

Notes on birds in the Severn and Avon Vales July – September 2015.**The “Severn Hams”), Gloucestershire and south Worcestershire**

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[Editor’s note. Gulls, many Passerines and some other species have been removed from this report. The full report will eventually appear on the web site www.wbrc.org.uk]

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 Ham); Ripple Lake (east bank) just south of the M50 (though a new pit is currently being excavated north of the M 50), on the opposite bank from Longdon Marsh. (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), where 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 closed basin on the west bank of the Severn, north of the M50; the Longdon or Bushley Brook flows into the Severn; Worcestershire Wildlife Trust has a major reserve at Hill Court Farm, south of Marsh Lane, while north of the lane the land is subject to extensive flooding when the Severn is high; a little further downriver, upstream of Tewkesbury on the east bank and just in Gloucestershire, is The Mythe and Mythe Hook.

The Avon Meadows (on either side of the Avon, going north from Tewkesbury) including: the restored gravel pits at Bredon’s Hardwick (Worcs), nowadays more overgrown and subject to greater disturbance, hence less favourable for birds; Upham Meadow (sometimes called the “Great Hay Meadow”) and Summer Leasow at Twynning (Glos) which form an SSSI on ornithological grounds; Rectory Farm Meadows (Worcs), across the Avon from Upham Meadow and an SSSI on botanical grounds; and Strensham Pits (Worcs), sludge pools below the waterworks. Along the Avon on either side of Eckington Bridge are more hay meadows, notably Asham Meadows (like Upham, a Lammas Meadow). Upstream of Nafford, a series of new riverside wetlands have been created in the last few years along the Worcestershire Avon by excavation of scrapes and shallow lakes: the Gwen Finch Worcestershire Wildlife Trust Reserve; the new John Bennett Reserve; the Avon Meadows Community wetland and Local Nature Reserve, established in 2008, covering 24 hectares near Pershore Town Centre (where censuses are carried out at least once a week); and land at Lower Moor owned by the Vale Heritage Landscape Trust. North of Lower Moor, between Pershore and Fladbury, is the Throckmorton Landfill Site, which still attracts large numbers of feeding gulls, (as Gloucester LS used to do) and where the lagoons also 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” proper, between Tewkesbury and Gloucester, in which the main wetland areas are: Ashleworth and Hasfield Hams; Coombe Hill Canal and Meadows (Coombe Hill Canal is a long disused and overgrown canal running from Coombe Hill to Wainlodes); and Cobney and Leigh Meadows along the River Chelt and Leigh Brook above Wainlodes. Barrow Ponds were created by the artificial damming of a small tributary of the Chelt, east of the A38. 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 recently established Tewkesbury Nature Reserve along the River Swilgate east of Priors Park; the Severn between Lower Lode and Haw

Bridge; and the Severn from Haw Bridge, past Wainlodes, Ashleworth Quay and Sandhurst, to Gloucester. At Sandhurst, Maisemore and at Walham Pools near Gloucester there are a number of abandoned overgrown riverside brick-pits, artificial excavations in the floodplain.

The River Leadon flows into the Severn just above Gloucester, and its valley extends north eastwards past Highleadon and Upleadon.

The four most important sites along the Leadon Valley are: the meadows northeast of Highnam; Dark Barn; Tibberton Meadows (former Lammas meadows along a tributary); and the ponds at the Orchard Centre at Blackwells End near Collier’s Brook, a tributary of the Leadon, which have great potential.

Maisemore Ham is now largely converted to arable farming.

Sites on the edge of urban Gloucester, once Severn flood meadows: 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 used to attract large numbers of gulls, but numbers have decreased dramatically since a falconer was employed to disturb them; it has a pond attractive to passage and some resident waterbirds. A little further south, near the Gloucester-Sharpness Canal, are Netheridge Farm and the small Quedgeley Local Nature Reserve. Near the northern bypass, at the foot of Churchdown Hill, is the Horsebere Brook Flood Alleviation Area, opened in about 2010 to prevent flooding in the Longlevens suburb of Gloucester, as happened in summer 2007.

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 (Wilmer 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, has only very low flood-banks in some places and so floods easily above Tewkesbury. The River Chelt holds running water throughout the year, and when levels are low has muddy edges and mud banks.

Weather

At the start of July there was very hot air over the UK, particularly England, with a humid southerly flow from the continent, which brought record-breaking temperatures for July in parts of the south-east (36.7°C at Heathrow, a new UK record for July), and the highest temperatures since August 2003. The heat was followed by thunderstorms, and afterwards the month was typified by a westerly Atlantic weather type, bringing cool and generally rather changeable conditions, with rain or showers for much of the time, and only a few dry warm days. A vigorous low pressure system from 16 to 18 July brought heavy rain and strong winds to much of Scotland; a low pressure system on 24 July brought strong winds and heavy rain to south-east England. There were some cold nights, especially in the last few days, and overall it was a rather cool month despite the hot start. Rainfall was 131% of the average over England as a whole, but only 107% for the Midlands and 89% for southwest England; the mean temperature for the month in England was 0.5°C below average. In the Severn and Avon Vales the first five days were hot, with some thunder; from 6 July an area of patchy rain spread from the west, with a cold front sweeping down from the northwest on 8 July. From 12 to 15 July showers occurred, though a ridge of high pressure on 16 July brought a sunny day. In the second half of the month the weather was patchy, fine weather alternating with showers some rain on 22 July, 15mm in Gloucester on 24 July, much

the wettest day of the month; the total July rainfall in Gloucester was however only 40mm. Very cold, near frost, at Ashleworth in the early morning of 31 July.

