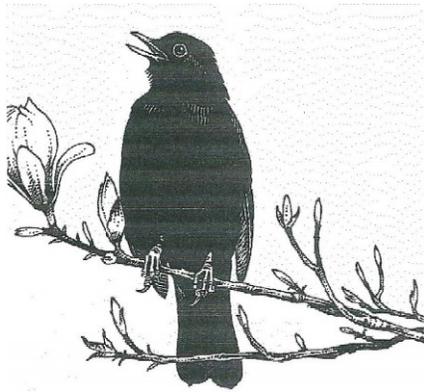


RISLEY MOSS BIRD REPORT

1997



Compiled by Rob Smith



Introduction

This report is a summary of birds seen at Risley Moss during 1997.

From an ornithological viewpoint, the year has been particularly interesting with several species being recorded for the first time for several years. The majority of these records were undoubtedly linked to the mossland rewetting scheme carried out in 1994 which not only fulfilled the original aims of the project, but created conditions suited to a wider range of bird species and other forms of wildlife as well.

Among the highlights and in the wetter areas, Little Grebe bred for the first time since 1987 and birds such as Water Rail, Redshank and Mute Swan put in brief appearances. On the muddy fringes, two pairs of Little Ringed Plover returned to breed but failed because of increasing water levels and the cold wet weather.

In the marginalised areas of the mossland Sedge and Grasshopper Warbler created interest for a short period whilst in drier parts, two former breeding species - Skylark and Tree Pipit, put in some good territorial displays before moving on,

The appearance of Hobby in July and August was an unexpected bonus which drew in considerable numbers of bird watchers from around the region. During this period superb views were had of two adults and occasionally two juveniles, hawking and feeding over the mossland on most days. Contrary to rumours at the time, the species did not breed at Risley Moss.

In the woodland, Nuthatch bred for the first time on the reserve, whilst Lesser Spotted and Green Woodpecker put in brief appearances.

Two surveys were carried out during the breeding season, a Common Bird Census [CBC] and a warbler survey. The CBC concentrated on the mossland species and was an attempt to standardise the technique and level of coverage for this rather awkward area. The warbler survey covered the whole reserve and is an arbitrary method of assessing birds holding territory on the reserve on one particular date. The results of both surveys for the year are included in the text and summarised at the end.



SYSTEMATIC LIST

LITTLE GREBE *Tachybaptus ruficollis*
casual

After a ten year interval, breeding was once again confirmed when an adult and juvenile were seen in front of Peters Hide on 5/8. Prior to this birds were heard calling near the Bottom Coppice on 11/4 and seen or heard on various dates throughout May and June.

CORMORANT *Phalacrocorax carbo*
overflying

Numbers and sightings were down on previous years with only singles noted moving north/south and vice versa during the winter period.

GREY HERON *Ardea cinerea*
casual

Sightings also down on previous years with single birds seen on a few days each month with the exception of a pair overflying to the north on 17/5. During July/August an occasional bird could be seen perched on various trees around the mossland.

MUTE SWAN *Cynus olor*
vagrant

An unusual visitor to the reserve, but on 12/12 a pair flew in from the south and settled onto one of the flooded bunds and proceeded to preen themselves.

CANADA GOOSE *Branta canadensis*
casual

Despite the presence of a pair on 6/4 and two pairs in May, breeding did not take place. For the rest of the year the mossland was used as an overnight roost with as an overnight roost with a maximum of 9 flighting in on 21/9.

PINK FOOTED GOOSE *Anser brachyrhynchus*
overflying

Winter maxima produced 70+ flying south east on 21/2. In the latter part of the year c300 - in 3 skeins of c100 each, flew south east in quick succession on 9th and 10/11.

TEAL *Anas crecca*
resident

Breeding was not confirmed, although three birds were noted on 3/3 and two pairs in early April.

MALLARD *Anas platyrhynchos*
resident

Four pairs bred on the mossland. At other times numbers fluctuated widely with maxima of 28 on 26/11 11 on 12/7 - 5 on 9/8 15 on 14/9 - 6 on 9/10 - 6 on 13/11 - 2 in December.

SHOVELER *Anas clypeata*

vagrant

A single bird flew in from the west, circled the moss and returned to the west on 21/9.

TUFTED DUCK *Aythya fuligula*

vagrant

A pair seen in front of Peters Hide on 1/5 was the only record of the year and the first since 1995.

MARSH HARRIER *Circus aeruginosus*

vagrant

A female was seen hawking close to the Observation Tower on 13/5. An immature was seen briefly at close quarters near the Bottom Coppice on the 9/8.

HEN HARRIER *Circus cyaneus*

vagrant

A ringtail was seen hawking over the mossland on the 9/2, 14/2 and 22/2. The only other record was also of a ringtail over the southern boundary on 2/11.

