernis apivorus</i> (1)	Yellow Legged Gull <i>Larus michahellis</i> A	Garden Warbler <i>Sylvia borin</i> B	Chilean Flamingo
Black Kite <i>Milvus migrans</i> (1)	Iceland Gull <i>Larus glaucooides</i> (c14)	Lesser Whitethroat <i>Curruca curruca</i> B	Lanner Falcon type. (Probably Peregrine/ Lanner hybrid)
Red Kite <i>Milvus milvus</i> A. M-3	Glaucous Gull <i>Larus hyperboreus</i> (5)	Whitethroat <i>Curruca communis</i> B	Cockatiel
Marsh Harrier <i>Circus aeruginosus</i> (3)	Great Black-backed Gull <i>Larus marinus</i> W. M-50	Chiffchaff <i>Phylloscopus collybita</i> B	Red Bishop
Hen Harrier <i>Circus cyaneus</i> (2)	Kittiwake <i>Rissa tridactyla</i> (9)	Willow Warbler <i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i> B	Budgerigar
Sparrowhawk <i>Accipiter nisus</i> B	Sandwich Tern <i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i> (2)	Wood Warbler <i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i> (1)	Canary
Buzzard <i>Buteo buteo</i> B	Common Tern <i>Sterna hirundo</i> P	Goldcrest <i>Regulus regulus</i> B	Zebra Finch

B–breeding. S–summer. W–winter. P–passage. A–all year. (\*)–number of records if relevant. M–max single count if relevant. LB–Lost breeder/has bred in the past.

Table 2. Full list of bird species recorded from the Avon valley around Lower Moor and local area.

## References

- Lord, J. and Munns, D.J. 1970. *Atlas of Breeding Birds of the West Midlands*. Collins, London.
- Jonsson, L. 1994. *Birds of Europe with North Africa and the Middle East*. A&C Black, London.
- RSPB Website. Available at: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/> [Accessed 20.11.22]
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## Images

01. The Avon floodplain at Lower Moor looking across to Haines Meadows, with Bredon Hill in the background 18.04.2017. Gary Farmer
02. Cattle grazing helps to keep a diverse sward and reduces scrub encroachment. Haines Meadows 04.10.22. Gary Farmer
03. Changes from summer hay-cutting to earlier silage-cutting contributed to the loss of Curlew as a breeding species in the area. Gary Farmer.
04. The newly fenced permissive route at Lower Moor 14.05.20. Gary Farmer.
05. Otters *Lutra lutra* are being seen more frequently, often in daylight. Gary Farmer.
06. Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus* is resident along both sides of the river and numbers appear to be increasing. Lower Moor 21.06.22. Gary Farmer.
07. Harvest Mouse *Micromys minutus* nests have been found in recent years including at Lower Moor 14.09.22. Rob Prudden.
08. Common Lizard *Zootoca vivipara* has only been noted on three occasions but may well be overlooked. Gary Farmer.
09. Avocets *Recurvirostra avosetta* first appeared at Lower Moor in 1996 and have become regular visitors in recent years. Gary Farmer.
10. Spoonbill was a new species for the area when this was dropped in at Lower Moor 01.09.21. Tom & Sally Hutchinson.
11. Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra* was once a common breeding bird in the area but is now rarely seen and “the future for this species in the south of the county looks bleak”. Gary Farmer.
12. The remains *Geotrupes spiniger* and Pygmy Shrew skull from a dissected Barn Owl pellet. 11.01.21, Haines Meadows. Gary Farmer.
13. Long-eared Owl at Haines Meadows 02.03.17. Andy Warr.