

Notes on birds in the Severn and Avon Vales (the "Severn Hams"), Gloucestershire and south Worcestershire January – March 2018

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General introduction

See Smart_Mike--Notes on birds in the Severn and Avon Vales October to December 2017.

Weather

At national level, January started mild and changeable; it was very windy on 2 and 3 January with the passage of named storm 'Eleanor'. Conditions became more settled and quite cold between 6 and 12 January, with high pressure often close to the British Isles. A changeable westerly weather type returned for the second half of the month, and it was generally mild in the south, but the third week was cold in Scotland, Northern Ireland and parts of northern England, with significant snow at times. The provisional UK mean temperature was 4.1°C, which is 0.4°C above the 1981-2010 long-term average; both maximum and minimum temperatures were between 1.0 and 1.5 °C above average over much of southern England. Most parts of the UK had near or rather above average rainfall, with the excess approaching 50% in Northern Ireland. Most regions had near average sunshine, but parts of northern Scotland were much sunnier than average. In the Severn and Avon Vales, January began fairly mild, with southwest winds and some light rain for the first few days of the month. Winds were mainly easterly from 8 to 13 January (frost from 5 to 8 January) with rather little rain, then going southwesterly or north-westerly until 21 January, often cold in the northwest breeze, though there was no frost in Gloucester; strong winds and quite heavy rain on 20 and 21 January (8mm); winds back in the southwest from 21 January to the end of month, generally mild, drizzle most days with occasional ridges of high pressure (bringing frost on 30 January). Gloucestershire Weather (based between Cirencester and Stroud) gave a monthly rainfall figure of 69.6 mm.

Nationally, the first half of February was rather unsettled, and temperatures were somewhat below average. The weather did settle down after mid-month, becoming predominantly dry and a little milder, but in the final few days it steadily became colder and snow was an issue in many areas at the end of the month. A high-pressure system moved in from continental Europe from 20 February until the end of the month, the first real continental high-pressure system of the winter; this one was particularly severe, affecting the whole of western Europe (snow in the Mediterranean) with strong easterly or north-easterly winds coming all the way from Siberia. The provisional UK mean temperature was 2.4°C, which is 1.3°C below the 1981-2010 long-term average. This was colder than February 2013 but not as cold as February 2010. Rainfall nationally was 73% of average, and a few places had less than half the average rainfall total for the month, with only a few areas near or above average. Sunshine was 137% of average, with few places failing to exceed their average, and it was provisionally the second sunniest February in the UK in a series from 1929, with only 2008 having been sunnier. In the Vales, the first three weeks of February brought a series of Atlantic fronts on westerly winds, often with a hint of much colder north-westerlies, and the occasional flurry of snow, though it did not settle in the Vales; some bright and sunny, but cold days; night temperatures in Gloucester were often close to zero, and frost was recorded most nights from 5 to 14 February, but it was of course several degrees colder in the countryside. Frost every night from 23 to 28 February, colder in the countryside, day temperatures not exceeding 6°C; the West Country escaped the worst of the snowfalls which affected eastern England; light snowfalls in the Vales on 28 February. Gloucestershire Weather (based between Cirencester and Stroud) gave a monthly rainfall figure of only 29.8 mm.

March began with an exceptionally cold easterly flow and widespread snow, and daytime temperatures remained below freezing in many parts of the country. It turned milder from the south during the first week, and until mid-month the weather was generally wet and cloudy for most with low pressure dominant, but north-western areas remained drier. A second cold easterly outbreak brought widespread snow on 17 and 18 March, though this was not as severe as at the earlier spell. After a brief dry sunny spell, the milder unsettled regime returned for the rest of the month. The provisional UK mean temperature was 3.8°C, which is 1.6°C below the 1981-2010 long-term average, but it was significantly less cold than March 2013. Rainfall was nationally 110% of average, and some places, notably Devon, the Midlands and some eastern coastal counties, had over twice the normal amount; in contrast Cumbria and north-west Scotland were much drier than average. Sunshine was 83% of average, and it was dull over most of England and Wales and eastern Scotland. In the Vales, the easterly winds of the last week of February (the 'Beast from the East') continued into the first days of March, when there was more light snow and very cold temperatures (not rising above zero all day in Gloucester on 1 and 2 March). Named storm 'Emma' arrived over southern England in the evening of 1 March, bringing slightly warmer air that met the easterly breeze, and fell as rain, but did not affect the Vales until 3 March, when the thaw set in, the temperature reaching 4°C; a snow depth of 57 cm was recorded at Little Rissington on the Cotswolds on 4 March; little frost after 2 March, temperatures rising to 10°C for the next week on light and mainly south-westerly winds, with small amounts of rainfall each day from 4 to 9 March. Winds went south-westerly from 10 to 17 March, easterly from 18 to 20 March ('the little beast from the east'), bringing another fairly heavy snowfall right down into the Vales on 18 March; no precipitation from 18 to 22 March with frost every morning between 17 and 21 March. Winds then went south-westerly on 21 and 22 March, northerly from 23 to 25 March, southwest again on 26 March. Heavy rain on 30 March. Gloucestershire Weather (based between Cirencester and Stroud) gave a monthly rainfall figure of 101mm, bringing the total for the first three months of the year to 201 mm.

Water levels and flooding: general

There were two flood episodes in the first six weeks of the year, one in the first week of January, one from the last week of January until the first few days of February; both high but neither exceptional, generally caused by snow or rainfall further up the Severn catchment, as local rainfall was quite low. There was then a further extended flood episode in March, caused by the two snowfalls on 1 and 18 March, causing high levels of flooding in the meadows throughout the month, with the highest flooding of the winter in mid-March; the river and flood levels began to recede a little in the last week of March, only to rise again following heavy rain on the last two days of the month. Once again, the flooding was high but not exceptional: the Severn did not quite overtop its banks at any time from January to March, and none of the minor roads rounds Coombe Hill, Ashleworth or Longdon Marsh were closed by flooding, as happens in many winters. Nevertheless, conditions were altogether wetter in early spring than they have been in the last three or four years.

Following two fairly heavy snowfalls in December (the second on Boxing Day), the level of the Severn was high on 1 January (at Haw Bridge 9.77m and rising); the Severn continued to rise at Haw Bridge until 6 January, but did not quite break its banks; Severn levels then fell back over the next week. Most wetlands in the Vales began the year with quite extensive, rising floodwaters as a result, a big change from the situation for most of the last three months of 2017; but levels on the meadows were beginning to drop by 10 January, and had gone down significantly by 18 January (Severn at Haw Bridge on 8.17m). However, the Severn began to rise again under the influence of rain locally and further up the catchment from 20 January, peaking on 25 January at 10.32m at Haw Bridge (with no tidal effect); with a few days delay, levels on the meadows rose again (since local streams could not discharge into the Severn) from

late January, with fairly high levels in late January and early February. The Severn then began to drop until mid-February, despite high tides in the first week of February, allowing floodwater levels on the meadows to decrease, though only very slowly with occasional fluctuations, notably from 15 February when a new high tide cycle began; river levels dropped continuously in second half of February, allowing water to flow off the meadows. The first days of March saw the beginning of another high tide cycle, which caused no flooding as Severn levels were low; however, the thaw from 2 March caused river levels in both Severn and Avon to rise, gradually on 4 and 5 March, quite sharply on 6 March, peaking on 7 March at 9.87m at Haw Bridge, then dropping back; these river levels caused the minor inflow streams to back up, and levels continued to rise on the meadows after 7 March. But both the Severn and Avon began to rise again from 10 March, peaking on 14 March (with the highest levels of the winter of 10.46m at Haw Bridge), and causing further flooding in riverside meadows for the next week; the Severn dropped in the last week of March, but not enough for much water to flow off riverside meadows, and the Severn level rose sharply on the last day of the month after heavy local rain on 30 March.

Conditions at the main sites

Sites along the Severn

Upton Ham: Most of the Ham, especially the area nearest the Severn, was under quite deep flooding in the first week of January; Upper and Lower Hams both flooded at the end of January. Much of the Ham was under water again in mid-March, substantially lower but still wet around the middle ditch by 23 March.

Ripple Lake: The two lakes had held the only area of extensive water in autumn 2017, and most of the water birds in the area had concentrated there. As other water bodies began to hold water from late December, the birds began to spread out, but the two lakes held water throughout the period.

Longdon Marsh: A little light flooding north of Marsh Lane on 1 January, dropping by 8 January, but rising again in the last week last week of January, gone by early February; floods again extensive on 14 March. On the Worcs WT reserve, following heavy rain in December, there was plenty of water round the scrapes (where water levels can now be controlled by a sluice) through January; in March most of the scrape field was still flooded, while the reservoir had significant pools in the western and south-eastern areas but becoming overgrown with reedmace and willow carr and thus quickly drying out.

Severn Ham, Tewkesbury: Not submerged by flooding in late February / early March, but there were large pools of water on the surface, originating in leaks in the water main under the Ham, iced over during cold weather in late February / early March; some flooding occurred during the thaw in early March, but waters rose again and the Ham was completely submerged from 13 to 18 March, after which levels dropped and Severn Trent Water began work on plugging the leaks, only to be interrupted at the end of the month by another flood.