August over the UK was mostly unsettled and fairly cool. In the first half of the month the most unsettled weather in UK was over Northern Ireland and Scotland, but later the jet-stream shifted southwards and formed a boundary between the cool, unsettled weather over the UK and the heat of mainland Europe. August was thus a wet month in the south of UK with several intense but localised falls of rain, some areas along the south coast (where it was the wettest August since 1977) receiving twice or even three times the monthly average. Rainfall over England and Wales was 125% of the average, and late in the month there was a run of days with relatively high daily rainfall totals. The daily Central England temperature was slightly below the 1981-2010 average, and southwest England was rather cool; unlike July, there were very few warm days and the temperature only exceeded 30°C on one day (22 August) in the southeast, so that August was a dull month in the south and southwest. In the Severn and Avon Vales, there were southwesterly winds from 1 August, not specially warm though the temperature did touch 24°C; the wind strengthened on 3 and 4 August, but became lighter on 5 August and the expected rain did not materialise. A fine day occurred on 8 August, when the thermometer hit 24°C in Gloucester, cooler on 9 August; an Atlantic depression moved through on 10 August, skirting the Vale to the east, and bringing a few spots of rain (the first for 11 days) to Gloucester; overcast with southwesterly winds but no rain on 11 August, bright and fine with easterly winds on 12 August (24°C in Gloucester); winds going southerly on 13 August, though there was little or no rain in the Severn Vale (less than 1mm in Gloucester); as the front went through, winds turned north-westerly, bringing heavy rain (26mm in Gloucester) on 14 August; high pressure from 15-18 August, fine but cool at first, warmer later (but maximum only 21°C); winds went westerly bringing Atlantic fronts and light rain on 19 August (4mm in Gloucester), dull and overcast though no rain on 20-21 August; briefly hot (29°C) on 22 August under the influence of high pressure spreading east from Central Europe; but the winds went southwest again from 23 to 28 August bringing Atlantic fronts and some light rain (7mm in Gloucester on 23 August, 8 mm on 26 August), with brighter but cool periods between the showers, the temperature in Gloucester barely reaching 20°C; from 29 to 31 August winds went north-westerly, bringing colder air and more rain (10mm on 31 August). Total rainfall in Gloucester in August was 67mm, making it the wettest month so far this year.

Over the month as a whole, September's weather was quite different from earlier months, being dry and fine in the northwest of the UK and less settled in the southeast; the eastward movement of high pressure was blocked in the first and last weeks by areas of high pressure that gave mostly fine settled weather with chilly nights. The middle of the month was more unsettled, but (unlike recent months) the jet stream pushed well to the south, allowing low pressure systems to affect mostly southern and central Britain. The average Central England Temperature was only 12.6°C, 1.4°C below the average for 1981-2010; this coolness was due to a lack of mild southwesterly airflows and to a high frequency of clear nights. Rainfall over England and Wales was only 73% of the 30 year average (74% in the Midlands, 84% in southwest England). Though cool, September was mostly sunny with a large percentage of nearly cloudless days early and late in the month. In late August and early September the British Isles were sandwiched between a large area of high pressure over the Atlantic (which shielded UK from westerly depressions) and an area of low pressure over the North Sea; the result was a cold airflow from the north, with some showers. In the Severn and Avon Vales, September therefore began as August had ended, with cool north-westerly winds and the odd spot of rain, and maximum temperatures only between 13° and 17°C, minima round 5°C. The high pressure moved gradually westward to cover the whole of UK, eventually linking with the European high pressure from 6-10 September, as winds went easterly, bringing dry conditions, high cloud and some sun; the temperature reached 18°C on 6 and 9 September, and 23°C on 10 September. High pressure

gave way to Atlantic fronts from 11 to 18 September, with strongish winds, mainly southerly or south-easterly, and lower temperatures (maxima in the upper teens) and light rain (8.8 mm on 14 September). High pressure took over briefly on 19/20 September, brining thick fog in the morning and, later, temperatures up to 19°C, but was replaced by Atlantic fronts from late on 20 September until 24 September, with fairly heavy showers (9mm on 22 September). High pressure took over again from 25 September until the end of the month, bringing an Indian summer with more sun (temperature reaching 19°C on 28 and 29 September) on light easterly winds. Total rainfall in Gloucester in September was 33 mm.

Water levels and flooding: generally

With a dry summer, water levels were already low at most sites in early July, with little open water remaining (except in deep water sites like Ripple Lake). Levels continued to drop during July and the first half of August, but stabilising with the damp conditions of the second half of August and early September, with levels just beginning to rise in late September.

Conditions at the main sites

Upham Meadow, Twynning: Little hay cut in early July, only one or two strips, but cutting carried out through month and completed by 1 August and all hay removed by 3 August.

Severn Ham, Tewkesbury: Some plots cut for hay in late June/early July. Normal hay cutting regulations provide that all hay should be cut and baled by 12 July, but the two farmers who had won the auction for hay cutting both agreed (with the support of the Town Council) to delay hay cutting until the Curlew chicks hatched; remaining areas cut on 28 July.

Ashleworth/Hasfield Hams: In early July, the only open water was in the main reserve pool, no other surface water and most ditches dry; slight inflow to reserve on 15 August after rain on previous day, but very little. Some hay being cut on the SSSI off the reserve on 3 July; most hay on reserve cut on 4 July; cattle brought in for aftermath grazing in early August.

Coombe Hill: Water levels in scrapes very low in early July, north scrape almost dry, south scrape drying fast; both scrapes completely dry by 18 July, though still plenty of water in Long Pool. Although late summer 2013 and 2014 were fairly dry and water levels dropped considerably, this is the first time that the scrapes have dried out completely in summer since 2011; before that, they dried out completely in 2010 and 2003. New shallow scrapes and ditches north of canal were excavated on 3 and 4 August, using RSPB's rotary ditcher; these (like the present scrapes excavated in 2002) have no water supply and simply retain surface water. The rain on 14 August replenished the Long Pool and south scrape somewhat, but there was little change by mid-September; in the second half of September water levels began to rise again very slightly, but the scrapes remained largely dry. All hay had been cut and removed by 18 July, fields being grazed by cattle from August onwards.

