

RISLEY MOSS

BIRD REPORT 1985





Introduction

It is two years since the last bird report and as part of the management programme, the reserve has undergone a degree of change to its basic habitat upon which the unique and varied birdlife of Risley Moss depends.

The emphasis of this work; the raising of the water levels and removal of birch scrub on the mossland, the removal of substantial areas of Bramble to encourage a ground flora and the establishment of a coppicing regime in the woodland, will undoubtedly have affected the wildlife balance of the reserve. In the mixed deciduous woodland, the coppicing regime is based on a seven year cycle, leaving future standard and mid-storey trees and restricting the growth of dominating species such as Bramble to allow the coppiced stools to grow back. In the birch woodland selective Willow thickets are removed and allowed to regenerate. Out on the open moss land extensive areas of Birch is removed each year, only leaving the occasional clump for nesting, perching and cover. This habitat improvement is now well advanced and the wildlife is rapidly approaching optimum levels. The question is – what effect has it had on the birdlife and to what extent?

In order to assess the effect of these changes, it is necessary to have a regular source of information for reference purposes.

At Risley Moss as with many other reserves, a system exists in the form of an 'Observation Book' in which all such information is entered be it from a Ranger, Birdwatcher or the general public. This well established and invaluable practice went astray in June 1985 when the Observation Book mysteriously vanished from the visitor centre thereby removing at a stroke the previous six months records! However, the staff of Risley Moss were eventually able to gather together enough information to make this report possible.

In addition to the Observation Book records, a parallel survey was carried out in conjunction with Rob Smith (local ornithologist) to assess the breeding status of certain woodland and moss land species. This is included both in the text and on a comparative basis later in the report.

The initial results of this survey, when compared with 1983 levels, are somewhat alarming even when taking into account the possible effects of the very wet summer of 1985. This is particularly evident in the woodland area, where breeding levels of the most common migrant – the Willow Warbler are down by almost; whilst the more reclusive Garden Warbler failed to breed at all during the last two seasons. Similarly, on the moss land, Meadow Pipit numbers are down by 25%; whilst Tree Pipit and Whinchat have also failed to breed for the second consecutive season.

There is cause for concern at the somewhat rapid decline of these and other species which have always been associated with the Risley Moss wildlife scene. At present, this problem generally



appears confined to summer visitors, perhaps as a result of past and present migration difficulties elsewhere; but equally there are some indications that certain indigenous species, Meadow Pipit and Common Snipe in particular, are also being affected. Whatever the reasons for this current downward trend in breeding levels, it is obvious there is an urgent need for close monitoring of the ornithological situation on the reserve. This could be followed up, if necessary, by appropriate forms of action.

Optimistically, although unlikely when comparing with other sites, much of the present decline may well be part of a short-term fluctuation in population levels as can occasionally occur. It must be borne in mind that it is difficult to obtain objective comparisons between reserves as often their sampling and/or recording methods are different. It is possible that the higher breeding levels recorded in the past may have been transient. Loss of habitat in the area through the demolition and bulldozing of the derelict ordnance factory site would have caused a temporary influx into Risley Moss. The subsequent development of local parkland, roadside planting and gardens has made dispersal back into these areas possible. At about the same time work started on Risley Moss, the open moss land has developed from what was basically a carr land to the stage when an acid peat bog is regenerating, while the choked and overgrown woodland was thinned, cleared and underplanted to create a better age structure and moss diverse habitat.

Risley Moss has, therefore acted as a temporary refuge for birdlife whose habitat requirements can now be found in the locality causing a decline in population levels on the reserve. The overall improvement in habitat has obviously had a detrimental effect on certain bird species and whether the apparent improvement is superficial would need further investigation. Realistically, we cannot afford to "wait and see" because by then it could be far too late to do anything at all about

Acknowledgments

To Rob Smith for the correlation of species data and the compilation of the bulk of this report.

To the regular birdwatchers and members of the public whose records make up the majority of this report and without whom it would not be possible.

To the Leigh Ornithological Society who kindly submitted the records of their members for inclusion in this report.

Illustrations by Jon Cole.

References

Peter Barlows Bird Reports 1981-83.

ADVICE ON NOTEKEEPING

1. How to record

As previously mentioned, the contents of the Observation book are an important link in studying the reserves birdlife, unfortunately a number of potentially useful entries are sometimes omitted for lack of detail.

It is important therefore when entering records in the book that certain relevant information is included, along the following lines:

Date	Time	Species	Details (numbers, sex(if known) direction in/out, area).	Observer
eg 31/8/86	1400	Heron	2 flew in from the west and landed on mossland pools before flying off to East.	Ranger
31/8	1800	Woodpigeon	A flock of 250 roosting in trees in the SW Wood	"
31/8	1830	Blackbird	A female was seen carrying food into a bush near the picnic area.	"

2. What to record

The arrival of a rare or unusual species of bird is naturally of interest to many birdwatchers, and as such makes for good reading, however, the real benefit of maintaining records in such an area as Risley Moss is the monitoring of the more regular species. As such all information is of value.