Ashleworth/Hasfield Hams: Quite extensive flooding in early January, levels rising gradually until about 9 January, then beginning to drop quite quickly until 20 January, from which time they rose again until 27 January; these levels were slow to drop in the first half of February, partly because of high tides, but were almost back to normal winter levels by 17 February. An almost total freeze-up took place in late February and early March, ducks concentrating round a small hole in the ice. Water levels dropped in early March, but rose again sharply in the middle of the month, dropping back a bit at the end of the month (before rising yet again in April!).

Coombe Hill: There was fairly extensive flooding from the beginning of January, rising to a peak on about 9 January, when the Grundon Hide was not accessible; beginning to drop from 10

January, hide easily accessible from 19 January, but then waters rose again, making the hide almost inaccessible from late January until the end of the first week in February; conditions of shallow flooding were ideal for surface feeding ducks from 10-17 February; water levels well down by 24 February, continuing to drop until 5 March, but beginning to rise again (in the aftermath of the snowfalls of early March) from 8 March, with highest levels of the winter around 14 to 19 March, dropping slightly (though still high) by 23 March, and very gradually until the end of the month (before another rise in the first days of April).

Leigh and Cobney Meadows: Fairly extensive flooding on 6 and 8 January but the River Chelt barely overtopped its banks, flooding almost gone by 21 January; however, floods rose again by 27 January, and were quite extensive in early February, dropping by 10 February, but still with some surface water from 13-17 February. As at other sites, water levels began to rise again in the first week of March and there was extensive flooding in the middle of the month, when they began to drop, but rising again at the end of the month.

Walmore Common: Extensive flooding in early January, peaking about 8 January, but levels had dropped considerably by 14 January and the floodwater had almost disappeared by 16 January. Another flood episode with water levels quite high on 27 January but was dropping fast by 6 February.

Sites along the Avon

Upham Meadow, Twynning: Light flooding in early January, but surface water gone by 13 January; light flooding late January / early February. Flooding receded in early March, but then rose again to submerge Upham and other nearby meadows completely in mid-March.

Overview of bird records

As always, floodwater on the meadows attracted large numbers of wintering birds. After a long dry period until mid-December, large numbers of geese and ducks had already begun to appear in the second half of December. The extensive floods of early January brought nearly a thousand geese and two to three thousand ducks to Ashleworth and Coombe Hill; the Greylag and Canada Geese and some, if not all, the Wigeon may well have come from nearby Ripple, but it seems much more likely that some of the Wigeon, and most of the Teal, Pintail and Shoveler came from the estuary – or, who knows, maybe further off? Water levels dropped in mid-January, then rose again at the end of January and in early February, to such an extent that the water was too deep for some surface feeding ducks (notably Teal, but not Pintail this year) and Lapwings, which moved off, for a short period in the last few days of January, to shallower floods at Longdon Marsh (count of nearly 2000 Teal in late January). But as the water levels dropped, four or five thousand ducks were present at Coombe Hill around 10 February (and the WeBS counts on 17 February gave a total of 4250 ducks between Coombe Hill, Ashleworth and Cobney Meadows).

By late February, the first of the breeding waders (Oystercatcher, Lapwing, Curlew and Redshank) were returning to the meadows; the flooding in March seemed to confuse them – they sat at the edges of deep pools of water in areas where they were preparing to nest. There were signs of waders passing through (notably Ruff, but as usual some Golden Plover and Lapwing) in March.

The American Wigeon present at Grimley since mid-October was seen in the first few days of January, while the juvenile Great Northern Diver first seen at Ripple in late December was present throughout January; the male Green-winged Teal stayed at Ashleworth and the Penduline Tit at Plock Court near Gloucester. A Black-throated Diver, most unusual in these parts, was at Grimley in early January.

A Great Grey Shrike put in a brief appearance at Ashleworth in appalling weather condition on 21 January; the few previous records in the Severn Vales have usually been in autumn or spring.

A massive Starling roost (perhaps 20,000 birds) was at Bredon's Hardwick in January and February, the birds coming not (as in previous years) from the Throckmorton Landfill Site, but from downriver in Gloucestershire.

This revised version benefits from many detailed records from Andy Warr in south Worcestershire, and from more records for March from Andy Jayne.

Swans

Mute Swan: In the first two months of the year a wintering flock of about 50 birds moved round the higher reaches of the Severn, occurring in different sites according to local conditions. By March adults had chased off last year's young and pairs were preparing to nest.

Worcestershire: At Upton Ham 15 on arable near the Ham on 29 January. At Saxons Lode south of Ryall 55 on 18 February, 44 on 10 March. At Ripple up to ten in January, two on 18 February. At Longdon Marsh (north) a flock of 24 (only five cygnets) on 8 January, none there on 28 January. At the Worcs WT reserve, 16 (three cygnets) on 1 January, none on 8 January. Along the Avon: at Bredon's Hardwick pits up to 11 in January, six on 18 February; a non-breeding flock of 14 on floodwater on 13 March, 20 on Avon bank on 21 March.

On the Mythe Brook a pair preparing to nest on 6 March. At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, the usual colour-ringed pair on the Avon in January and February, swimming in floodwater on Ham on 12 March; two pairs in late March. Near Chaceley one on 10 March, an adult pair on 13 March. At Ashleworth up to six in January (two pairs, one – unringed - with two cygnets, one with none on 11 January); a resident pair on 2 February. At Handkerchief Pool a pair on 31 March. At Coombe Hill two on 6 January, four immatures (probably from the local 2017 brood) on 9 January, five adults on 13 January, 16 on 21 January; two pairs with the odd immature present for most of February and March; eleven including the two pairs on 13 February. At Leigh Meadows two pairs on 9 January; at Cobney Meadows 15 on floodwater on 27 January, eight on 17 February, two on 10 March, nine on 13 March (probably including the Coombe Hill youngsters), two on 19 March, 19 on 31 March. At Hartpur Orchard Centre a pair on 28 March. At Horsbere a pair on 17 January, three on 15 February. At Minsterworth Ham five on 11 January, ten on 27 January, three on 13 March. At Walmore a family party of seven on 1 January, 12 on 8 January, an adult pair and two separate cygnets on 16 January, only two adults on 21 January, last year's cygnets departed; resident pair nest-building on 18 February; four on 11 March. At Wilmer a pair on floodwater on 1 January. Along the Avon at Upham Meadow a pair on 13 January.

Whooper Swan: Worcestershire: At Upton Warren the single adult that had been present since late October was there from 1 January to 22 February, then six on 24 February, none left after 25 February.

At Leigh Meadows no sign of the party reported in late December on 9 January.

The family party of three (an adult with two cygnets) which had been in the Walmore area since 19 November was still there from 1 to 15 January; what was no doubt the same family of three flew into Ashleworth at dusk on 15 January, so not found at Walmore, Wilmer or Rodley on 16 January; the family of three at Minsterworth Ham was on 25 and 27 January, then back at Walmore on 2 and 6 February.

The singleton (recognised by the staining on its head), that had been at Frampton Pools since early October was seen there again on many

dates in January, and occasionally appeared at Slimbridge; there were two adults at Slimbridge on the morning of 6 February.

Bewick's Swan: No records at all north of Gloucester, despite conditions which appeared highly suitable for them; with declining numbers at Slimbridge, they seem less inclined to venture into the Severn Hams. At Slimbridge there were about 123 swans (including ten cygnets) for most of January. At Walmore, four adults (one ringed but unread), first and only record of the winter, on 14 January; not seen on 16 January.

Black Swan: At Coombe Hill one appeared on floodwater from 27 to 31 March, the first for some time.

Geese

Greylag Goose: As usual, large numbers wintered north of Gloucester, numbers decreasing in February; much time was spent looking for birds marked with neck collars or leg rings (at Slimbridge, Forest of Dean, South Wales or the Lake District summer moulting site) but none were found this year.

Worcestershire: At Ripple five on 21 January, one on 18 February, 18 March. Along the Avon near Bredon's Hardwick 200 flying north on 30 January; at Bredon's Hardwick Pits 212 on 23 January, 50 on 6 February, 155 on 18 February; big numbers there throughout March (maximum 200 on 9 March) as they gathered to breed.

At Ashleworth up to 50 on many dates in January, February maximum 28 on 10 February. At Coombe Hill by day 420 on 14 January, only 100 on 20 January, 17 on 1 February, none on 10 February; but some still seemed to be roosting: 100 came in from the direction of Barrow Ponds (south) at dusk on 16 February; none seen in the evening of 8 March, but several heard coming to roost after dark; two on 10 March; a pair on 17 March, three pairs on 31 March. At Castlemeads two on 25 March. At Minsterworth Ham two on 11 January. At Walmore six on 22 March. Along the Avon at Upham Meadow two with Canada Geese on 13 January, at least 50 on 30 January, five on 6 March.

White-fronted Goose: No records at all this winter of this species, once upon a time a regular visitor to the floodwaters from Slimbridge, where (as in Bewick's Swan) numbers have crashed in recent years.

Canada Goose: As for Greylag, large numbers now winter in the Severn Hams, up to a thousand moving between Ripple, the Avon valley and Coombe Hill and staying in numbers into January and February, when numbers dropped as they departed to nest elsewhere, though smaller numbers nest in the Vales; much time was devoted to looking for coloured leg rings (from birds marked at summer moulting flocks in the Lake District), but none found this winter.