Leigh and Cobney Meadows: Fields very dry in early July; some, but not all, hay had been cut by 11 July. Very little rain left in flight pond at Cobney Meadows on 8 August.

Horsbere Brook Flood Alleviation Area: Water levels dropping, leaving very little water; three years' growth of pioneer willows removed by volunteer party in two sessions.

Walmore Common: Flashes on the Common cleared and deepened during August, hay cut taken, ponies and cattle grazing in September.

Overview of bird records

Because of the dry summer and low water levels, water birds were restricted to the few sites still holding some water, notably Ripple Lake and the gravel workings along the Worcestershire Severn. Many Gloucestershire sites dried out almost completely.

Unusually, there were two records of breeding Gadwall in Gloucestershire. The breeding season had more or less ended for most waders by the end of June, but those Curlews that had not already been predated were still raising chicks in July, and some successes were recorded, largely where hay cutting was gradual or late. Almost certain proof of breeding by Water Rail was obtained at Coombe Hill, and a Spotted Crake may have bred there too.

Greylag and Canada Geese returned from moulting areas (believed to lie further to the north, but as yet poorly known and understood) from August onwards and a few more ducks appeared – mainly Teal (the first of which had already appeared in June) and Shoveler. The Canada gosling that had been adopted by Mute Swans at Hartpury did finally return to the goose flock,

A Marsh Harrier, the only one of the autumn, was recorded in south Worcestershire in August and an early Merlin appeared at Grimley on 1 September.

The southward autumn passage of waders had already begun in June with the first returning Snipe and Green Sandpipers, but the dry conditions meant there was little to retain passing birds from July to September, and many migrants may have passed straight over the Vales over towards the coast and estuary without stopping; however there were some records of southward bound Ruff, Black-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel, a sprinkling of Greenshanks and a single Wood Sandpiper. An unusually early Jack Snipe was found at Coombe Hill in early September.

Among passerines, the proof of breeding by Cetti's Warbler at Pershore was a welcome first. There was quite heavy hirundine passage in early September, with a fair showing of migrant Yellow and Pied Wagtails, Redstarts Whinchats, Wheatears and a single Worcestershire Rock Pipit, a species which regularly evades the notice of Gloucestershire observers in the Vales.

Swans

Mute Swan: In the very dry conditions there were few concentrations of non-breeding birds; there was a small group on the fishing lake at Bredon's Hardwick Pits, but much the largest was on Ripple Lake.

Worcestershire: At Ripple Lake a non-breeding flock of 38 on 19 July, 41 (no cygnets) on 11 August. At Pershore Wetlands ones and twos regularly throughout the period, eight on 17 September. On the fishing lake at Bredon's Hardwick Pits about 15 on 12 July, at least four on 4 August. At Bredon's Hardwick Pits one on 18 August.

At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, a pair with one cygnet was on the Severn on 10 July; a different pair on the Mill Avon (both familiar birds with very old colour rings) with one cygnet on in late July and mid-August (when the very aggressive male attacked other swans in the vicinity); a third ringed pair without young on 25 and 28 July. At Lower Lode brickpits a pair with four cygnets on 8 August, two pairs with five and one cygnets on 5 September. At Coombe Hill two adults flew out early on 4 July; a pair with two cygnets on the Parish Drain (not previously seen all summer) on 27 August. At Leigh Meadows one on the Chelt on 12 September. At Hartpury Orchard Centre a pair adopted a Canada gosling early in the season and were still tending it on 11 July. At Horsbere one on 7 September, four adults on 23 September. At Walmore a pair with three cygnets that had bred on site present throughout the period, sometimes hidden in ditches. At Upham Meadow an unringed female with four cygnets on 2 July, a different pair with six cygnets on the Avon on 5 July and 5 September.

Geese

Greylag Goose: Worcestershire: At Ripple Lake 46 on 19 July, 238 on 11 August. Along the Avon: At Lower Moor, where the species is resident throughout the year, large number loaf throughout the breeding season and from mid-July birds arrive from other areas, to

feed on maize stubble with numbers peaking in mid November; monthly maxima this year were 140 in July, 218 in August and 240 in September (as against 2014 figures of 156, 226, 245). At Pershore Wetlands eight on 12 September, 40 on 17 September. At Bredon's Hardwick Pits about 50, including a crèche of young goslings, in late July. On the Avon Meadows 50 on 22 July.

At Coombe Hill geese were clearly roosting on the Long Pool in July and August, to judge from the number of feathers shed, but moved out early to feed elsewhere and were only occasionally seen locally; the two breeding pairs observed earlier in the summer were seen with their families of one and ten goslings on 4 July; up to 44 flying birds for the rest of the month, with 26 coming to roost on the evening of 26 July; 20 flew out on 31 July, passing over Ashleworth in the direction of Newent. Few records in August, perhaps because the birds had moved off to Ripple Lake (but 16 on 18 August); increase from early September: 55 on 5 September, 160 on 12 September, 36 in from Barrow direction on 22 September, went on northwards towards Tewkesbury (or Ripple?).

Canada Goose: Worcestershire: At Ripple Lake 83 on 19 July, 204 on 11 August. Recorded at Pershore Wetlands in September: six on 3 September, 37 on 10 September. At Bredon's Hardwick Pits 13 on 12 July, 40 (including a crèche of full-grown goslings) on 14 July. On Avon Meadows 15 on 22 July.