Apart from recording normal patterns of behaviour on a regular basis it is of interest to include information on familiar species in unusual or un-characteristic circumstances and numbers, or perhaps at an unusual time of the year.

Likewise monitoring the first arrival or last departure of certain species eg Swallows, Swifts, Fieldfare, Redwing etc. is of interest and value.

3. Recording of rare species

The possibility of an unusual or rare bird arriving at Risley Moss is perhaps inevitable; however, it should be stressed that this is a relatively uncommon event.

If the situation does occur however it is essential for all concerned, to submit accurate field notes* of the species in the observation book and where possible obtain confirmation of the sighting from a Ranger.

Birds which fall into this category, as far as Risley Moss is concerned, are either, marked by an asterisk (*) in the

following check list or are previously unrecorded on the reserve.

(* A written description taken at the time of the observation without reference to any book.)

4. New species

The following species have been recorded in 1985 for the first time at Risley Moss.

Whooper Swan
Red Kite
Rough Legged Buzzard



CHECK LIST AS AT DECEMBER 1985

TUFTED GREBE	REDSHANK	* RING OUSEL
CORMORANT	GREENSHANK	BLACKBIRD
HERON	* GREEN SANDPIPER	FIELDFARE
MUTE SWAN	* WOOD SANDPIPER	SONG THRUSH
● WHOOPER SWAN	COMMON SANDPIPER	REDWING
PINK FOOTED GOOSE	B.H. GULL	MISTLE THRUSH
(SNOW GOOSE)	COMMON GULL	* GRASSHOPPER WARBLER
■ CANADA GOOSE	L.B.B. GULL	* SEDGE WARBLER
SHELDUCK	HERRING GULL	* LESSER WHITETHROAT
TEAL	G.B. B. GULL	WHITETHROAT
, MALLARD	COMMON/ ARTIC TERN	GARDEN WARBLER
PINTAIL	* STOCK DOVE	BLACKCAP
GARGANEY	WOOD PIGEON	CHIFFCHAFF
■ SHOVELER	COLLARED DOVE	WILLOW WARBLER
TUFTED DUCK	TURTLE DOVE	GOLDCREST

● RED KITE	CUCKOO	SPOTTED FLYCATCHER
MARSH HARRIER	* BARN OWL	PIED FLYCATCHER
■ HEN HARRIER	LITTLE OWL	LONG TAILED TIT
■ GOSHAWK	TAWNY OWL	WILLOW TIT
● SPARROWHAWK	SHORT EARED OWL	COAL TIT
BUZZARD	NIGHTJAR	BLUE TIT
■ ROUGH-LEGGED BUZZARD	* SWIFT	GREAT TIT
■ KESTREL	* KINGFISHER	NUTHATCH
MERLIN	GREEN WOODPECKER	TREECREEPER
■ HOBBY	G. S. WOODPECKER	* GREAT GREY SHRIKE
■ PEREGRINE	* L. S. WOODPECKER	JAY
■ PARTRIDGE	SKYLARK	MAGPIE
PHEASANT	SANDMARTIN	JACKDAW
■ WATER RAIL	SWALLOW	ROOK
MOORHEN	HOUSE MARTIN	CROW
COOT	* TREE PIPIT	STARLING
● CRANE	MEADOW PIPIT	HOUSE SPARROW
OYSTERCATCHER	YELLOW WAGTAIL	TREE SPARROW
■ LITTLE RINGED PLOVER	GREY WAGTAIL	CHAFFINCH
GOLDEN PLOVER	PIED WAGTAIL	BRAMBLING
LAPWING	WREN	GREENFINCH
● RUFF	DUNNOCK	GOLDFINCH
● JACK SNIPE	ROBIN	SISKIN
C02•240N SNIPE	* NIGHTINGALE	LINNET
WOODCOCK	* REDSTART	REDPOLL
■ BAR TAILED GODWIT	WHINCHAT	BULLFINCH
■ WHIMBREL	STONECHAT	YELLOW HAMMER
CPRLEW	WHEATEAR	REED BUNTING
		CORN BUNTING
<u>LITTLE GREBE</u>		

A bird heard calling from the ' Moorhen Clump' on May 1st and another – probably the same bird – heard on the 5th off the 'Main Ridge' were the only two records received this year.

However, since the first record of this species at Risley Moss in- March 1982 and the subsequent proof of breeding in 1983, experience has shown that these birds are not particularly vocal. Their presence, therefore, can often be overlooked – this has been proven in the past and could also be the case during 1985.

CORMORANT

Early Spring records include what is now an established flight pattern over the reserve, with singles noted flying South East on the 25th & 30th March and North West on April 3rd. Autumn movement included a maximum of 10 flying South on November 20th.

GREY HERON

With no information available for the earlier months, the first birds noted were 1 on May 1st over the South West Wood with what may well have been the same bird later in the day feeding out on the Moss land. Thereafter singles were occasionally seen with maximum of 3 days on 31st May.