Worcestershire: At Ripple 32 on 21 January, 52 on 22 January, 13 on 18 February, four on 18 March. At Longdon Marsh WWT reserve five on 1 January, two on 8 January. Along the Avon near Bredon's Hardwick 370 on 20 January, 14 on 30 January; at Bredon's Hardwick Pits, where they nest: 137 on 21 January, 97 on 15 February, 102 on 18 March, 40 on 21 March.

At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, 25 flew over, continuing up the Avon, on 6 February. Near Forthampton eight on 12 March. Near Chaceley 20 on 10 March. At Ashleworth monthly maxima of 395 on 22 January, 400 on 2 February, just two in icy conditions on 1 March, two (one with broken wing) on 19 March, four on 31 March. At Coombe Hill monthly maxima of 500 on 9 and 13 January, 550 on 1 February, only 50 on 10 February, but about 100 came in to roost from the north at dark on 16 February; several heard coming to roost after dark on 8 March; one with broken wing on 10 March, pair, one with broken wing, on 31 March. At Cobney Meadows about ten on 2 February. At Walmore 27 on 8 January, 24 on 18 March. At Hartpur Orchard Centre a pair on 28 March. Along the Avon at

Upham Meadow 125 on 13 January, 200 on 30 January, 80 on 6 February, 120 on 6 March, 30 on 27 March.

Barnacle Goose: One regularly seen at both Ashleworth and Coombe Hill with the Canada flock, and probably paired to one of them (no doubt the individual seen in autumn 2017 and thought to be paired to a Canada); seen at Ashleworth from 19 to 22 January, at Coombe Hill from 6 to 27 January.

Brent Goose: A Dark-bellied bird at Walmore on 11 January.

Feral and Hybrid Geese: The familiar Greylag x Canada cross (seen in several places in autumn 2017) with white face, orange bill and white stripe on black nape was at Ashleworth on 21 January and Coombe Hill on 27 January. Another Greylag x Canada cross with yellow legs and white nail above the bill at Coombe Hill on 13 January. A Swan Goose x Greylag cross (not the very large bird of previous winters) at Coombe Hill on 13 January and at Ashleworth on 2 February. A small dark Barnacle x Canada Goose in the Avon Meadows on 20 January, then at Ashleworth on 22 January.

Egyptian Goose: A pair and a singleton seen throughout the period at several different sites, probably the same birds in each case?

Worcestershire: At Holt two on 24 January. At Grimley, one on 26 March. At Clifton pits two on 19, 21 and 23 February and 4 March, a single on 27 and 30 March. At Ripple three on 28 January. Along the Avon: at Bredon's Hardwick two on 1 January.

At Ashleworth one on 25 March. At Cobney Meadows one on 2 February. At Wilmer three on floodwater on 31 March.

Ducks

Shelduck: Present throughout the period, numbers often increasing sharply in time of flood.

Worcestershire: At Ripple one on 28 January. At Longdon Marsh (north) one on 28 January. At Bredon's Hardwick a pair on 10 March.

At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury one on 6 February; one on floodwater on 17 March, then nine, paired and lekking on 19 March, just one pair left on 20 March, four on 27 March, eight on 29 March, two on 30 March. At Ashleworth present throughout the period; monthly maxima two on 3 and 19 January, 14 on 27 February, two on 25 March. Also present throughout at Coombe Hill, with monthly maxima of two on 14 January, ten on 16 February then as many as 29 on 24 February, 26 in evening of 26 February, ten in the evening of 5 March, 26 on 30 March. At Cobney Meadows one on floodwater on 27 January, 18 on 2 February, eleven on 19 March, 26 on 30 March. At Maisemore five on flood by River Leadon on 22 February. At Minsterworth Ham four on 11 January, three on 25 January, eleven on 27 January. Also present throughout at Walmore (where birds may have come in from the estuary), with 30 on 8 January, 33 on 14 January, 28 on 23 January, 38 on 2 February, 32 on 6 February, one on 4 March, twelve on 11 March, eight on 18 March, six on 22 March. At Wilmer Common one on 1 January, eight on 16 January, 13 on 31 March.

Mandarin: Worcestershire: At Queenhill Rough two along Bushley Brook on 28 March.

At Ashleworth one on 1 January; on the Severn just downstream of Ashleworth Quay, two pairs on 19 January. At Minsterworth Ham two on 11 March.

Surface-feeding ducks:

Numbers of surface-feeding ducks were largest on the floodwater sites like Coombe Hill and Ashleworth in Gloucestershire, and it seems likely that there were frequent exchanges between the Severn

estuary and these sites, with only smaller numbers going further north into Worcestershire. There is no doubt movement of Wigeon (and other surface-feeding ducks too) between Ripple on the Severn and Bredon's Hardwick Pits, only a few miles off as the Wigeon flies, on the Avon, especially when the Avon floods, as occurred in mid-March.

Wigeon: Worcestershire: At Grimley (Wagon Wheel) 84 on 17 February. At Clifton 62 on 24 January. At Ripple 500 on 6 January, 288 on 21 January, 511 on 18 February, 480 on 24 February, at least 800 on 3 March, 942 (biggest count here of the winter) on 10 March, 45 on 17 March, 48 on 18 March, at least 400 on 25 March. At Longdon Marsh WWT reserve 125 on 1 January, 200 on 8 January, 100 on 23 January, 40 on 28 January. Along the Avon: at Kemerton Lake 21 on 1 January; at Bredon's Hardwick pits one on 1 January, 177 on 7 January, 159 on 23 January, as many as 700 on 3 March, three on 6 March, then bigger numbers on floodwater in mid-March: at least 500 on 13 March, 326 on 17 March, 422 on 18 March, 80 on 21 March.

At Ashleworth present in numbers through the period, with at least 1500 on 11 January, 2000 on 13 January, at least 275 on 10 February, 216 on 17 February, 350 on 25 February, 600 on 27 February, 600 in icy conditions on 1 March, 300 on 19 March, 12 on 31 March. Also present throughout at Coombe Hill, with at least 1600 on 6 January, rough estimate of 3000 on 20 January, 1860 on 21 January; at least 1900 on 1 February, 2000 when water dropped on 10 February, 2500 on 13 February, 1530 on 17 February, at least 605 on 24 February; at least 500 on 10 March, 430 on 19 March, at least 247 on 31 March. At Cobney Meadows ten on 27 January, 320 in extensive flooding on 2 February, 400 on 17 February; 100 on 19 March. At Sandhurst one on 1 March. At Minsterworth Ham 108 on 3 January, 220 on 11 January, 21 on 27 January, just seven on 11 March. At Walmore 140 on 8 January, 390 on 27 January; 700 on 2 February, 260 on 18 March. Along the Avon at Mitton 30 on 20 January.

American Wigeon: Worcestershire: The female present in the Wigeon flock at Grimley since mid-October was still present from 2 to 6 January.

Gadwall: Worcestershire: At Ripple two on 6 January, eight on 24 February, 17 on 3 March, 22 on 10 March. Along the Avon: at Kemerton Lake one on 1 January; at Bredon's Hardwick pits one on 21 January, four on 23 January, two on 18 March.

At Ashleworth present in small numbers through January with maxima of 15 on 13 January, 30 on 17 February, 16 on 30 March. Monthly maxima at Coombe Hill of six on 20 January, six on 13 February, 16 on 30 March. At Cobney Meadows 17 on 17 February. At Alney Island two pairs on 6 February, eight on 22 February, eight on 13 March. At Minsterworth Ham as many as 22 on 3 January, nine on 11 January, three on 31 March. At Walmore six on 8 January, 14 on 2 February, 13 on 22 March. At Wilmer three on 31 March.

Teal: Worcestershire: At Clifton 45 on 7 January. At Ryall 45 on 10 March. At Ripple 112 on 21 January, 38 on 22 January, 24 on 18 February, 324 on 24 February, 50 on 3 March, 176 on 10 March, 40 on 25 March. On floodwater at Longdon just two on 23 January; at Longdon Marsh WWT reserve at least 600 on 8 January, 800 on 9 January, a massive 1940 on 23 January (in time of high flood elsewhere), 750 on 2 February. Along the Avon: at Bredon's Hardwick pits 51 on 7 January, 42 on 21 January, 40 on 16 March, 31 on 18 March, ten on 21 March.

On the Mythe Brook ten on 6 March. At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury eight along the Mill Avon on 4 March. At Ashleworth 700 on 11 January, 450 on 13 January, 565 on 17 February, 320 round a hole in the ice on 1 March, 183 on 25 March. Near Chaceley Stock six on 13 March. At Coombe Hill around a thousand through January with 800 on 6 January, 1200 on 13 January, estimate of 1500 on 20

January, 1070 on 21 January; at least 750 (probably an underestimate) in deeper flooding on 3 February; at least 2000 in shallower flood on 10 February, 1400 (with more on nearby Cobney Meadows) on 13 February; still 750 on 24 February, 1000 on 10 March; minimum of 400 on 30 March. At Cobney Meadows small numbers on distant floodwater on 9 January, 300 in extensive flooding on 2 February, 580 on 17 February, 700 on 10 March, still at least 600 on 31 March. At Hartpury Orchard Centre 12 on 28 March. At Horsbere five on 17 January, four on 15 February, two on 13 March. At Sandhurst 90 on 1 March. At Alney Island 58 on 7 January, 40 on 6 February, 120 on 22 February, 150 on 13 March, still 100 on 25 March. At Minsterworth Ham 450 on 15 January, 86 on 27 January, 25 on 11 March. At Walmore 570 on 14 January, 550 on 2 February, 400 on 11 March, 100 on 31 March. At Wilmer 42 on 1 January, 65 on 31 March. Along the Avon at Upham Meadow 20 on 13 February; at Mitton 30 on 20 January.