SPARROWHAWK *Accipiter nisus*

resident

Birds were seen on most days throughout the year with a pair displaying over the woodland on the 9/3 and the mossland on 2/5. One pair bred in the usual area of the reserve with a female and juvenile present there on 9/8. Of interest was the actions of a male bird which was seen swooping repeatedly and unsuccessfully at Jays in front of the Woodland Hide on 3/1. Elsewhere a male was noted being harassed over the mossland by three Carrion Crows on 21/2.

BUZZARD *Buteo buteo*

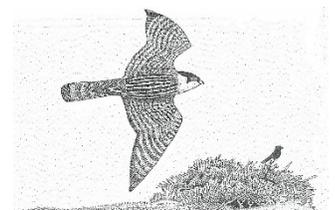
vagrant

A single bird was noted flying over the north east corner of the reserve on 14/9. Interestingly a bird flew up from the ground near the Maintenance Unit on 2/11.

HOBBY *Falco subbuteo*

vagrant

An adult flying north across the mossland on the 25/5 gave little indication of the treat in store later in the year. On 20/7 an adult bird was seen repeatedly mobbing a pair of Sparrowhawks over the Bottom Coppice, the reason became clear later that day when two adults and a juvenile were seen hawking over the Southern Birchwood. Thereafter and up to the 9/8, considerable numbers of birdwatchers were treated to fine views of two adults and two juveniles feeding on dragonflies over the



mossland on most days. Despite speculation at the time, the species did not breed on the reserve.

KESTREL *Falco tinnunculus*
Casual

Changes to the mossland in recent years have clearly improved conditions for this species. Single birds were noted hunting over the mossland on several dates in May, July, August and October.

MERLIN *Falco columbarius*
vagrant

A single bird was seen tussling with a Sparrowhawk over the southern boundary on 2/3.

PEREGRINE FALCON *Falco peregrinus*
vagrant

A male was seen drifting low and slow across the mossland to the west on 29/7. A second male flew north east on 28/9.

GREY PARTRIDGE *Perdix perdix*
casual

A bird was heard calling from an area of grass and bracken near the clay capping on 12/7.

PHEASANT *Phasianus colchicus*
casual

Most observations refer to transient birds, some of which are reared on adjacent farmland to the south of the reserve. A male was heard calling near the OT on 9/2, south west wood on 7th and 30/4 and the east boundary on 13/11. A female was seen near the Woodland Hide on the 5/3.

WATER RAIL *Rallus aquatica*
vagrant

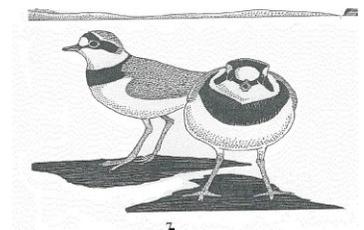
Good views were had of a bird which was disturbed beside the Centre Ridge on 13/11. This is only the sixth time that this species has been recorded on the reserve.

MOORHEN *Gallinula chloropus*
common

The CBC revealed that a total of ten pairs had bred on the mossland with young being seen well into October.

LITTLE RINGED PLOVER *Charadrius dubius*
casual

Since the rewetting in 1994, conditions for this species have greatly improved in recent years. Unfortunately, the two pairs



which attempted to breed in 1997, failed because of the wet weather and rising water levels. Outside this period, four pairs were noted on 30/4 and three pairs on 2/5. A single juvenile on 5/9 was the only evidence of autumn passage.

GOLDEN PLOVER *Pluvialis apricaria*

overflying

A flock of 17 birds flew west along the southern boundary on 26/12.

COMMON SNIPE *Gallinago gallinago*

resident

This species has declined as a breeding species on the reserve in recent years. In 1997 only one pair bred on the mossland. Outside this period, singles were seen or disturbed on occasions in most months with a maxima of seven on 21/9 and five on 26/12.

WOODCOCK *Scolopax rusticola*

resident

Although breeding was not confirmed, birds were noted in most months in different parts of the reserve and in particular during winter.

REDSHANK *Tringa tetanus*

vagrant

A single bird was seen preening and feeding on one of the bunds on 12/7. This is only the sixth sighting of this species on the reserve, since records began.

GREENSHANK *Tringa nebularia*

passage

Three birds on the mossland on 5/8 were the only evidence of autumn passage.

GREEN SANDPIPER *Tringa ochropus*

passage

A single bird on 17/5 was the only spring record. Autumn passage began with the arrival of a bird on the 4/7 and ended with two birds leaving the mossland on 5/9. In between those dates, records included two on 12/7, 29/7 & 25/8 and four birds on 5/8, 9/8 & 30/8.