Post-breeding activity during June including 2 birds flying West on 2nd and 3 on the 5th; whilst on the 8th 3 arrived from the East, circled and landed in the along the East boundary and were then mobbed and driven off by a Carrion Crow and Sparrowhawk. During the latter half of the year, 2 were present on July 31st with singles noted occasionally in most months the exceptions being August and November. Interestingly on the 30th October a bird was observed being mobbed by a Hen Harrier, whilst on the 31st a return match saw 2 Herons mobbing a Hen Harrier! Two birds on December 24th and on 28th concluding the year.



WHOOOPER SWAN

Two birds arrived from the North on January 19th and then circled before flying off to the North West.

This is an unusual record for the local area in general and a first for Risley Moss.

PINK FOOTED GOOSE

Typical Winter movements of this overflying bird relate to the latter part of the year with 80+ high flyers to the South East on November 24th and 30 low flying birds later the same day. During December 38 flew North East on the 8th whilst 3-4 were heard calling over the Mossland on the 24th. However, the largest movement noted and probably the same flock, were the 110 flying South East on the 26th and 28th December

CANADA GOOSE

With birds regularly seen in the local area, the 7 seen heading West on February 22nd was not unexpected; however, the real question was when would Risley Moss become suitable enough for breeding purposes?

From April 17th to May 15th a pair were regularly seen around the Moss land pools and main ridge areas and were undoubtedly prospecting for a suitable nest site. Unfortunately an increase in work and disturbance on the Mossland itself finally proved too much and they eventually moved off.

A final record for the year was of 16 heading North on 18th December.

SHELDUCK No record in 1985.

TEAL

With only small numbers occasionally present during the very cold months of January and February, a peak of 90 on January 30th was above the average. Thereafter numbers fluctuated at the onset of Spring passage with 100+ on 3rd March; 60 on the 12th and again on April 9th falling to around 15 by the 17th.

Breeding numbers were down on previous years; however, with two nests found containing eggs and the number of males present throughout May, it is estimated that 5-8 pairs did in fact breed. A female with 6 young noted on the 22nd May was the only brood reported. During September, the first indications of an Autumn passage became evident when 15 present on the 6th rose to 120 by the 19th before returning to 17 by the 25th. By far the largest count- and typical of the month- were the 200 on the 17th October, peaking at 300 on the 19th where after numbers fell and varied between 20 & 70 until the years end.

MALLARD

The first significant record of the year came when 20 birds were counted on March 10th around the moss land pools. Thereafter single birds, invariably female, and an occasional pair were noted in the vicinity of The Flashes and Main Ridge. Based on these consistent sightings, it is thought that between 7-10 pairs bred although no young were actually seen. Autumn records included a flock of 48 on September 6th and 60 on the 19th out on the Moss land.

SHOVELER

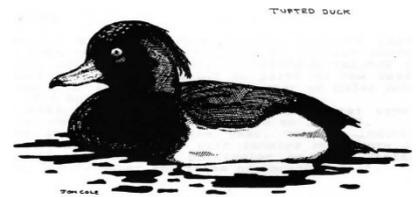
Only three records were received: - the first was of two males present on the early date of March 12th, whilst a pair were seen on the Moss land pools on April 17th.

On the 21st November one male and two female were present on the Moss land

TUFTED DUCK

One male on the mossland on March 12th and a pair on May 16th were the only records this year.

As with the previous species it is interesting to note that both early dates probably indicate part of a major dispersal from such local areas as the Woolston Eyes and Rixton Claypits.



RED KITE

An observer familiar with this species watched a bird soaring high over the flashes for several minutes on May 31st, before it drifted off to the North. This is a first record for Risley Moss.

Subsequent information received by the Rangers at Risley from two separate observers indicate that this bird may have been in the area for several days as it was seen North of Risley on 25th May and South of Warrington on the 30th.

HEN HARRIER

A good year for the species and affording some excellent views for many. The first record of a ringtail over the Mossland on February 2nd was probably the same bird seen earlier in the day at the Woolston Eyes.

On March 2nd, an adult female quartered the Moss land area and was seen again on several dates until March 25th.

The first Autumn bird, again ringtail, appeared on October 15th and remained until the 19th before disappearing for several days only to reappear on the 29th until the 31st

During this latter period, it was observed s-

- I) Being mobbed by a Merlin (29th)
- II) Chasing Teal and attacking a Heron (30th)
- 3) Being mobbed by two Herons (31st)

Another ringtail was present near Peter' s Hide 12thon December and again on the 18th out on the Mossland.

SPARROWHAWK

The general status of this species improves yearly and it is now seen regularly on the reserve in most months with the 1 exception of June and July. Although various individuals were seen hunting or soaring in parts of the reserve, there was a lack of further detail - except of males noted on 17th March, 14th April and 17th August.

During 1984, this species bred for the first time at Risley Moss, but unfortunately failed to do so in 1985.

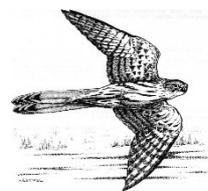
For the latter part of the year, various individuals were again regularly recorded, with females much more in evidence - two being present in particular on 22nd September, 19th October, 7th December and three on December 31st.

ROUGH-LEGGED BUZZARD

A bird seen on September 25th at 15.45 from Peter's Hide by an experienced ornithologist is only the second record of its kind for Risley Moss.