Green-winged Teal: At Ashleworth (where a male had been found among the masses of Eurasian Teal in winter 2016/17) the male first seen on 27 December 2017 (same individual as last winter??) was found again on 1 and 18 January, from 10 to 20 February, then again on 12 March.

Mallard: Numbers wintering distinctly low, compared with the numbers of migrant wintering ducks.

Worcestershire: At Ripple 23 on 21 January, 51 on 18 February. At Longdon Marsh Worcs WT reserve eight on 1 January. Along the Avon: at Bredon's Hardwick Pits 74 on 7 January, 45 on 21 January, 111 on 23 January, 20 in February and March.

At Mythe Brook 20 on 6 March. At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury one along Mill Avon on 4 March. At Ashleworth maxima of 80 on 3 January, 74 on 10 February, only one huddling round a hole in the ice on 1 March, 20 on 19 March. At Coombe Hill maxima of 55 on 21 January, 62 on 17 February, 40 on 17 March. At Cobney Meadows, 11 on 9 January, 30 on 17 February. At Horsbere 12 on 17 January. At Alney Island at least 30 on 16 February, 12 on 13 March. At Minsterworth 62 on 11 January. At Walmore 100 on 8 January, 15 on 18 February, 52 on 18 March. At Wilmer 26 on 1 January, 14 on 31 March. Along the Avon: at Upham Meadow ten on 13 January, 20 on 6 February; at Mitton 50 on 20 January.

Pintail: No sign of the very large numbers (over 1000) which have occasionally occurred on shallow floodwater, in particular at Longdon Marsh, in January/February in recent years, but peak counts nevertheless gave respectable numbers (up to 250); numbers were larger in Gloucestershire than in Worcestershire, perhaps reflecting that the birds originated on the Severn estuary?

Worcestershire: At Grimley three on 8 January, three (one drake) on 5 March. At Clifton five on 14 January, 16 on 19 January, 13 on 24 January, ten (four drakes) on 11 March. At Ripple up to six on many dates in January, four on 10 March, two on 25 March. At Longdon Marsh 50 on floodwater on 23 January, but none left on 28 January; at Longdon Worcs WT reserve five on 1 January, ten on 8 January, three on 23 January, six on 28 January. Along the Avon: at Bredon's Hardwick pits three on 23 January and 18 March.

At Ashleworth at least 200 (biggest count anywhere in the area so far this winter) on 11 January, 100 on 13 January, 46+ on 14 January; 110 on 10 February, 60 on 27 February, still 40 courtship chasing in icy conditions on 1 March, 37 on 25 March. At Coombe Hill at least 85 on 6 January, 184 on 14 January, at least 254 on 20 January, 161 on 27 January; at least 75 on 1 February, only 25 found in deeper flooding on 3 February, but 226 in shallower conditions on 10 February, at least 103 on 13 February, 78 (mostly in pairs) on 24 February, 60 on 27 February; at least 40 on 8 March, 40 on 10 March, 47 on 31 March. At Cobney Meadows 20 on 13 February, ten on 10 March. At Minsterworth Ham 55 on 3 January, 35 on 11 January. At Walmore 63 on 8 January, big count of 300 (perhaps

birds from the estuary rather than Severn Hams birds?) in second flood episode on 2 February; 11 on 11 March, 48 on 18 March.

Garganey: Worcestershire: At Ripple a probable female in poor light on 23 March.

Shoveler: Worcestershire: At Grimley (Wagon Wheel) seven on 17 February. At Clifton five on 24 January. At Ripple monthly maxima of 23 in 22 January, 13 in February and 32 in 18 March. At Longdon Marsh Worcs WT reserve five on 1 January, two on 8 January, four on 23 January. Along the Avon: at Bredon's Hardwick pits 12 on 7 January, six on 23 January, three on 17 March, 25 on 18 March.

At Ashleworth maxima of 26 on 13 January, 50 on 10 and 25 February; only five left in icy conditions on 1 March, but 38 on 25 March, four on 31 March. At Coombe Hill maxima of 55 on 14 January, unusually large count of 103 on 10 February, 73 on 13 February; 40 on 10 March, as many as 90 on 31 March. At Cobney Meadows two on 17 February; ten on 10 March. At Alney Island two on 25 January, 22 on 22 February; 26 on 13 March. At Minsterworth Ham 25 on 3 January, 75 on 11 January, one on 11 March. At Walmore 40 on 8 January, 22 on 14 January, 32 on 2 February. 29 on 22 March. Along the Avon: at Mitton five on 20 January.

Diving ducks:

As usual, numbers of diving ducks were higher in Worcestershire than in Gloucestershire, no doubt because of the prevalence of deeper waters in the gravel and sand pits along the Severn and Avon, and also because many of these birds originated further north from deeper waters in the Midlands. In Gloucestershire diving ducks mainly appeared when deep floodwater was available. Surprisingly, very few records of sawbills this winter (no Smew or Merganser, only one record of Goosander).

Pochard: Worcestershire: At Ripple monthly maxima of 13 in January, six in 18 February, 12 in March, Along the Avon: at Bredon's Hardwick pits four on 7 January, three on 21 January, one on 18 February, three on 18 March.

At Coombe Hill (where they only occur in times of deep flood), a single on 6 January in deep flooding; two on 19 March, one on 17 and 25 March.

Tufted Duck: Worcestershire: At Clifton 38 on 24 January. At Ripple 45 on 1 January, 36 on 28 January, 42 on 18 February, 68 on 10 March, 48 on 18 March. At Upton Ham 15 on floodwater on 29 January. Along the Avon: at Kemerton Lake, two on 1 January; at Bredon's Hardwick Pits 21 on 1 January, 33 on 21 January, 18 on 18 February, 27 on 20 February, 32 on 18 March, eleven on 21 March.

At Ashleworth maxima of four on 22 January, two pairs on 12 February, six on 17 February, 17 on 19 March, 13 on 25 March, four on 31 March. At Coombe Hill 20 on 6 January, eight on 13 January, but none on 20 January when water levels were dropping; two on 21 January, four on 27 January when water levels had risen again; ten on 1 February, four on 17 February; six in deeper water on 8 March; eleven on 19 March, 17 on 23 March, 16 on 30 March. At Walmore, where they are unusual, six on floodwater on 18 March.

Goldeneye: Numbers in Worcestershire increased during March. No Gloucestershire records.

Worcestershire: At Grimley where one or two females had been present since early December, two females throughout January, then four on 9 February; two (one drake) on 19 February, three (one drake) on 20 February, four (one drake) in late February; then six (two drakes) on 1 March, a drake with three or four females until 20 March, a female on 26 March. At Ripple one on several dates in January, two drakes on 25 February, a drake on 1 March, two drakes

on 3 March, three on 10 March, two birds on 18 March, drake on 19 March. Along the Avon: at Kemerton Lake one on 1 January.

Goosander: Worcestershire: At Clifton four on 24 February.

Divers and Grebes

Great Northern Diver: Worcestershire: At Ripple the juvenile first seen on 31 December was still present until at least 16 February.

Black-throated Diver: Worcestershire: At Grimley one on 6 January, a very rarely seen species.

Little Grebe: Worcestershire: At Grimley (Wagon Wheel) two on 17 February. At Clifton two on 24 January. At Ripple singles on 6 and 21 January and on 25 February. Along the Avon, at Kemerton Lake seven on 1 January.

At Ashleworth one on 17 February. At Coombe Hill two whinnying from Broadmere on 30 March, one whinnying on 31 March. On the Severn, just downstream of Ashleworth Quay, one on 19 January. At Sandhurst two on 1 March. At Horsbere a male trilling on 13 March. At Walmore, where they are unusual, two on floodwater on 28 March.

Great Crested Grebe: Worcestershire: At Ripple five on 6 January, one on 24 February, three on 3 March, five on 10 March, one on 18 March. Along the Avon: at Bredon's Hardwick one on 1 January, two on 7 January, one on 21 January, two on 18 March.

At Severn Ham one on the Avon on 6 March, one on the Mill Avon on 21 March. At Coombe Hill two on floodwater on 17 March.

Cormorant

Cormorant: Present throughout, but a suggestion at Ripple of increasing numbers in March as migrants moved through en route to nesting sites further north.

Worcestershire: At Clifton seven on 24 January. At Ripple one on 21 January, two on 18 February, but 45 on 3 March, four on 25 March. Along the Avon: at Kemerton Lake five on 1 January; near Bredon's Hardwick four perched in trees on 30 January; at Bredon's Hardwick Pits five on 1 January, eight on 7 January, 11 on 21 January, seven on 23 January; five in summer plumage on 6 February, three on 18 February, 18 on 24 February, 13 (several in summer plumage) on 6 March, five on 18 March, one on 21 March.