At Brockridge Farm, Twynning, five on a farm pond on 18 August present looked like a family party of two adults and three fully-grown young. At Ashleworth seven birds on 3 July; 27 birds flew in from Coombe Hill early on 31 July; 20 flew in on 8 September; only two, probably broken-winged, on 12 September. At Coombe Hill none seen in July, though some may have been roosting with the Greylags and flying out early; 17 on 11 August, 12 over on 15 August, five on 18 August, 30 coming from the Coombe Hill direction (probably roosting there), flew down the Severn at 06h30 on 29 August; 18 on 5 September, 13 on 12 September. At Hartpury Orchard Centre ten on 11 July; the gosling adopted by the pair of Mute Swans eventually returned to the Canada flock after eight weeks. At Upham Meadow maximum of 21 birds in July; 12 on 1 August, 18 on 22 September. At Avon Meadows between Twynning and Tewkesbury eight on 2 July.

Feral and Hybrid Geese: At Ripple Lake on 11 August, a full-grown Canada x Greylag cross, which looked like one of the family of six seen last winter. The Swan Goose x Greylag cross was at Ripple on 19 and 27 September.

Egyptian Goose: On the Avon above Tewkesbury one on 1 July.

Ducks

Shelduck: At Coombe Hill, no sign in July of the adults which had been present until June and were suspected of attempting to breed; a flying juvenile which didn't stay long on 9 August – perhaps locally bred?

Surface-feeding ducks:

An odd few returning Teal had already appeared in late June; numbers increased very slightly in the dry conditions of July and August, with rather more in September. Shoveler also appeared from mid-August onwards. Other wintering ducks began to appear in very small numbers from late September.

Wigeon: First records not until the last days of September: at Coombe Hill ten on 27 September, two on 28 September.

Gadwall: Unusually, two proofs of breeding in Gloucestershire in July. At Coombe Hill a female was seen with three well grown ducklings on 18 July, and four Gadwall on 21 July were presumably the same individuals; one on 25 July, an eclipse male on 15 August. On Avon Meadows between Twynning and Tewkesbury a female with a half-grown duckling on 12 July (not recorded here in "Birds of Gloucestershire").

Teal: Usually the first duck to reappear on southward passage, and up to four had been noted in the last ten days of June at Coombe Hill, where up to five were noted throughout July, then up to 15 by 18 August with 37 on 30 August, and similar numbers during September. Elsewhere: at Pershore Wetlands seven on 17 September, three on 24 September; at Lower Lode brickpits singles on 8 August and 5 September; at Ashleworth five on 6 September, 35 on 12 September; at Walmore one on 23 August and 4 and 14 September.

Mallard: Worcestershire: At Ripple Lake 18 on 19 July, 40 on 11 August, including two females with ducklings. At Pershore Wetlands up to 30 regularly throughout the period.

At Lower Lode brickpits ten on 8 August, 40 on 5 September. At Ashleworth 15 on 15 August, 25 on 12 September. At Coombe Hill up to 160 in July, not more than 60 during August, but 200 gleaning the recently cut barley field on 5 September, and up to 105 in September. At Cobney Meadows 15 on 8 August, five on 12 September. At Hartpury Orchard Centre an adult with eight ducklings on 9 July. At Horsbere single figures throughout the period. At Walmore five on 28 September. At Upham Meadow up to 20 on the Avon. At Avon Meadows between Twyning and Tewkesbury 20 on 2 July, a female with six large ducklings on 12 July.

Pintail: The first of the winter appeared in Worcestershire in late September, but there were no records from Gloucestershire. At Camp Lane Pits an eclipse male on 18 September and a female on 26 September; at Clifton Pits one on 26 September.

Garganey: Worcestershire: At John Bennett a juvenile on 25 and 26 September.

Shoveler: At Coombe Hill one in eclipse on 10 August was the first since a pair in late May; one in eclipse on 18 August, two on 5 September, increase to 12 on 7 September, 22 (all in eclipse plumage) on 12 September.

Hybrid: Worcestershire: The Blue-winged/Cinnamon Teal x Shoveler hybrid seen at Grimley in August 2014 was back again on 10 August.

Diving ducks:

Tufted Duck: Worcestershire: at Ripple Lake 20 on 19 July, 16 on 11 August.

At Coombe Hill a female on the Long Pool on 14 July. On the Avon between Twyning and Tewkesbury a male on 2 July, a female on 12 July.

Hybrid: Worcestershire: At Ripple Lake a Ring-necked Duck x Pochard cross on 27 September.

Gamebirds

Quail: At Ashleworth none had been heard singing during a long series of regular early morning visits since April, but on 14 July two were flushed from a tiny area of uncut grass at the edge of a field, shortly after the completion of hay making over the rest of the reserve; interestingly, two were flushed from exactly the same spot on 16 July; had they been nesting quietly somewhere in the area without being observed, then disturbed by hay making activities? At Coombe Hill on the other hand (where several Quail had been heard from late May onwards), one was singing on 1 and 4 July, but was not heard after that date.

Divers and Grebes

Little Grebe: At Hartpury Orchard Centre an adult with two chicks on 11 July, one chick seen on 15 July; only one chick survived; one on 1 September, an adult and an immature on 6 September, one on 7 September.

Great Crested Grebe: Worcestershire: at Ripple Lake 15 on 19 July, nine (no young) on 11 August. At Bredon's Hardwick Pits one on 22 July. On the fishing lake at Bredon's Hardwick Pits one or two on 12 July.

Cormorant

Cormorant: Ripple Lake and Lower Lode brickpits (which are only three or four miles apart) continue to be the most favoured loafing spots. Other records are mainly birds moving up and down the Severn and Avon.

Worcestershire: At Ripple Lake eight on 11 August. At Pershore Wetlands one on 13 August, two on 12 September.