KESTREL

As in previous years, birds were seen almost daily with an estimated 2 pairs using the area for hunting over. Some interesting behaviour included a Blue Tit taken by a male bird in front of the Woodland Hide on February 9th and a pair present at an Owl box on June 5th - possibly as an attempt to breed. For record purposes, a pair successfully bred at Risley Moss for the first time in 1984, the breeding site was a Magpie nest in the South West Wood about 30 yards in from the mossland edge.



MERLIN

A good year for a species which is now becoming a regular feature of the moss land during winter. Two birds, one an immature male, were present throughout January and February affording some excellent views on a number of occasions. With no more sightings until March 24th, the female immature which then appeared more than compensated by remaining well into April and was last seen on the 21st.

The first winter record of an immature male on October 29th, was noted mobbing a Hen Harrier and remained until 3rd November. During December an immature bird was seen on the 1st and a female on the 7th and the 31st.

PEREGRINE FALCON

A female immature was present on March 30th in the woodland and again the following day, out on the moss land.

PARTRIDGE

A pair of birds and an occasional individual were noted throughout April and May in the vicinity of the Meadow, Observation Tower, and central coppice – suggesting perhaps that breeding may have been attempted within the reserve for the first time. Unfortunately no records after May 31st were received.

PHEASANT

With a number of birds seen or heard regularly during the breeding season, it is estimated that 3 pairs bred within the reserve. A dispersal to local farm areas seems apparent from July to September with no records at all. During winter, birds were heard mainly in the woodland areas and occasionally seen in front of the Woodland Hide.

MOORHEN

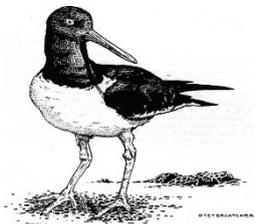
Recorded in the various wetter parts of the reserve from April until September with no further information received outside this period. Breeding status was estimated at 7 pairs (compared with 12 pairs in 1983).

COOT

One present on the moss land on November 24th was the only record of this scarce visitor.

OYSTERCATCHER

A bird flying South West on May 28th was the only observation received this year.



GOLDEN PLOVER

All records. refer to overflying birds which undoubtedly form part of the larger flocks found at the Woolston Eyes and fields adjacent to Lymm Golf Club. Six flying South on January 2nd were the maximum noted during the early part of the year, with a light spring passage of one flying North East on 25th March and 1st April and 3 moving East on April 4th.

Returning birds were first noted with 4 on October 31st. A peak of 70 seen among Lapwings on 30th November was followed the next day by 10 moving South East.

Thirty birds flying South on December 14th were the last seen.

LAPWING

There was little information available for the early part of the year other than 68 flying South on January 13th. With birds displaying in and around the reserve in spring, it is estimated that 2 pairs bred within the boundaries, whilst 4 pairs bred just outside it (2 pairs each along the south edge and far corner, 6 chicks and 4 adults were counted at the latter area on June 14th).

A later-than-normal movement of birds during autumn produced a flock of 200 on October 12th and 500 by the 28th. Thereafter, smaller numbers were noted until mid-December when on the 12th, perhaps in anticipation of colder weather, a moderately heavy

movement to the South East was noted when several flocks totaling 891 were counted in a short time including a flock of 150 and 600.

COMMON SNIPE

Compared with previous years, breeding numbers were down due in part to the very wet summer and the increased water levels throughout the moss land. However with two birds still drumming over the area on June 2nd, it is estimated that 4 pairs bred (compared with 6 pairs in 1983).

It was interesting to note the unusual habit, for this species, of one individual in June which was regularly noted perched quite high up and calling from a dead Silver Birch.

For the remainder of the year until November, one and two were frequently noted in the usual areas of moss land, with the exception of 4 flushed on 30th October, and 3 on the 31st. Two birds on November 5th were the last seen.

WOODCOCK

During the cold weather and earlier months, individuals were seen occasionally in the Oak, Ash, Elm woodlands – the last on March 23rd. No evidence of breeding was recorded this year. Towards the end of the year one and possibly two birds were seen on December 2nd.

CURLEW

Singles were noted occasionally in spring, with birds flying mainly South to South East in March and North East in April, with 2 flying South West on 1st April.

GREEN SANDPIPER

As in previous years, the main influx albeit small of this scarce migrant is during the autumn. The first record was of a bird flying West on September 1st whilst it was not until the 17th before one was seen on the reserve itself and again on the 19th in the area of the Mossland pools.

The last and a very late record was of a bird present on October 20th in the same area.

LESSER BLACK BACKED GULL

There were a number of spring records of birds flying North during March. Outside this period, a number of immatures with an occasional sub-adult could be seen around the area probably as a result of the nearby tip at Rixton.

COMMON/ARTIC TERN

A single bird flew North West on the unusual date of June 8th.

WOODPIGEON

Present in good numbers during winter with birds using the trees along the eastern boundary and South West wood areas for roosting purposes. During the colder weather, small flocks of 200 300 birds were seen, increasing occasionally to over 1000 particularly during the latter half of February.