At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, four flew over on 19 March, one on 21 March, two on 26 March, three on 28 March. At Chaceley Stock one perching on riverside tree on 13 March. At Ashleworth one on 11 January; one flying over on 17 February; one in summer plumage perching on a tree stump on 19 March, one on 25 March. At Coombe Hill ten flew over in direction of Barrow Ponds where they were probably going to roost on the evening of 5 March. At Walmore one on 3 January. Along the Avon at Upham Meadow one landed on the river on 6 March.

Hérons and Egrets

Little Egret: Worcestershire: At Ripple singles on several dates in January, four on 18 February, three on 24 February, singles in early March, then three on 25 March, two on 30 March.

Rather few winter records in Gloucestershire; do the majority go to the estuary in winter? At Ashleworth singles on 27 February and 25 March. At Coombe Hill one on 14 January. At Cobney Meadows one by floodwater on 6 January. At Horsbere one on 15 February. At Plock Court, Longford, one flew over on 9 February; at Wotton Brook, Longford, one on 20 February. At Saintbridge Ponds in Gloucester two on 8 February. At Netheridge Farm one on 6 February.

Great White Egret: Worcestershire: At Grimley one on 5 March. At Ripple one from 22 to 28 March. Along the Avon at Bredon's Hardwick one on floodwater on 13 and 23 March. Likely to have been the same bird in each case.

Grey Heron: Worcestershire: At Ripple one on 21 January, two on 18 February, one on 18 March. At Upton Ham one on 14 March. Along the Avon: near Bredon's Hardwick three on 30 January, at Bredon's Hardwick Pits one on 23 January, three on 6 February, one on 18 February and 6 March.

Along the Mythe Brook below Puckrup, three on 23 February and 6 March. At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, one on 26 March. At Ashleworth and Coombe Hill ones and twos on many dates in January and February. At Cobney Meadows seven on 9 January, ones and twos on other dates. At Sandhurst three on 1 March. At Horsbere two on 17 January. At Castle Meads singles on 25 January and 27 February. At Minsterworth Ham three on 11 January. At Walmore three on 25 January and 18 March. Along the Avon at Upham Meadow two on 8 March.

Raptors

Red Kite: Worcestershire: at Bredon's Hardwick Pits one over on 7 January

At Apperley one in flight near the Severn on 19 March.

Sparrowhawk: Worcestershire: At Longdon Marsh Worcs WT reserve one flew over on 8 January.

At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, one flew over on 20 March. At Cobney Meadows one on 2 February. At Horsbere one on 17 January, a female on 15 February.

Buzzard: Worcestershire: At Queenhill Rough one on 28 March

At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, one on 4 March. At Forthampton one on 26 March. At Ashleworth three on 22 January. At Coombe Hill one on 6 and 13 January; one on a carcass on 3 February, one on 16 February. At Cobney Meadows three on 2 February. At Alney Island two on 16 February. At Horsbere one on 17 January and 15 February. At Sudmeadow two on 28 January.

Osprey: As usual, birds were moving northwards through the area in late March. A couple of records in Worcestershire away from the vales on 27 and 29 March, one over Evesham on 31 March.

Kestrel: Worcestershire: At Longdon Marsh Worcs WT reserve one on 1 January.

At Sudmeadow a female on 28 January, one on 6 February. At Alney Island two on 16 February.

Merlin: Worcestershire: At Grimley a female on 31 January. At Ripple a male on 28 January. Along the Avon at Lower Moor one on 3 March.

At Ashleworth one hunting on 11 February. At Over one on 11 February.

Peregrine: At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, a pair displaying on 20 March, presumably the birds that nest on the Abbey, again on 30 March. At Ashleworth an adult male on pylons on 11 January, one on 22 January, two on pylons on 10 February, one seen on 12 February. At Cobney Meadows one on 2 February. Over Longlevens, northern Gloucester, one on 25 March. At Walmore two, both probably males, on 15 January. Along the Avon at Upham Meadow one sitting on the grass in the middle of the meadow on 13 January.

Rails and Crakes

Water Rail: Worcestershire: At Ripple two on 1 January, 18 February.

At Tewkesbury Nature Reserve one on 18 February. At Coombe Hill one heard on 6 January, two on 9 and 14 January. At Hartpury Orchard Centre one heard on 8 January. At Port Ham one heard on 7 January. At Castlemeads one calling on 13 March. At Walmore one calling on 18 February, at least one calling on 4 March.

Moorhen: Worcestershire: At Bredon's Hardwick Pits two on 23 January

At Ashleworth at least two on 17 February, four on 31 March. At Coombe Hill two on 17 February and 19 March. At Cobney Meadows two on 17 February. At Horsbere eight on 13 March. Along the Avon at Upham Meadow four on 13 January.

Coot: Worcestershire: At Ripple 60 on 1 January, 31 on 21 January, 35 on 18 February, 12 on 18 March. At Longdon Marsh Worcs WT reserve two on 28 January. Along the Avon: at Kemerton Lake 107 on 1 January; at Bredon's Hardwick Pits 52 on 1 January, 65 on 7 January, 75 on 21 January, four on 18 February, two on 18 March.

On the Mythe Brook four on 6 March. At Ashleworth eleven on 11 January, ten on 2 February, 50 on 17 February, 45 huddled round a hole in the ice on 1 March, 32 on 19 March, 34 on 31 March. At Coombe Hill 15 had appeared on the floodwater on 6 January, 35 on 27 January; five on canal on 16 February; 29 on 17 February, 24 on 30 March. At Horsbere eight on 15 February. At Alney Island 20 on 22 February, eight on 13 March. At Castlemeads three on 7 January, 23 on 25 March. At Walmore Common 17 on 18 March, 20 on 22 March.

Waders

Oystercatcher: Worcestershire: At Ripple Lake the first of the season (five birds) on 18 February, four on 24 and 25 February, then as many as ten on 3 March, eight on 10 and 18 March, six on 19 and 25 March (some of these March birds must have been passing migrants). At Kemerton Lake first of the year on 5 February, two pairs (including one which will probably nest) on 13 February. At Bredon's Hardwick Pits two pairs (one of them displaying) on 15 February, one pair from 20 February to late March (but four on 10 March), a pair roosting on the evening of 22 March.

By the Mythe Brook a pair on a farm pond on 6 March. At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, one in flight on 30 March. At Ashleworth one on 10 March, two on 25 March, mating on the island. At Coombe Hill one (with a metal ring on its right tarsus, never seen again) on 10 February; then from 8 March, a pair until the end of the month with three individuals on 31 March. Along the Avon at Upham Meadow, the first of the year on 6 February, a pair feeding on 6 March, one on 27 March.

Avocet: Worcestershire: The species has for some years bred at Upton Warren; records in March may well refer to birds on route to the breeding colony there. At Ripple one briefly on 25 March.

At Coombe Hill four on 28 March, two on 29 March.

Little Ringed Plover: Worcestershire: At Ripple, one, first of the year on 17 March, two on 18 March, one on 25 March.

No March records this year in Gloucestershire, perhaps because of the extensive floods late in the month.

Golden Plover: As usual some records of wintering flocks in south Worcestershire, the only records in Gloucestershire probably relating to birds on passage.

Worcestershire: At Grimley 74 on nearby ploughed fields on 17 January, 20 on 18 January, 60 on 19 January. Along the Avon: at Lower Moor 55 on 22 February.

At Coombe Hill three with Lapwings on 24 February, four on 10 March.

Lapwing: Birds seemed very mobile in January, moving round according to water levels. Huge flocks – probably the same individuals – of 1500 at Longdon Marsh on 23 January, 2500 at Hasfield on 26 January and 2600 at Longdon on 28 January (when floodwater was quite high elsewhere) may well have included all the Lapwings wintering in the area. Flocks of several hundred, no doubt migrants, in the Coombe Hill / Ashleworth area in mid-February. During the second half of February and the first half of March, there was as usual a distinct passage of migrants through the area, no doubt returning to continental breeding sites.

Worcestershire: At Ripple at least 700 on 1 January, 23 on 21 January, eight on 10 March, 15 on 18 March. At Longdon Marsh (north) a flock of 370 on 8 January; massive flock estimated at 2600 on shallow flood on 28 January; at the Worcs WT reserve, 28 on 1 January, 1500 on 23 January, 40 on 28 January. Along the Avon: at Rectory Farm Meadows three pairs, probably preparing to breed, on 20 March; near Bredon's Hardwick one on 21 March, two in courtship display on 27 March. At Bredon's Hardwick pits 25 on 6 March, 44 on 18 March, 26 on 21 March, a singleton roosting on 22 and 26 March.

At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury one on 4 March. A flock of up to 300 was in the Ashleworth / Coombe Hill / Cobney Meadows area in early January and seemed to move between these sites. At Ashleworth a flock of 250 over in the afternoon of 11 January, 118 on 22 January, but a huge flock of 2500 over Hasfield on 25 January; at least 250 on 10 February, 150 on 17 February, 49 on 25 February, just ten in icy conditions on 1 March, 75 in flight on 16 March, six on 25 March, two on 31 March. At Coombe Hill 80 on 6 January, 240 on 13 January, big noisy flock of 400 on 27 January, 140 on 1 February, at least 700 on 13 February, 190 on 17 February, 62 on 18 February; then 500 (migrants, very flighty) on 24 and 26 February; 170 on 5 March, 200 on 8 March appeared to be migrants, 300 (mostly migrants) on 10 March, only five on 19 March, 25 on 23 March, eight on 30 March. None in January at Boddington where there had been a big flock in January 2017. At Leigh Meadows 200 on 9 January; at Cobney Meadows 350 on 2 February, but 700 on 17 February, 120 on 25 February. At Maisemore 25 on Leadon flood on 22 February. At Sudmeadow 250 moving downriver on 28 January. At Minsterworth Ham 400 on 11 January, 200 on 15 January. At Walmore 160 on 8 January, 260 on 14 January, 145 on 21 January; 800 on 2 February, 700 on 6 February, 575 on 18 February. Along the Avon at Upham Meadow 12 on 6 March were probably passing migrants; one on 27 March.