Gloucestershire: At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, three on 8 July; one fishing on the Avon on 20 July. At Lower Lode brickpits 23 perching on a dead tree on 8 August, 15 on 5 September. At Coombe Hill up to five flying over on many dates from July to September, two fishing on 8 August and one loafing on the Long Pool on 10 August. At Leigh Meadows one on a dead tree on 12 September. At Walmore two fishing on 5 August, one on 23 August, two loafing on 29 September; this species has always been a rare visitor here, but has in the past year been occasionally noted fishing in the ditches. At Upham Meadow one along the Avon on 22 September. On the Avon the between Twyning and Tewkesbury one feeding on 12 July.

Hérons and Egrets

Little Egret: The numbers of records and individuals increased in Worcestershire over the course of the summer. At Grimley Pits (mainly Camp Lane but some at Wagon Wheel) ones and twos in the first half of July, up to seven in the second half of July; up to eight in August; twos and threes for most of September, but seven on 30 September. At Clifton Pits up to ten in July; up to four on several dates in August. At Pershore Wetlands one on 17 September. At John Bennett up to ten on several dates in July, four on 17 August. At Gwen Finch up to four in late July. At Bredon's Hardwick Pits four perching in trees on an island on 15 July.

At Tewkesbury Nature Reserve one on 25 July. At Coombe Hill up to five on several dates in July, with one on 11 July joining herons in catching eels in the dwindling waters of the south scrape; on 8 August four, which had apparently roosted, flew out early to the north, perhaps going to sites on the Avon; singles on 10, 11 and 15 August, but none after this date, no doubt because of falling water levels. At Hartpury Orchard Centre five on 9 July. At Horsbere singles on several dates from July to September. Over Netheridge Farm three circling on 11 July. At Walmore one on 29 September.

Great White Egret: Worcestershire: At Ryall Pits three flew south on 11 July. At Coombe Hill one flew over on 5 July. (There were records of up to five roosting in the Slimbridge/Frampton area on 2 and 3 July). These records may reflect post breeding dispersal, now that this species breeds in England.

Grey Heron: Worcestershire: At Ripple Lake singles on 19 July and 11 August. At Pershore Wetlands ones and twos regularly throughout the period. Near the Avon at Bredon's Hardwick East one on 18 July, three on 4 August.

At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, two on 8 July. At Lower Lode brickpits one on 8 August, two on 5 September. At Ashleworth two on 15 August, one on 8 September, two on 12 September. At Coombe Hill eleven on 4 July included some making baby noises, which had no doubt only recently left the heronry, but the adults were not interested in a large dead fish in the drying scrape; eleven on 11 July, some catching quite large eels in the south scrape; six on 14 July (one eating an eel); six on 18 July; numbers recorded in August and September were lower, maximum five. At Leigh Meadows one on 11 July. At Cobney Meadows one on 8 August and 12 September. At Horsbere ones and twos throughout the

period. Along the Avon between Twynning and Tewkesbury two on 12 July.

Raptors

Red Kite: An increasing number of records as this species becomes established. At Tirley one drifted upriver on 20 August. At Coombe Hill one in a thermal on 9 July, one on 28 September. At Walmore one soaring on 29 September.

Marsh Harrier: The only record was in Worcestershire: a male quartering a cornfield by the M5 near Strensham on 19 August.

Sparrowhawk: Worcestershire: At Pershore Wetlands ones and twos regularly throughout the period.

At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, a male on 12 July. At Coombe Hill one on 21 July, a female on 4 August, one on 10 August, one hunting on 19 September. At Hartpury Orchard Centre one on 1 September. At Walmore one on 23 August. At Upham Meadow one in flight carrying prey (perhaps a bird, but not a Curlew chick) on 2 July; another flying over high on 5 July.

Buzzard: Worcestershire: at Pershore Wetlands ones and twos regularly throughout the period, four on 17 September.

At Coombe Hill nine on a thermal on 9 July, then ones and twos until September. At Leigh Meadows two on 11 July. At Hartpury Orchard Centre four on 9 July, one on 1 September. At Horsbere one on 7 September. At Sudmeadow six on 10 September. At Upham Meadow ones and twos throughout, one being mobbed by an adult Curlew on 2 July.

Kestrel: Worcestershire: At Pershore Wetlands ones and twos in September. At Avon Meadows a female on 15 July.

At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, a male was regularly seen throughout July. At Coombe Hill a juvenile on 21 July, up to three in August. At Hartpury Orchard Centre (where breeding had been recorded in May) one on 1 September, two on 7 September. At Horsbere ones and twos in July and September. At Sudmeadow two on 10 September. At Walmore one on 23 August. At Upham Meadow one on 10 July, a male on 22 July.

Merlin: Worcestershire: at Grimley an early record on 1 September.

Hobby: This species, very secretive during the breeding season, becomes easier to observe in late summer when young birds are on the wing. Worcestershire: at Clifton one on 2 July. Along the Avon: at Pershore Wetlands one through on 20 July, two on 30 July, singles on 5, 8 and 28 September. At Little Comberton (near Bredon) two on 19 August, three on 20 August. At Strensham one on 9 August. At Kemerton Lake two on 21 July and 15 September.

Over The Mill Avon at Tewkesbury one catching dragonflies on 28 September. At Tirley at least one on 19 July, one on 20 August. One over Ashleworth village on 11 July. At Coombe Hill one on 15 August, one on 22 September, one chasing Swallows on 4 September. At Leigh Meadows one on 11 September. Over Hartpury village one on 26 August; at the Orchard Centre one on 12 September. At Walmore an adult on 20 July, a single on 23 August. At Upham Meadow one in flight on 22 July. Along the Avon north of Tewkesbury one on 25 September.