Breeding appeared as successful as ever, although no accurate count was made. Interestingly enough, a number of nests (8 on one quick count alone) are now frequently seen in trees adjacent to or over regular pathways. During the later months, numbers

increased slowly; a typical pattern being the 200 on November 3rd rising to 700 by the 24th. Thereafter flocks of over 1000 were once again periodically seen with a peak on December 12th of 300 birds in the woodland and 1300 moving off to the North.

COLLARED DOVE

Birds were seen in most weeks of the breeding season in the Jay wood area although breeding was not confirmed. On December 27th, a flock of 63 birds along the East boundary was quite outstanding.

TURTLE DOVE

A bird seen on May 4th heralded the return of the species with an occasional single seen or heard in certain favoured areas thereafter.

During June, and in keeping with previous years, two pairs bred. The, last bird heard was on a somewhat late date of November 7th?

CUCKOO

From the first bird seen on April 21st to the last heard on June 14th in the South West wood, there were many records referring mostly to the calling male. However, females were occasionally heard "bubbling" whilst one bird in particular was observed sorting out its next round of victims early one morning in June. After first quartering the local area of moss land it then settled down in a Silver Birch, where for the next hour it could be seen intently observing the comings and goings of the Meadow Pipit and Reed Bunting population, who in turn would take time off to mob and scold it whilst it sat. there.

Breeding status was estimated at 4/5 pairs.

LITTLE OWL

The odd record received referred to birds on adjacent farmland.



TAWNY OWL

Unfortunately this species has failed to breed in the last two years at Risley for reasons unknown and cause for some concern.

The only record for the year was of a bird flushed from the Rhododendrons on 14th June, with very little evidence around to suggest it might have been in the area any length of time.

SHORT EARED OWL

A bird present on February 14th was the only record for the early months.

A single bird seen on October 19th and three present from December 28th - 30th on the mossland were the only other records.

SWIFT

A bird seen flying North on April 27th was the first seen. During the early part of May numbers remained very low; however, following a major influx on the 19th and until the end of the month birds were described as "numerous"

With mainly local birds present throughout June, it was not until July that numbers gradually increased as birds once again hawked over the mossland for insects, with August producing the largest numbers.

GREEN WOODPECKER

One on April 12th on adjacent farmland was noted on a beehive! .

GREAT-SPOTTED WOODPECKER

Although birds were seen and heard in most months, breeding and post-breeding evidence ie. young birds – was not confirmed. From October to December, 2 adults, a male and female were seen almost daily at the Woodland Hide whilst, on occasions, upto 5 birds were noted.

LESSER-SPOTTED WOODPECKER

Only the one record of a bird at a nest box on 19th April in the Oak, Ash, Elm wood.

For record purposes, this species did make an attempt to breed in 1984 when, over a number of days a male was seen to excavate a suitable nest site before eventually moving off possibly for lack of a mate! It was present from the 26th April to the 3rd May.

SKYLARK

With only two records of single birds on two dates in June, the demise of this bird as a breeding species at Risley must now be complete and whilst water tables remain so high the situation is unlikely to change.

SAND MARTIN

Two flying North on April 10th were the first seen.

During the summer, small numbers could occasionally be seen feeding over the moss land pools along with other Hirundines.

SWALLOW

A relatively early bird on April 2nd was the first seen.

Following a large influx on the 17th, numbers thereafter fell dramatically until the months end.

For the remainder of the summer, numbers feeding over the moss land pools fluctuated from a handful to "numerous" according to local conditions. Last birds seen were 2 on September 30th.



HOUSE MARTIN

The earliest record was of 3 on April 21st.

Present in small numbers throughout most of May with the exception of a large influx on 22nd May which quickly dispersed. Thereafter, small numbers were once again noted until the last one seen on September 13th.

TREE PIPIT

A single bird on June 7th was the only record of a species which once regularly bred here.

MEADOW PIPIT

Small flocks were occasionally noted during the winter months with a notable increase of activity during March which included a flock of 51 birds flying North West on the 25th.

With breeding numbers estimated at 7-9 pairs (compared with 12 pairs in 1983), the combination of a wet summer and predetermined increases in the water level of the mossland is causing problems to this species.

YELLOW WAGTAIL

A pair frequented the southern boundary throughout the summer and probably bred in the adjacent area.

WREN

Recorded throughout the year wherever there was suitable habitat. Interestingly a cock nest, unlined, was found by the mole-patch.



ROBIN

An assessment of breeding status, based on two brief checks only, estimated the main woodland population at 25 pairs. However a more accurate survey is needed before true comparisons can be made.

WHINCHAT

Apart from an unconfirmed report of a pair seen on one date in May and a single bird present off the Main Ridge on July 7th, there were no further records.

Although this species appears to have suffered a decline locally in recent years, this is the second consecutive year that it has failed to breed at Risley Moss and it is suspected that once again the increased water level of the moss land combined with tree and shrub removal may well be the reason.

STONECHAT

A bird seen on October 5th was the only record of this scarce visitor.