Breeding birds: At Coombe Hill, some birds in summer plumage, some aerial and tail-up display on 10 March, three over barley field with some aerial display on 17 March, two displaying over barley field on 27 March, 12 (pair on barley field) on 31 March.

Dunlin: Worcestershire: At Upton Ham a small flock on 28 February on a dropping flood. At Ripple five on 3 and 4 March, one on 25 March.

At Coombe Hill seven still in winter plumage on 8 March, three on 10 March, one on 14 March. At Leigh Meadows one round floodwater with Lapwings on 9 January. At Walmore, closer to the estuary, 11 on 2 February, 75 on 6 February, 22 on 17 February, ten on 18 February.

Ruff: Worcestershire: At Ripple one on 1 March.

At Coombe Hill six (including one large male) with Lapwings on 5 March, increasing to 19 (with several males) on 8 March, as many as

28 (must be a record) on 10 March – presumably migrants on their way through – unusual to see such numbers here in March; then one from 27 to 31 March. At Walmore 15 on 6 February, four on 17 and 18 February – no doubt up from the estuary at a period of high flood.

Jack Snipe: Worcestershire: At Ryall Pits three on 13 January, fifteen on 18 February. At Ripple eight on 3 March.

At Walmore two on 18 February.

Snipe: Remarkably few found in January round the edges of floodwater, despite apparently favourable conditions – (except at Ryall!); perhaps more in February and March – northward migrants beginning to appear?

Worcestershire: At Ryall Pits 47 on 13 January, 17 on 18 February, one on 10 March. At Ripple at least 60 on 3 March, eleven on 18 March. At Longdon Marsh Worcs WT reserve, two on 8 January. At Bredon's Hardwick seven on 18 March, two roosting on 22 March

On the Mythe Brook below Puckrup, two on 23 February, one on 6 March. At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury three on 4 March, one on 27 March. At Tewkesbury Nature Reserve four on 18 February. At Ashleworth ones and twos in the first half of January, 12 on 19 January, seven on 21 January; but 25 at Hasfield on 8 February, seven on 13 February, ten on 15 February, nine on 27 February, one on the ice on 1 March, 13 on 10 March, twelve on 25 March, six on 31 March. At Coombe Hill none in January or early February, but four on 24 February, four at dusk on 26 February; just one at dusk on 5 and 8 March; two on 27 March, eleven on 31 March. At Leigh Meadows two on 9 January. At Cobney Meadows seven on 13 February. At Hartpurp Orchard Centre six on 28 March. At Horsbere two on 17 January, one on 13 March. At Sandhurst three on 1 March. At Wotton Brook, Longford, two in freezing weather on 1 March. At Port Ham one on 7 and 25 January; two on 22 February, seven on 25 March. At Walmore one on 8 January, seven on 21 January; four on 18 February, four on 18 March.

Black-tailed Godwit: Odd birds in winter plumage occurred in winter flood episodes, no doubt up from the estuary. The usual passage of birds en route to Iceland was less marked in March this year than in recent years, perhaps because the extensive flooding made observation difficult. No colour-ringed birds noted this year in March (though there were some in April).

Worcestershire: At Bredon's Hardwick one on 12 March.

At Ashleworth one on 9 and 20 February. At Coombe Hill two on 21 January; one still in winter plumage on 24 February; two on 14 March, one coming into summer plumage on 17 March, two coming into summer plumage on 23 March, six on 26 March, nine on 27 March, 18 on 28 March, six on 29 March, seven on 30 March, eight on 31 March. At Minsterworth Ham one on 11 January.

Curlew: As in previous years, an intensive breeding survey was carried out in the Severn and Avon Vales in 2018, with observations taking place from early in the year, when birds begin to return to their breeding areas. Observations were also made in North Worcestershire, away from the Severn Vale, where small numbers of breeding Curlews survive in higher altitude grassland. This year a very early bird was at Coombe Hill in January, but most began to appear from late February, though their breeding cycle must have been interrupted by the heavy flooding in March, when many were seen sitting, often in pairs, alongside the floodwater covering their usual breeding areas. The usual small flocks of passing migrants, no doubt en route to breeding sites further to the north east (as far off as Finland) were also noted.

Worcestershire: At Upton Warren a flock of 13 on 22 February were likely to have been migrants. At Upton Ham a single male arrived on 13 February and was joined by a female on 17 February to make up a territorial pair, seen together regularly by day, but flying out by

night, until 25 February; they were joined by a third bird on 24 February; the three were back on 5 March after the snowy period; then two pairs throughout March. At Longdon Marsh (north of Marsh Lane) the first male was seen at the edge of floodwater on 12 March. At Queenhill Rough none found in March. At Uckinghall Meadows a female (probably same bird as at Ripple) on 25 February, 10 and 25 March. At Ripple one on 24 February and 3 March. Along the Avon: a pair (first seen on 8 March) moved between Woodnorton and Lower Wick, occasionally stopping off at the Pershore Avon Meadows because of the flooded conditions. At Asham Meadows the first record of a pair was on 9 March; a male was first seen at John Bennett on 20 February (probably a bird from nearby Asham), and the Asham pair was seen there several times through March. At Eckington Bridge a singleton was first seen on 20 February and a pair plus two males were seen throughout March. At Rectory Farm Meadows the first one record was on 20 March. At Fleet Lane near Bredon's Hardwick at least one pair, perhaps two, from 10 March onwards. At Bredon's Hardwick Pits the first one on 15 February, six (probably migrants) on 20 February, nine (probably migrants) on 6 March; five on the evening of 9 March didn't seem to stay to roost; three pairs on 10 March; none on floodwater on 13 March, three pairs on 19 and 21 March, at least three roosting on 22 and 26 March. At Kemerton Lake one, probably a migrant, heard on 20 February.

Gloucestershire: Along the Mythe Brook below Puckrup, three on 23 February may have been migrants, no sign of breeding birds. At the Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, the first one was on 4 March, two on 6 March, three on 12 March; six together in high flood on 17 March, three (a pair and a singleton) on 19 March, then two pairs and a singleton in late March. Near Forthampton a singleton by floodwater on 12 March. Near Chaceley Stock one calling by the yacht club on 24 and 30 March. North of Haw Bridge a bird first noted at the usual site on 7 March, with a pair present until the end of March. Just south of Haw Bridge two, probably both males, on 13 March, a female on 26 March, one on 31 March. At Ashleworth none found in January and February, despite long and extensive searches; one heard on 10 March, two seen from 13 March, two on the only area of grass not covered by floodwater on 19 March, and present until the end of March. At Coombe Hill a single bird, first noted on 5 January (a very early date). was seen again throughout January and February, apparently the same individual on each occasion, probably a breeding bird returning very early to occupy territory; on 13 February a slightly nervous group of four, probably passing migrants, was also present; three on 17 February; 13 roosting at dusk, probably mainly migrants, on 26 February; eight roosting at dusk, probably migrants, on 5 March; eight again on 8 March, four in floodwater on 10 March; one or two birds bubbling over meadows in the second half of March. At Cobney Meadows one roosting on the morning of 17 February; a flock of 12 in high flood on 19 March may have been migrants, or perhaps breeding birds from flooded fields in the neighbourhood? Along the Avon: at Upham Meadow the first arrivals were seven (including a pair doing courtship display) on 6 March; 16 including a colour-ringed bird on 27 March; definitely roosting on site, but none caught, in lamping session on 29 March.

Redshank: Worcestershire: At Upton Ham two, first of the year, on 14 March. At Ripple four, first of the year on 24 and 25 February, ten on 10 March, eight on 17 March, 15 on 18 March, ten on 25 March. Along the Avon one at Fleet Lane on 27 March; at Bredon's Hardwick Pits the first one on 9 March.

At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, one heard by Severn weir on 30 March. At Coombe Hill two (first of the year) on 9 March, still there trilling and courtship chasing on 10 March, with up to five, still trilling, for the rest of the month.

Green Sandpiper: Small numbers winter in the area; there is rarely much indication of spring passage.

Worcestershire: At Ryall one on 10 March. At Ripple one on 1 January, three on 14 January, one on 22 January, three on 18 and 24 February, one on 4 March, two on 17 March, three on 18 March.

At Coombe Hill three on 5 March. At Leigh Meadows one, perhaps two, on 9 January. At Wotton Brook, Longford, (northern suburbs of Gloucester) one on 1 March. At Netheridge Farm two on 6 February, one on 20 February. At Minsterworth Ham three on 3 January, one on 11 March.

Common Sandpiper: Only rarely winters in UK, but has been noted in winter at Ripple in several previous years.

Worcestershire: At Ripple a singleton on many dates from 1 January to 17 March, with two on 22 January.