Peregrine: At Coombe Hill one on 2 July, an adult male on 18 August and 12 September, one on 27 September.

Rails and Crakes

Water Rail: At Coombe Hill singles were seen in vegetation round the Long Pool, where water levels were low, on 4 and 18 July; one calling from the Long Pool on 25 July; then three (an adult and two fully fledged juveniles) on 1 August giving almost certain proof of local breeding, often assumed, but rarely proven; a juvenile seen on

8 August; one on 10 August, two juveniles seen separately on 18 August, one on 5 September.

Spotted Crane: At Coombe Hill one had been heard on several dates in the second half of June; not heard in the very early morning of 4 or 11 July, but a bird briefly seen on 21 July was considered to be a Spotted Crane.

Common Crane: After a spate of records of birds from the Great Crane Project in the spring, no records either in Gloucestershire or Worcestershire in this period. No doubt they are less inclined to wander outside the spring migratory period.

Moorhen: Worcestershire: at Pershore Wetlands up to six regularly throughout the period.

At Lower Lode brickpits two on 8 August. At Coombe Hill an adult with four chicks on 11 July; three families with chicks on 21 July, one chick was snapped up by a fox which jumped out of the reeds; 15 or 20 on various dates in August when water levels were low; numbers recorded smaller in September. At Horsbere two on 10 August, eight on 23 September.

Coot: Worcestershire: Ripple Lake seemed to hold most of the Coot in the area during the summer: 211 on 19 July, 233 on 11 August. At Pershore Wetlands ones and twos regularly throughout the period, with six on 9 July and eight on 16 July. At the fishing lake at Bredon's Hardwick Pits two on 12 July; at Bredon's Hardwick pits numbers in single figures in early July.

At Lower Lode brickpits one on 8 August, 12 on 5 September. At Coombe Hill, two adults and a full grown chick on the south scrape on 4 July; after this, all records were of adults with chicks on the canal: an adult with a large chick on 11 July, nine (four juveniles) on 25 July, six on 8 August, two with two juveniles on the canal on 18 August, two on 12 and 22 September. At Hartpury Orchard Centre one with a chick on 9 July. At Horsbere three on 10 August, two on 7 and 9 September.

Waders

Waders that had bred in the area (Oystercatcher, Little Ringed Plover, Lapwing, Curlew and Redshank) moved out early in the period. In the dry conditions, southward passage was disappointing, thus there were very small numbers of Ringed Plover and Dunlin and no records of Temminck's Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Sanderling or Turnstone (all recorded on northward passage in spring). Very respectable numbers of Green Sandpipers occurred however, many of them presumed to be adults that stayed to moult before moving on to winter quarters much further south.

Oystercatcher: Up to about six birds at various spots along Avon in early July – probably birds known to have bred (or to have attempted breeding) in the area (John Bennett, Kemerton Lake). Both along the Avon and Severn birds disappeared, no doubt returning to the coast or estuary, by the end of July.

Worcestershire: At Ripple Lake five on 19 July. Along the Avon: at Bredon's Hardwick Pits two on 12 July, singles on 14 and 18 July, three on 23 July; at Bredon's Hardwick East six on 12 July, four on 14 July.

At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, one flew over on 8 July, one heard on 17 July. At Coombe Hill the two failed breeding adults were still present on 4 July (last date). At Upham Meadow two on 2 July, two pairs on 5 July, five on 10 July, one on 22 July, all simply feeding and showing no signs of breeding behaviour. On the Avon between Twynning and Tewkesbury two flying over on 12 July.

Avocet: Little or no indication of passage by the birds that have nested for some years at Upton Warren. Worcestershire: At Wagon Wheel Pits Grimley one on 21 September.

Little Ringed Plover: Worcestershire: At Ripple Lake five on 19 July.

The status of this species at Coombe Hill, where most Gloucestershire Severn Vale records come from, is uncertain, and complicated. Birds after mid-June no doubt include return southward migrants, but some may be wandering off duty birds from local breeding areas (e.g. the Worcestershire gravel workings), perhaps failed breeders, perhaps non-breeders. Numbers in late summer and autumn this year were lower because the scrapes dried out early, though records continued until the middle of August, with fewer juveniles - perhaps indicating a poor breeding season? Four on 1 July, as many as ten (nine adults) on 2 July, just one juvenile on 3 July; four, including an adult and a juvenile, on 4 July; five adults on 5 July, an adult with three juveniles on 9 and 11 July; one adult on 14 July; two juveniles on 25 July; an adult from 7 to 11 August; none after this date, by when the scrapes were dry.

Ringed Plover: At Coombe Hill one on 4 July.

Golden Plover: No September records this year of this species which occurs on southward passage in some years.

Lapwing: A few breeding birds (adults and fledged chicks) from late or replacement clutches were still present until the middle of July. Small numbers of passage birds, including some birds of the year, which complicates the picture, from outside the area were observed while the breeding birds were still present, but numbers were small, no doubt because of the low water levels.

Breeding birds: At Coombe Hill four adults were still attending five chicks from three broods on 4 July; three adults with one full grown chick round scrape, plus an adult with three chicks round Long Pool on 11 July; of four on 14 July one was definitely a juvenile, and three more may have been; seven juveniles on 18 July; five (at least one juvenile) by day on 21 July, but 20 that evening were probably migrants; just one adult on 25 July, four birds on 28 July and 1 August, when one was still making alarm calls as though young birds were about; only one on morning of 4 August; six (five adults and a juvenile) on 8 August, two on 10 August, two flying juveniles on 11 August. Records after this date were all considered to be migrants.

Migrants: Worcestershire: At Ripple Lake 17 on 19 July, 21 on 11 August. At Bredon's Hardwick 11 on 12 July, five on 15 July, nine (including some flying juveniles) on 22 July.