WHEATEAR

A male bird seen on March 30th was the earliest recorded for Risley Moss. During April and May upto 3 birds were occasionally seen.

FIELDFARE

During the cold weather, birds were driven more and more into the public parts of the reserve particularly around the Woodland Hide. A single bird seen in the general area on January 20th increased to "numerous" by February 9th.

The last birds seen were 6 along the East boundary on April 12th. The first returning birds appeared on 19th October, with a flock of 14, which slowly increased to 38 by the 28th. November maxima was 63 on the 4th, whilst December, perhaps in anticipation of impending cold weather, saw a light movement to the South particularly on the 14th with flocks of 95, 65 and 76 respectively.

SONG THRUSH

Resident and breeds in small numbers.

REDWING

A general movement to the South West during the middle of January was noted. However, by the 26th, birds had returned to the woodland and upto 70 were roosting in the mixed woodland. By the 9th February "numerous" birds were again using the area with- an occasional bird feeding in front of the Woodland Hide.

The last seen was on 24th April.

Birds returning in autumn became apparent on October 12th when 12 were noted. Thereafter, and until the end of the year, small groups of upto 30 birds were seen with the exception of the 300 and 100 flying South on the 20th October and 14th December and the 150 roosting on the reserve on October 29th.

MISTLE THRUSH

Although birds were seen or heard in most months, the breeding population was down to 3 pairs (compared with 4/5 pairs in 1983). On October 19th a group of 10 birds was the largest flock noted with ones and twos thereafter. On the early date of December 18th a bird was heard in full song in front of the Woodland Hide.

LESSER WHITETHROAT

A pair bred just outside the reserve along the East boundary.

WHITETHROAT

Although 3 birds were seen on May 3rd and four on the 16th, the normal breeding area for this species along the West fence remained deserted. However, a pair did occupy territory in front of Peters hide, whilst a second pair bred along the fence line adjacent to the Holly Bush Gate.

GARDEN WARBLER

Despite an unconfirmed report of a bird heard in May and a possible sighting of another in July, breeding once again - did not take place.

BLACKCAP

The earliest record of a male on 9th April was followed by several others throughout the remainder of the month.

During May, with territories becoming more obvious, the survey confirmed 12 pairs as breeding with a further 4 pairs as probable's - an increase on previous years (compared with 14 pairs 1983).

The last bird a female was seen on August 12th by the Hairpin Bend.

CHIFFCHAFF

The first bird heard was on the slightly earlier-than-normal date of April 3rd near the Observation Tower and, by the 10th, had increased to 5 singing males in the usual more mature areas of woodland.

With territories well established during May, careful survey revealed a record increase in breeding status with 3 pairs and the possibility of a 4th pair) present. Last record was of a bird calling on July 11th.

WILLOW WARBLER

Two birds heard on April 9th were the first of spring. By the 14th, following an overnight "fall", several were heard throughout the reserve. Despite being one of the more common warblers, the breeding survey indicated a much-reduced total of 44 birds on territory (compared with 60 pairs in 1983).

GOLDCREST

Apart from two seen along the Foxglove path on May 4th, all records referred to birds occasional 1 seen in winter with a maximum of 3 on November 24th.

SPOTTED FLYCATCHER

Although a pair were initially seen near the Woodland Hide on May 21st, subsequent sightings became somewhat erratic suggesting that the species failed to breed this year. As if to confuse matters, a single adult was seen along the East boundary on June 30th.

LONG-TAILED TIT

Seen in small groups during January and February – particularly, and unusually at the Woodland Hide feeding area. Thereafter, birds began pairing off and were seen occasionally in parts of the reserve.

Breeding was estimated at 3 pairs compared with 4/5 pairs in 1983).

During the latter part of the year, sightings increased – along with flock sizes which averaged 6–10 in number, the exception being 16 on October 29th, 25 on 14th November, 20 on 25th November, and 28th December.

WILLOW TIT

An occasional bird was seen during winter at the feeding station of the Woodland Hide, notable more so during November and December.

The only other record was of 6 birds at the Hairpin Bend on August 12th.

Breeding status is unknown for this year.

COAL TIT

Another species which is invariably seen at the Woodland Hide area in winter. All records received referred to individuals present on many dates from October 29th onwards – the exceptions being 2 birds on the 4th, 23rd, and 28th November and 28th December.

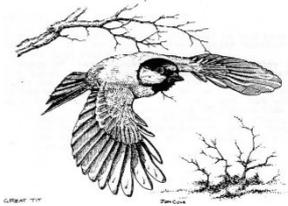
BLUE TIT

An autumn check on nest boxes revealed that 10–15 pairs had bred, comparing favourably with recent years. Wintering parties of varying size were much in evidence with an occasional group of 20 noted particularly during November and December. As usual, quite a number of birds could be seen at the Woodland Hide feeding station on most days.

GREAT TIT

Breeding status, based on the nest box check, was estimated at 6-8 pairs although no young were subsequently recorded.

As with the previous species, birds are much more accountable during winter with 6-8 birds regularly noted at the Woodland Hide and in small mixed roving flocks around the reserve.