Gulls

Since the Throckmorton Landfill site stopped processing household waste in October 2016, the number of gulls recorded there has dropped dramatically from 7,000 to 15,000 large gulls a day to a few hundred. But they still seem to congregate on freshwater floods, for a wash and brush-up between the estuary and their feeding areas (wherever they may be), some of them occasionally staying to roost on the floodwater when levels are high, without bothering to return to the estuary.

Mediterranean Gull: Worcestershire: At Woodnorton an adult on floodwater with Black-headed Gulls on 15 March.

Little Gull: Worcestershire: At Clifton an early adult on 3 March.

Black-headed Gull: Worcestershire. At Longdon Marsh (north) on 1 January 250 feeding round shallow flooding, no doubt stopping off on the way back to the estuary roost; on 8 January 50 flying through in early morning, no doubt en route to Throckmorton; 500 feeding on shallow floodwater on 28 January. Along the Avon: at Bredon's Hardwick pits many roosting on 22 March.

On the Severn Ham at Tewkesbury 25 round pools on 6 and 19 March. At Ashleworth ten on 11 January; 300 feeding on floodwater on 2 February, 40 on floods on 17 February. At Coombe Hill 200 on 13 January; 20 at roost on 5 March. At Cobney Meadows 100 on floodwater on 6 January, at least 300 on 9 January, five on 19 March.

Common Gull: At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, ten round floodwater on 19 March. At Coombe Hill one on floodwater on 17 February. At Leigh Meadows five on floodwater on 9 January. At Cobney Meadows one on floodwater on 19 March.

Lesser Black-backed Gull: At Longdon Marsh 100 feeding round shallow flooding, no doubt stopping off on the way back to the estuary roost, on 8 January; 50 on 28 January. At Bredon's Hardwick Pits 20 on 21 March.

On the Severn Ham at Tewkesbury one round pools on 6 March. At Ashleworth 20 on floodwater on 11 January. At Coombe Hill massive numbers of this species and Herring Gulls (between 5000 and 10,000) arriving very late in the evening on 16 February for a wash and brush up on floodwater, some going on to the estuary to roost, but some apparently staying to roost (unless they left in complete darkness) the very many white feathers on the water in early February suggest that this behaviour was regular even though there are few evening records to confirm it; only 19 by day on 17 February; large numbers heard again on the distant floodwater on 19 February; roost still present but with much smaller numbers (about 500 of two species combined) on reduced flooding on evening of 26 February; smaller numbers still – total 150 of both species – on 5 March, but none on 8 March. At Cobney Meadows 50 on floodwater on 6 and 9 January.

Herring Gull: Worcestershire: At Longdon Marsh 20 feeding round shallow flooding, no doubt stopping off on the way back to the estuary roost.

On the Severn Ham at Tewkesbury five on 19 March. At Ashleworth 30 on floodwater on 11 January. At Coombe Hill 40 on floodwater on southern meadows on 20 January; massive numbers of this species and Lesser Blackbacks appeared to be roosting on floodwater rather than flying all the way to the estuary in February (see under Lesser Blackback). At Leigh Meadows 40 on floodwater on 9 January.

Yellow-legged Gull: At Ripple a first winter bird on 4 March.

Iceland Gull: Worcestershire: At Avon Meadows, Pershore, an adult on 15 March. At Throckmorton Lagoon an immature on 22 January, a juvenile at nearby Lower Moor on 23 January.

Great Black-backed Gull: At Walmore an adult and a first winter bird on 8 January.

Kittiwake: Worcestershire: At Upton Warren an adult in the evening gull roost on 26 January.

Pigeons

Stock Dove: At Coombe Hill ten feeding on banks emerging from the floodwater. At Alney Island one singing on 16 February. At Minsterworth Ham 50 on a crop field on 11 January, same number on 11 March. At Upham Meadow six on 6 March.

Owls

Barn Owl: At Bredon's Hardwick pits one on 20 February.

At Ashleworth one at dusk on 13 February, and on several other areas in the general area of Ashleworth Ham. At Coombe Hill one hunting along the canal bank at dusk on 16 February. At Alney Island, where a hunting bird had been recorded in late November and December, one in early morning on 29 January; probably the same bird at Castle Meads from the Severn Way footpath at dusk on 7 and 16 February; at Walham one at dusk on 17 February – same bird again? At Elmore one at dusk on 18 and 29 January. Along the Avon: at Cowfield Marsh one hunting at dusk on 23 January, and probably the same bird at the nearby Tewkesbury Industrial Estate on 31 January.

Little Owl: At Chaceley Stock one heard briefly on 13 March. At Cobney Meadows one calling briefly on 17 February, one seen on 10 March. At Elmore one on 29 January. At Minsterworth Ham one on 1 January and again at dusk on 15 January. At Wilmer one on 1 January.

Tawny Owl: At Tirley one calling before first light on 3 January. At Ashleworth one calling before first light on 11 January.

Long-eared Owl: None found at the former traditional Gloucestershire site (where they have not occurred since about 2007).

Short-eared Owl: No records at all. The floodwater may reduce small mammal prey in winter.

Kingfisher

Worcestershire: At Ripple two on 1 and 7 January.

At Tewkesbury NR one on 18 February. At Coombe Hill one along the canal on 14 January, one on 21 January. At Wotton Brook, Longford, one on 1 March. At Alney Island one on 25 January. At Minsterworth Ham one on 3 January.

Woodpeckers

Great Spotted Woodpecker: At Forthampton one drumming on 12 March. At Ashleworth one drumming on 2 February. At Coombe Hill drumming birds on 6 January, 3 and 13 February, 24 February (two) and on 10 March.

Passerines

Skylark: In general, very few in January almost none of them singing.

Worcestershire: At Upton Ham half a dozen singing on 25 January. At Ripple 35 on 18 March. Along the Avon near Bredon's Hardwick two (no song) on 30 January.

At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, five on 30 January, one singing on 4 March, 12 on 12 March, three singing from 24 March to the end of the month. At Ashleworth three (one singing timidly) on 17 February. At Coombe Hill one or two singing on 10 March. At Leigh Meadows two or three on 9 January; at Cobney Meadows two on 17 February. Along the Avon at Upham Meadow eight on 30 January, one singing on 6 February, at least 12 quite active on 6 March, some song on 27 March.

Sand Martin: Worcestershire: first notable arrivals on 12 March: At Upton Warren eight, at Grimley eight, at Clifton six. At Ripple one on 17 March, eight on 18 March, 30 on 30 March. At Bredon's Hardwick two on 18 March.

None round the colony at Forthampton on 26 March. At Coombe Hill three on 14 March.

Meadow Pipit: Worcestershire: At Ripple at least 60 on 19 March.

At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, only one on 6 February, few records in March: one on 27 March, five on 28 March. At Ashleworth one on 11 January. At Coombe Hill a flock of 15, probably migrants, on 24 February. At Leigh Meadows one on 9 January, 38 in high flood on 2 February. At Cobney Meadows ten in high flood on 19 March. At Port Ham 35 on 25 March. At Walmore 45 on 8 January, minimum of 100 on 18 March. Along the Avon At Upham Meadow one on 6 March.

Rock Pipit: Worcestershire: At Clifton one on 12 March

Grey Wagtail: Worcestershire: at Ripple one on 1 January.

At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, one on 12 and 29 March.

White / Pied Wagtail: Little flocks of Pied Wagtails were regularly seen feeding at the edge of floodwater (where there must have been many insects and invertebrates brought to the surface by the floods) in early January.

Worcestershire: Along the Avon near Bredon's Hardwick four feeding round the edges of puddles on 30 January.

At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, just one on 6 February, but a flock of 75 round pools on 20 February, ten on 4 March, 29 on 6 March, just five on 12 March, then a singleton on 28 March. At Ashleworth three feeding at the edges of the flood on 2 February. At Coombe Hill 12 on 6 January, ten on 9 January, ten on 10 February, up to 40 on 13 February; five on 24 February; evening pre-roost gatherings of 23 on 5 March and 50 on 8 March (probably migrants). At Leigh Meadows ten on 9 January, 48 in high flood on 2 February. At Cobney Meadows 50 on 19 March. Along the Avon: at Mitton one on 20 January; at Upham Meadow eight on 6 March.

Stonechat: Worcestershire: At Ryall one on 18 February. At Ripple two in early January, three on 14 January, two on 22 January and 18

February. At Longdon Marsh Worcs WT reserve, a pair on 8 January.

At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, a female on 13 January. At Ashleworth two on 19 January. At Cobney Meadows two on 2 and 13 February. At Horsbere a female on 17 January and 15 February. At Port Ham two on 7 January. At Plock Court, Longford, ones and twos from 19 January to 15 February. At Oxleaze a pair on 25 January, four on 5 February. At Walmore two on 1 and 18 January, four on 21 January, three on 18 February, two on 4 March. At Wilmer one on 1 January.

Wheatear: At Minsterworth Ham one on 31 March.

Fieldfare: Many observations of birds feeding on the ground, no doubt attracted (like Pied Wagtails, Starlings and crows) by invertebrates pushed to the surface by floodwaters; several large flocks, no doubt returning migrants, in March.