At Coombe Hill numbers varied erratically, suggesting passage birds: 60 on 9 July, 80 on 16 July, 28 on Long Pool on 18 July, joined by a flock of 106 which flew in, all probably migrants; 120 on 19 July; on the evening of 21 July 20 on Long Pool included 13 adults and seven juveniles; on the evening of 4 August, 15 on the edge of Long Pool after only one that morning; flock of 12 on 10 August, six on 15 August, 46 on 16 August; one on 18 August, flock of 45 on 7 September, 25 on 28 September.

Dunlin: Remarkably few records: In Worcestershire four at Ripple Lake on 19 July; in Gloucestershire three at Coombe Hill on 26 July.

Ruff: Worcestershire: At Camp Lane Pits, Grimley, a juvenile on 27 August, one on 1 September. At Clifton Pits two to three on many dates between 14 August and 5 September, often identified as juveniles. At John Bennett two juveniles on 14 and 17 August. No records in Gloucestershire.

Jack Snipe: At Coombe Hill a very early bird was flushed on 5 September, but not found on 7 September; one on 22 September.

Snipe: A first early returning bird had been recorded at Coombe Hill on 19 June; as usual, records of small numbers continued through July, and into August and September.

Worcestershire: at Pershore Wetlands two on 15 September, four on 19 September, one on 27 September.

At Ashleworth a single on 12 September. At Coombe Hill singles on many days in July, monthly maximum three on 25 July; records throughout August and September, maxima of nine on 18 August and ten on 5 September. At Walmore the first of the autumn was on 20 July, three on 23 August, six on 29 September.

Black-tailed Godwit: A string of records in early July in Worcestershire, no doubt birds returning from Iceland (mainly adults?), but also a series of records in late August and early September, probably juveniles?. At Camp Lane Pits Grimley three on 8 July. At Clifton Pits a juvenile from 29 August to 3 September. At Ripple Lake one on 25 July, a juvenile on 30 August. At Pershore Wetlands one on 30 and 31 July. At John Bennett eight on 4 July, two on 5 July, one on 7 July. At Bredon's Hardwick Pits three in summer plumage on 12 July. The only Gloucestershire record was of a juvenile at Coombe Hill on 22 September.

Whimbrel: As is usually the case records on southward migration in autumn are much less numerous than on northward migration in spring. At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, on 20 July, three flew over high to the south, calling, and were clearly migrants; at Ashleworth on 31 July, one calling at first light, probably a migrant that had stopped to roost there.

Curlew: Recent publications have suggested that Curlews are one of the most highly threatened, if not the most highly threatened breeding species in UK, largely because of the poor production of young birds. Observations earlier in the season had shown that some breeding birds failed in May and June, probably because of predation. Curlews, as the largest wader, clearly have a longer breeding season than Oystercatcher, Lapwing or Redshank, and many of their young do not fledge until July. This year, several breeding pairs were found to be successful in raising young, usually at sites where hay was cut late or was cut gradually, leaving some grass uncut to serve as a refuge for chicks. It is hoped to organise a survey of breeding Curlew next spring and summer, to investigate the status of breeding Curlews and the reason for the perceived local decline.

Worcestershire: Young had been found at Wick and Asham Meadows in June. On the Avon Meadows at Bredon's Hardwick East one landed with alarm calls in an uncut hayfield on 2 July; a male was bubbling here on 6 July; on 12 July after the hay had been cut, three birds were present, at least one (and probably two) fully grown juveniles, the third probably an adult; on 14 July at least one, probably an adult; on 15 July three adults and three flying juveniles; on 18 July at least two adults and two flying juveniles; on 22 July a single adult giving alarm calls, but no juveniles found; none on 4 August, but remains found of one Curlew, probably killed by a raptor.

At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury (not surveyed earlier in the season because of high disturbance from dog walkers and joggers) breeding was successful: the same adult (recognisable by a displaced feather in its right wing), was first seen with two largish but non flying chicks on 3 July; the adult with one or two chicks in the long grass was seen regularly in almost daily watches until 15 July when at least one chick was able to fly, then again regularly until 20 July; during this period the adult would occasionally fly (presumably for a rest) just across the Avon to Breakingstone Meadow, where the hay had been cut. On 23 July one adult was seen moving between one chick on the Severn Ham and another on Breakingstone Meadow; on 25 July the usual adult was on Breakingstone Meadow with alarm calls, but no young were seen; on 28 July a recently dead chick was found on Breakingstone Meadow. It should be noted that the farmers who had purchased the right to mow the hay had, with the approval of the Town Council, agreed to delay hay cutting until the Curlews had flown.

At Ashleworth / Hasfield Hams the breeding Curlews had failed in June and none were seen in July. At Coombe Hill after regular night roosts through June, no Curlew roost was found at first light on 4 or 11 July and it appeared all breeding adults had moved off to the estuary, since none were found by day on 14, 21 or 28 July; the juveniles seen from 25 July onwards (see below) were considered to have been incoming migrants, but might just possibly have been locally bred. At Leigh Meadows none were left on 11 July. At Upham Meadow about five adults, with two chicks, were seen on 2 July; at least four adults, with at least two, perhaps four chicks, on 5 July; two adults and one, maybe two, chicks on 10 July; one agitated adult on 15 July; at least two adults and two flying chicks on 22 July, none on 23 July. On Avon Meadows at Bredon's Hardwick West (on the opposite bank from the Worcestershire birds mentioned above three adults, with no young, were feeding in a cut hayfield on 2 July.