WOODPIGEON *Columba palumbus*

resident

Present throughout the year and breeds in good numbers in woodland areas. Large flocks roost in the south west wood during the winter period with 2000+ being a typical count.

COLLARED DOVE *Streptopelia decaocto*

casual

Frequently seen and heard along the north boundary adjacent to the housing estate. Birds are occasionally noted at the Woodland Hide feeding station in winter.

CUCKOO *Cuculu canorus*

summer

A very poor year for this once common summer visitor to the reserve. A bird heard on the morning of 13/5 was the only record received.

TAWNY OWL *Strix aluco*

resident

Birds were heard occasionally in different parts of the reserve, but status is unclear at present.

SWIFT *Apus apus*

summer

First birds of the year appeared on 13/5. Thereafter birds were occasional noted over the mossland during the breeding season with numbers beginning to increase in July. On 4/7 over 150 birds were hawking over the mossland, with 100+ on various dates in August. Two birds on 8/9 were the last of the year.

GREEN WOODPECKER *Picus viridis*

vagrant

A single bird landed on a tree in front of Peters Hide on 3/8 and was heard near the Typha Pool area on 9/9 Prior to this the species had only been recorded at Risley Moss in 1983, 1985 and 1993.

LESSER SPOTTED WOODPECKER *Dendrocopus minor*

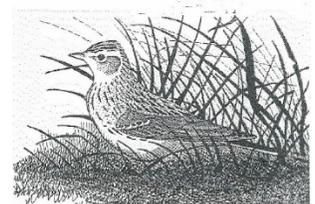
vagrant

Two birds were watched at the Woodland Hide by a visiting RSPB group on the 22/2. This is only the seventh record for the reserve.

SKYLARK *Alauda arvensis*

casual

Two birds were singing over the mossland on several occasions in May and June, but breeding did not take place. Other records include a light passage of birds to the north on 5/10 and two birds circling the moss on 26/12.



SAND MARTIN *Riparia riparia*

summer

Four birds noted on 4/7 were the only records received.

SWALLOW *Hirundo rustica*

summer

Two birds overflying the reserve on 11/4 were the first record of the year. Thereafter small numbers were noted hawking over the mossland on occasions during the breeding season with 50+ on many days in August. Of particular interest was the formation of a small roost of 30 birds in front of the Observation Tower on 13 & 14/9. This record also seems to have been the last seen of the species for the year.

HOUSE MARTIN *Delichon urbica*

summer

A flock of 40 hawking over the mossland on 13/5 was the first record of the year. Virtually absent from the reserve during June flocks of 50+ began to reappear in mid July and rose to 150+ on 9/9. Last birds seen were 40 on 11/10.

MEADOW PIPIT *Anthus pratensis*

resident

The CBC indicated that seven pairs held territory during the breeding season with the raised embankments forming the core breeding areas. During winter birds also roost on the mossland with 66 present on 26/1, 20+ on 21/9 and 26 on 21/12.

TREE PIPIT *Anthus trivialis*

casual

A male was displaying strongly in a traditional breeding area of the mossland on the 10/6 but moved on two days later.

PIED WAGTAIL *Motacilla alba yarrellii*

casual

Four juveniles were present on one of the bunds on 29/7 and two adults on 5/9. Thereafter singles were seen in October and December.

ROBIN *Erithacus rubecula*

resident

Present throughout the woodland area and parts of the mossland with up to eight birds noted at the Woodland hide on most days during winter.

WHINCHAT *Saxicola rubetra*

casual

A bird appeared briefly on the mossland on 1/5.

BLACKBIRD *Turdus merula*

resident

Outside the breeding season up to 20 birds can be seen at the Woodland hide or entering a roost near the Observation Tower.

FIELDFARE *Turdus pilarus*

winter

Two departing bird on 3/3 were the last spring record.

SONG THRUSH *Turdus philomelos*

resident

Present in small numbers and usually seen in the woodland glades.

REDWING *Turdus iliacus*

winter

During winter upto 100 birds can be seen entering a roost along the woodland edge between Peters Hide and the Observation Tower most evenings. Birds noted on 3/3 were the last seen.

MISTLE THRUSH *Turdus viscivorus*

resident

Up to three pairs bred in the main area of woodland. Other records included five birds perched on trees on the mossland on 10/6.

GRASSHOPPER WARBLER *Locustella naevia*

vagrant

The unmistakeable reeling of this crepuscular species, from the edge of the mossland bunds at dusk on 17/5 was a pleasant surprise. This is only the fifth occasion that this species has been recorded at Risley Moss.

SEDGE WARBLER *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

vagrant

Another unusual and notable record for the reserve was a bird which appeared on 2/5 and remained among the Centre Ridge birches for several days.

WHITETHROAT *Sylvia communis*

summer resident

Another poor year for this species. A single bird was heard near the Observation Tower on the 13/5 and another among bushes on the moss on the 25/8.