NUTHATCH

Since this species was first seen at Risley Moss in 1983, its use of the area has increased dramatically, unfortunately, most records as yet refer to the late autumn and winter periods. On September 22nd two birds were noted in the Oaks near the Woodland Hide and frequented this area until October 5th. Following a short lull, a female appeared on the 29th October and 5th November followed by two females on the 10th and 13th. Thereafter single birds were regularly seen until the end of the year usually in the vicinity of the Woodland Hide - although two records involved singles around the Maintenance Unit and South West wood areas .

TREECREEPER

Although this species is often overlooked, there was sufficient evidence to suggest that 2 pairs bred in the more mature areas of woodland.

Outside the breeding season, an occasional bird was seen feeding at the Woodland Hide.

JAY

Present throughout the year, this attractive bird maintained its breeding status at 2/3 pairs. Outside this period it was usually noted in one and two with 3 recorded at the Woodland Hide on December 1st and 4 at Peters Hide on the 4th. Occasional views were had of birds using the feeding area in front of the Woodland Hide during winter.

JACKDAW / ROOK

The majority of records received referred to the mixed overflying flocks which form part of the regular North-South vice-versa flight line during winter.

The movement of these flocks - sometimes on a wide front over the Warrington area can, on occasions, total between 200- 500 birds as they disperse from the major roost at Marbury Park in the mornings and return to it during the afternoon.

Jackdaw - 1 present on site in the Oak, Ash, Elm wood on June 2nd. Otherwise overflying totals include 34 flying North West on 23rd November, 100 flying South on 24th November, 100 flying North on 21st December.

Rook 180 flying South on 6th October 160 to the North West on 23rd November.

TREE SPARROW

Although generally overlooked, there are nearly always a few birds seen at the Woodland Hide during the winter period. Three pairs bred on the Visitor Centre and has become a regular practice now.

CHAFFINCH

There were very few records received, although they are present in all but the harshest weather.

Breeding numbers were reduced to 3-5 pairs (compared with 8 pairs in 1983) with one of these nests subsequently destroyed.

BRAMBLING

Limited numbers were seen during the winter amounting to no more than the occasional one or two and then only at the Woodland Hide feeding area.

GREENFINCH

One of the commonest finches to be seen in winter at the peanut dispensers. On most days 6-10 birds were present-with notable maximas of 27 on December 24th and 20 on the 27th.

GOLDFINCH

Birds were seen occasional ly during the early part of the year, particularly in the cold weather. A flock of 10 on January 20th followed by 12 on the 23rd were feeding on Alders in the meadow area. By the 9th February, however, the continuing cold weather had driven the birds further into the woodland and unusually a party of 12 was seen feeding at the Woodland Hide.

With flocks still active during early spring, 25 on March 25th were again noted feeding among Alder. Whilst on April 3rd upto 15 birds flew in from Gorse Covert and remained in the area for most of the day. By far the largest flock, however, was the 36 seen on April 14th which, by the 24th, had dispersed. Apart from a pair seen flying over the Typha area on May 7th, the only other record was of a single at the Woodland Hide on November 7th.

SISKIN

Normally a scarce visitor to the reserve, there were only two records for the early half of the year, both of a female seen among a Goldfinch flock on the 9th and 10th February. During November, sightings became almost daily the most notable being the 20 • seen in the woodland area on the 7th and 2 8th November. By far the largest flock recorded at Risley Moss was the 40 birds seen near the Maintenance Unit on December 5th. Thereafter 2 and 3 were occasionally noted.

LINNET

A flock of 40 birds on January 20th and 50 on April 5th were the only records received.

REDPOL

The only early record received was of a flock of 50 birds on January 20th. During the breeding season single birds were regularly noted flying over the reserve on a North-South and vice-versa route. Breeding was estimated at 2/3 pairs in an area adjacent to the southern boundary fence of the reserve.

Autumn and winter flocks produced a notable 65 on October 12th with more typical numbers of 15 on 17th October and 28th November and 20 on December 24th.

BULLFINCH

Birds were regularly recorded in all but the coldest months. Although most sightings were of individuals, 3 were together on 15th April and 28th November, whilst pairs were obviously more in evidence during the breeding season.

Breeding status was estimated at 2/3 pairs in such areas as the Foxglove path, Rhododendron patch and South West Wood.

YELLOWHAMMER

Although male birds were heard singing by many observers from March to August in many parts of the reserve, the survey revealed only 8 pairs as breeding (compared with 11 pairs in 1983) in the usual areas around the edges of the Mossland.

Outside this period a maxima of 11 birds were seen on March 25th along the East boundary.

REED BUNTING

Breeding numbers remained stable with 13 pairs present, mainly in the central areas of moss land particularly areas adjacent to the centre ridge.

Outside this season, 6 birds were present along the East boundary on February 2nd whilst 12 were seen there on December 12th.

CORN BUNTING

A single bird noted among Reed Buntings on December 27th was the only record of this locally scarce species.