Worcestershire: At Longdon Marsh (north) 50 feeding on the ground on 8 January, 500 on 3 February. Along the Avon: at Fleet Lane 120 on 27 March; at Bredon's Hardwick Pits 40 on 15 February

Along the Mythe Brook one on 6 March. At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury 138 feeding on the ground on 4 March. Near Forthampton 180 feeding on the ground, no doubt returning migrants, on 12 March, still 250 on 26 March. At Ashleworth 70 in tall trees on 11 January, 50 on 13 January, 200 on 10 February. At Coombe Hill only ones and twos in the hedges on 9 January, only five in the hedges on 20 January and 10 and 13 February; 20 feeding on the ground with Lapwings on 24 February. At Cobney Meadows at least 600 round extensive flood on 2 February. At Wainlodes 200 feeding on pasture with Redwings and Starlings on 2 February, at least 200 on 13 March. At Minsterworth Ham 120 on 11 January.

Song Thrush: At Coombe Hill three singing on 3 February.

Redwing: Whereas this species had been numerous in the autumn (largely feeding on berries, it would seem), only small numbers were found in early January; they were noticeably absent from orchards west of the Severn too, having perhaps been pushed even further west by the cold condition in December?

Worcestershire: Along the Avon at Fleet Lane five with Fieldfares on 27 March

At Ashleworth only two or three in hedges on 11 January; at least 100 on 10 February. At Coombe Hill only ones and twos in the hedges on 9 January, only two on 13 January; ten on 1 February, only one or two on 13 February. At Cobney Meadows at least 75 round extensive flood on 2 February. At Wainlodes 50 feeding on pasture with Fieldfares and Starlings on 2 February, five on 13 March. At Plock Court 20 on 12 February. At Alney Island at least 160 on 6 February, 50 on 22 February, 50 on 13 March, 150 on 25 March. At Walmore Common 80 on 21 January.

Mistle Thrush: Along the Mythe Brook two on 6 March. At Coombe Hill one singing on 3 February.

Cetti's Warbler: Worcestershire: At Ripple one on 1 January.

At Walmore one calling on 15 January.

Chiffchaff (nominat subspecies *collybita*): Worcestershire: At Hallow sewage works south of Grimley at least seven on 11 February. At Upton sewage works 15 on 10 January.

Wintering birds: At Port Ham two on 7 January. At Minsterworth Ham one on 3 and 15 January. At Wilmer four in reeds on 1 January.

Singing birds: At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, one on 27 and 28 March. At Coombe Hill one on 26 and 31 March. At Hartpury Orchard Centre one on 28 March.

Siberian Chiffchaff (subspecies *tristis*): Worcestershire: At Hallow sewage works south of Grimley, one on several dates from 11 to 26 February. At Upton sewage works one on several dates from 10 January to 25 February. Along the Avon at Lower Strensham sewage works one on 4 February.

Goldcrest: At Ashleworth two on 19 and 22 January. At Coombe Hill two on 1 February.

Long-tailed Tit: Worcestershire: At Longdon Marsh Worcs WT reserve ten on 8 January, eight on 28 January.

Penduline Tit: The bird seen since mid-December was still at Plock Court in the northern suburbs of Gloucester from 1 January to 23 February, feeding by ripping open reed mace heads to reach moth larvae.

Nuthatch: At Ashleworth one in low-lying ground at the bottom of Stank Lane, a long way from the usual site at Meerend Thicket, on 11 January; two near hide on 13 January, one on 27 February, two on 16 March.

Treecreeper: At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, one singing on 27 March. At Chaceley Stock one singing on 13 March. At Ashleworth one on 22 January, two on 12 February. At Coombe Hill one singing on several dates in the first half of January.

Great Grey Shrike: At Ashleworth one perched atop a willow on 21 January.

Jackdaw: Near Chaceley 40 on 10 March. Along the Avon at Upham Meadow three feeding on the grass on 13 January.

Rook: Near Chaceley 20 on 10 March. Along the Avon at Upham Meadow three feeding on the grass on 13 January, eleven on 6 February.

Carrion Crow: Worcestershire; At Longdon Marsh (north) 30 feeding round floodwater on 28 January. Along the Avon at Avon Meadows 20 feeding on grass on 30 January, at Bredon's Hardwick 11 on 15 February.

Along the Mythe Brook 34 on 6 March. At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, large numbers feeding on the short grass: 30 on 30 January, 41 on 6 February, 74 on 6 March, 40 on 19 March, 55 on 21 March, 84 on 23 March, 62 on 26 March. Near Chaceley five on 10 March. Along the Avon at Upham Meadow 45 feeding on the grass on 13 January, 12 on 6 February, 30 on 6 March.

Raven: At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, one flying over towards the cemetery (where they have nested in the past) on 12 March. At Ashleworth two on 27 February. At Coombe Hill one waiting its turn at a carcass after a Buzzard on 3 February. At Walmore daytime records of two on 6 February, one on 18 February, two on 22 February; the former large night roost at Walmore is a thing of the past, numbers declining when tipping of organic matter stopped some years ago at the Gloucester Landfill Site.

Starling: The large flocks of this species (10,000 – 15,000 individuals) which used to feed around the Throckmorton Landfill site in winter were no longer observed this winter, since the site closed to household waste in October 2016. As a result, the large roosts noted in previous winters at sites such as Gwen Finch or Kemerton Lake were not occupied this winter, and the roost at Bredon's Hardwick was occupied by birds coming in from the south. Many records in early January of small flocks feeding round the edge of floodwater, notably at Longdon, no doubt searching for invertebrates.

Worcestershire: Worcestershire: On floodwater at Longdon Marsh (north of the Worcs WT reserve) 20 feeding round edges of floodwater on 1 January, 150 on 8 January, over 5000 on 23 January, about 1500 on 28 January, 700 on 3 February. Along the Avon: near Bredon's Hardwick ten feeding on grass on 30 January, twenty on 27 March; at Bredon's Hardwick Pits a huge roost (said to have been active since late 2017) of probably 20,000 birds in the evenings of 15 and 20 February; none there on the evenings of 22 or 26 March. No roost at Kemerton this year.

At Forthampton 20 with Fieldfares on 26 March. At Ashleworth during January and early February in the late afternoon, small flocks of Starlings were seen coming from the south in flocks of 20 to 150 (but once 500) and passing on to the north, clearly on their way to a roost further north (undoubtedly the one at Bredon's Hardwick Pits); on 27 January a much bigger flock of perhaps 9000, maybe many more, birds were seen; on one evening some 12,000 birds passed in an hour; on 15 February two flocks of 500 heading north in the late evening at Priors Park, Tewkesbury. At Coombe Hill 20 feeding round edges of flood on 13 January, five on 20 January. At Wainlodes 200 feeding on pasture with Fieldfares and Redwings on 2 February. At Hartpury Orchard Centre at least 2000 roosting in reed-bed on 8 January. At Gloucester Landfill Site 3000 (the first large flock for a long time) feeding on the afternoon of 19 February, about 6,000 in the evening of 11 March, on both occasions presumably preparing to go to roost at Bredon's Hardwick. At Netheridge Farm a murmuration of 1000 in the early afternoon of 6 February.

Brambling: At Apperley a pair in a garden in the snow (first ever here) on 19 March. At Ashleworth one in a garden on 25 March. At Over two with Chaffinches and Linnets on 11 February.

Greenfinch: Along the Mill Avon in Tewkesbury one in song flight on 28 March. At Castlemeads 20 on 25 March.

Siskin: At Ashleworth one in a garden on 25 March. At Port Ham one on 22 February with Goldfinches in alders.

Linnet: At Over 100 on 22 February. At Minsterworth Ham 100 on 11 January, 40 on 11 March, 80 on 31 March.

Lesser Redpoll: At Port Ham one on 22 February with Goldfinches in alders.

Hawfinch: Many of the unusual numbers of this species recorded in autumn 2017, notably in Worcestershire but also in Gloucestershire, seem to have stayed to winter, as there were many records from all over both counties in January and February.

At Walmore one on 18 March.

Bullfinch: At Walmore ten together on 18 March.

Yellowhammer: Around floodwater north of Longdon 26 in time of high flood

Reed Bunting: Remarkably few found in winter in the low-lying meadows of the Severn and Avon Vales, apart from roosts at Hartpury and Port Ham. Some may be moving out to arable fields on higher ground, but many seem to be moving out of the area to winter elsewhere, then returning in numbers from March onwards.

Worcestershire: At Longdon Marsh Worcs WT reserve just one on 8 January. Along the Avon at Fleet Lane one (very perky – new arrival?) on 20 January.

At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, four singing on 12 March, up to seven singing until the end of the month. At Chaceley Stock one singing on 13 March. At Ashleworth just one on 11 January, two (one thinking of singing) on 17 February, a male on 16 March; two in a garden on 25 March. At Coombe Hill one on 24 February, at least four singing

on 10 March, two singing on 23 March. At Hartpury Orchard Centre at least 12 going to roost in a reed bed on 8 January. At Horsbere three on 17 January, two on 15 February, two females feeding on Typha on 13 March. At Port Ham 80 going to roost on 7 January; five males in song on 25 March; at Castlemeads one male in song on 25 March. At Minsterworth Ham three on 11 January, 12 in game strip on 11 March. At Walmore four on 21 January, five on 18 February including two males in song. Along the Avon at Twyning a male in a garden on 6 February; at Upham Meadow three with a little timid song on 6 March, one singing on 27 March.

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