Migrants: Several interesting observations were made in July of birds flying straight over the breeding areas and going on without stopping, all presumed to be adults migrating towards the estuary after the end of their breeding activities. At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, two adults flew over to the south, calling, on 8 July, attracting no interest from the breeding adult still present, and disappearing to the south. At Ashleworth on 16 July, when the breeding birds were presumed to have failed, one (the first here for a long time) flew in from the north east, circled over the reserve at about 09h00, then flew on downriver. At Coombe Hill on 12 July one flew over from east to west without landing or calling; on 25 July three flew in, at least one (perhaps all of them) a juvenile; on 26 July two (age unknown) were on fields south of the canal, perhaps two of those seen the previous day; on 1 August a single juvenile was feeding in a grassy field south of the canal, on 4 August two juveniles were feeding in long grass; these birds were thought to be young that had moved in from elsewhere, but might just possibly have been locally bred; on 5, 6 and 7 August a single bird flew over the Long Pool area, in mid-afternoon, calling, age unknown; none after 8 August.

Spotted Redshank: Not a single record in spring or autumn, in either county! Where have they all gone?

Redshank: Worcestershire: At John Bennett the young bird fledged in June remained on its own from 6 to 12 July (last date). At Bredon's Hardwick Pits two, no doubt migrants, on 14 July.

The only record in Gloucestershire was of one on 9 July at Coombe Hill.

Greenshank: More often seen than other migrant waders, but still relatively few records.

Worcestershire: At Camp Lane Pits, Grimley, two on 24 August. At Clifton Pits one on 18 July flew off to the south; one on 25 and 26 July; one on 2 August, two on 4 August, one on most days from 22 August to 5 September, with two on 30 August. At Ripple Lake one on 31 July. Along the Avon: at Pershore Wetlands singles on 18 and 19 September; at Lower Moor one on 18 September; at John Bennett one on 26 July which flew off to the north; one in the evening of 26 September. At Kemerton Lake one on 9 September.

At Coombe Hill one on 9 July, two juveniles on 17 August, one on 9 September.

Green Sandpiper: Records not available from Worcestershire, but there must have been some! In Gloucestershire (where the first returning birds had been recorded on 16 June) good numbers built up in July and August, especially at Coombe Hill, probably birds staying to moult? At Ashleworth Ham one on 5 July, two on 24 August. At Coombe Hill many records including eight on 2 July, five looking like adults on 4 July, 17 on 18 July, 14 on 25 July, 12 on 28 July; eleven on 4 August, 15 on 10 August, 16 on 11 August, nine on 15 August, 12 on 18 August, nine on 23 August, after which

there was a sharp decrease; singles on 27 and 30 August and on four dates in September, the latest 28 September. At Leigh Meadows one along the Chelt on 12 September. At Hartpury Orchard Centre singles on 22 July and 27 August.

Wood Sandpiper: Worcestershire: At Clifton Pits one from 23 August to 1 September.

Common Sandpiper: Worcestershire: At Ripple Lake three on 19 July.

At Coombe Hill singles on 18 July and 23 August, four on 27 August. At Horsbere singles on 4 August and 1 September.

Selected Passerines

Grasshopper Warbler: At Coombe Hill (where singing birds had been recorded through April and June, and breeding assumed) one, sometimes two, still singing on several dates until the very early morning of 11 July; none heard after this date until 10 August, when one was singing strongly from the same place, perhaps a young male of the year.

Sedge Warbler: At most sites birds seemed to move out very rapidly as soon as the breeding season was over (probably moving on to south coast reed beds to put on weight before migrating to Africa).

Worcestershire: at Pershore Wetlands maxima of ten in July and August, last date 3 September.

At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, one still singing from 3 to 15 July, two on 20 July. At Ashleworth Ham (where the first juveniles had been caught on 23 June), two singing on 3 July; eight caught (two adults and six juveniles) on 16 July; only one still singing, two adults retrapped and two juveniles caught on 23 July; no song on 31 July but six (three adults and three juveniles) caught; on 15 August no song, and most seemed to have departed, only one juvenile caught; after 22 August none seen, heard or caught. At Coombe Hill, the one site where birds stayed into September, five were singing on 4 July, one still singing on 11 July; an adult with four juveniles on 18 July; five (two of them singing) on 25 July; singles on 28 July, 1 and 4 August, at least three on 8 August; no song on 10 August but at least three seen; five on 11 August, eight on 15 August, five on 18 August, at least one as late as 7 September. At Hartpury Orchard Centre at least two on 1 September. At Horsbere one singing on 4 July; a male singing briefly on 26 July was probably a passing migrant. At Walmore four on 20 July and six (five juveniles) on 11 August. At Upham Meadow three singing on 2 July, one on 5 July, two on 10 July. At Avon Meadows between Twyning and Tewkesbury three singing on 2 and 12 July.

Reed Warbler: Worcestershire: at Pershore Wetlands up to 12 in July, smaller numbers in August, the last record was of three on 20 August.

At Tewkesbury Nature reserve one on 25 July. At Ashleworth one seen on 6 September. At Coombe Hill up to three singing on many dates in July, one in subsong on 10 August. At Hartpury Orchard Centre still calling on 9 July, still at least 12 on 15 July, one on 7 September. At Walmore five on 31 July, one on 4 September. At Upham Meadow two singing on 2 and 10 July, one on 15 July. At Avon Meadows between Twyning and Tewkesbury two singing on 2 July, three on 12 July.

These are unconfirmed records, compiled by M. Smart from his own observations and those of Les Brown, with additional records from Gordon Avery, Steve French, Mervyn Greening, Alan Hooper, Andy Jayne, Rob Prudden, Graham Smith, Alisa Swanson and Andy Warr, from the Pershore Wetlands Survey and the Ashleworth and Coombe Hill logbooks, with some cherries picked from the Gloster Birder and Worcester Birding websites and the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust website.