Nest Box Survey 1985

A survey was carried out of all the bird nest boxes to assess them for their state of repair. Of the 42 tit boxes recorded in August. 85 (Ecological Report 38) 2 are now missing and will be replaced since they were both occupied in previous seasons. Of the rest only 5 were damaged and in need of repair, 2 had lost their lids but were found on the ground. The damage was predominantly due to Woodpecker activity, although greatly reduced compared with last year. The condition of the boxes was generally very good, repairs and replacements will be made shortly. Box 37 is to be re-sited to a neighbouring tree with more cover. Records exist for 5 robin boxes, 4 are now missing, one more than in August. These will probably not be replaced since there are an abundance of robins at Risley with presumably no problems of nest sites. The 'Wedge' box and 2" hole box were satisfactory.

The Kestrel boxes are all in a fair condition but not in use. The Kestrel box at t3 will be resited to H 17, since in this area Kestrels have bred in the past utilizing old magpie nests. El 3 has never been used but is ideally sited to be pointed out to from the path when on guided walks.

The Kestrel box at E4 has been used in the past by a pair of Tawny Owls, except in 1985, although an owl was seen on the same Rhododendron bush on the 14th June 85.

The owl boxes are all in a fair condition without need of repair. Boxes 15 & L 6 have never been used, whereas 05 & J22 have regularly been used except in 1985. The box at F 19 will be replaced in a suitable tree. The lack of any signs of breeding by the owls is puzzling as they have remained present on site. The box at J22 was used in 1985 as a roost but here was no evidence of breeding. The most obvious answer is a crash in the small mammal population, not only on Risley Moss but also the surrounding area (farmland and Gorse Covert).

There are several possible reasons for this: -

1. The increased rainfall and cool temperatures in 1985 many have caused flooding of the nests and runs of the small mammals, thus inhibiting or reducing breeding.
2. Due to the increased housing around the boundaries there has been an observed increase in cats which may have been taking small mammals.
3. There has been an increase in the fox population which suggests sufficient mammals for them to breed at the expense of the owls ie increased competition.
4. The owl population may be at it carrying capacity but this is not thought likely.
5. Tawny Owls are known to "move around" occasionally and it is possible that they have temporarily dispersed locally, although it is thought unlikely that all three resident pairs would do this simultaneously.

Appendix Report 39

Box Number	Breeding Status August 85	Comments	Condition March 86	Comments
1		Tit Nest	Fair	
2	Used	Tit Nest 2 eggs	Missing	Replace
3	Used	Tit Nest 1 egg	Fair	
4	Used	Tit Nest	Fair	
5	Used	Tit Nest 1 egg abandoned? Woodpecker damage	New front req	Woodpecker Damage
6	Used	Tit Nest	Fair	
7	Used	Tit Nest	Fair	

8	Used	Wrens Nest Woodpecker Damage	Fair	
9	Empty		Fair	
10	Used	Tit Nest	Fair	
11	Used	Tit Nest	Fair	
12	Used	Tit Nest	Fair	
13	Empty		Fair	
	Used	Tit Nest	Fair	
15	Empty	Probable Roost	Fair	
16	Was Used	Collapsed on 1 dead Blue Tit and 1 dead Great Tit.	Fair	
17	Empty	Woodpecker Damage Probably Roost	Fair	
18	Empty		Fair	
19	Used	Tit Nest	Fair	
20	Used	Tit Nest	Fair	
21	Empty		Fair	
25	Used	Tit Nest (Larger Egg)	Fair	
26	Used	Tit Nest 4 eggs	Fair	
29	Missing		New front req	Lid to be Put on.
31	Used	Tit Nest enlarged Hole.	Fair	
32	Used	Sawdust Filled emptied, Tit Nest	and Fair	
34	Empty	Woodpecker Damage	New side & Front	Woodpecker Damage
	Breeding Status	Comments	Condition	Comments
Number	August 85		March 86	
35	Missing	Backboard still on tree	New Lid Req.	Found on Ground
36	Used	3BI. Tit eggs Woodpecker damage	Fair	Lid to be put on.
37	Used	4 BI Tit eggs	Fair	Re-site
38	Empty	Woodpecker Damage	Fair	
40	Missing		Missing	Replace
41	Used	Tit Nest 1 egg White slightly Speckled.	Fair	
	Used	Tit Nest	Fair	
43	Used	BI Tit Nest 1 egg	Fair	
44	Used	BI Tit Nest 1 egg Woodpecker damage	Fair	

45	Used		New front reg	Woodpecker Damage
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46	Box	Used		
47	Tit Nest	Fair	Used	Tit
48	Nest 2 eggs	Fair		
	. Empty	Fair		

KESTREL BOXES

A3		Empty	Fair	Re -site
E13		Empty	Fair	
E4		Empty	Fair	

49	Empty	1/2 Built nest	Fair	
		Woodpecker Damage		

102	Empty		Fair	
	(Wedge)			

201	Used	Tit Nest	Fair	
	(2"Hole)			

ROBIN BOXES

51	Empty		Missing	
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52	Empty		Missing	
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53	Empty		Missing	
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54	Empty		Missing	
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57	Used	Wrens Nest	Fair	
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OWL BOXES

	Empty		Fair	
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15	Empty		Fair	
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