GARDEN WARBLER *Sylvia borin*

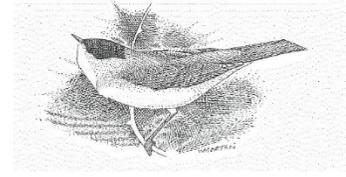
summer

The warbler survey revealed that three pairs held territories on the reserve with the species being heard for the first time on the 13/5.

BLACKCAP *Sylvia atricapilla*

summer/winter

The warbler survey carried out in May revealed that 15 pairs were holding territory in the woodland areas. Outside this period two overwintering birds were seen at the Woodland Hide on various dates in March/April. A male bird was also seen in a tit flock on 11/9.



CHIFFCHAFF *Phylloscopus collybita*

summer

A bird was heard calling in the main wood on 17/3, with the last bird being heard on 9/8. The survey revealed the presence of six territories in the main areas of woodland.

WILLOW WARBLER *Phylloscopus trochilus*

summer

The most common warbler on the reserve with 59 pairs being recorded during the breeding season. The mossland edges and birch scrub provide the main habitat for the species with 40 pairs being recorded on the CBC. Earliest record was of a bird calling on 7/4 and the last was heard on 25/8.

GOLDCREST *Regulus regulus*

resident

A species often overlooked so most records referred to single birds seen at the Woodland Hide or among wintering tit flocks.

LONG TAILED TIT *Aegithalus caudatus*

resident

Winter flocks containing on average 15 birds were a regular feature around the reserve with an exceptional group of 25 on the 11/9. These birds have also become a regular feature and a delight to watch at the Woodland Hide on many days in winter.

WILLOW TIT *Parus montanus*

resident

Two pairs bred, with up to 3 birds being present at the feeding station in winter. Individuals were also noted among the roving tit flocks, with four being seen on 11/9.

COAL TIT *Parus ater*

resident

Three pairs bred. Outside the breeding season up to two birds could be seen at the Woodland Hide in winter and among the roving tit flocks around the reserve.

GREAT TIT *Parus major*

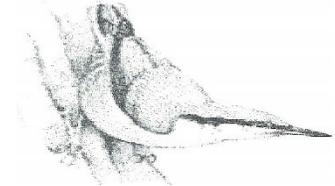
resident

Up to 15 birds were seen at the Woodland Hide in winter with smaller numbers noted among the mixed winter flocks roaming the area.

NUTHATCH *Sitta europaea*

resident

Until recently this species was a frustrating and irregular visitor to the reserve. The situation changed during the winter of 1996/97, when it became a frequent sight at the Woodland Hide and finally, remaining to breed in the main woodland for the first time on the reserve.



TREECREEPER *Certhia familiaris*

resident

Most records refer to single birds seen in the usual areas of the reserve and among the mixed flocks in winter.

JAY *Garrulus glandarius*

resident

Birds are seen throughout the year with up to three at the Woodland Hide on many days in winter. A small roost of 5 - 10 birds also formed on occasions near Peters Hide.

MAGPIE *Pica pica*

resident

The winter roost near Peters Hide produced a maximum of 97 birds on 21/2. With the roost reforming in October, numbers increased slowly with 36 on 13/11 and c70 in December.

JACKDAW *Corvus monedula*

overflying

Birds seen are usually part of the mixed flocks which flight between fields and tips to the north of the site and the traditional roost at Marbury Park. Maximas included c300 in January, c140 in February and c380 in November.

ROOK *Corvus frugelegus*

overflying

Part of the same movement as the previous species although in lesser numbers, Flocks of note included c170 in January and c280 in December.

CHAFFINCH *Fringilla coelebs*

resident

A common bird on the reserve with up to 20 birds at the Woodland Hide feeders in winter. Up to 50 birds were also noted entering a regular roost in Jay Wood on most evenings over the same period.

BRAMBLING *Fringilla montifringilla*

winter

A flock of 25 were seen on birches in the Mini moss area along with Redpolls and Siskins on the 2/4. Aside from this, birds were generally scarce with occasional sightings at the Woodland Hide in January/February and the finch roost.

SISKIN *Carduelis spinus*

winter

Birds were seen in most months near the Woodland Hide and Lagoon pond area. Typical flock size was 15 - 25 birds, with 15 noted in the Mini moss area on 2/4.

REDPOLL *Carduelis flammea*

resident

Seen or heard in most months with 3 pairs breeding among the birch scrub on the mossland,

BULLFINCH *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

resident

Mostly seen or heard in the Main and south west wood areas. Birds have also recently begun to feed at the Woodland Hide with two being seen there on several occasions in March and December.

YELLOWHAMMER *Emberiza citrinella*

casual

A bird was heard calling from the NE boundary on the 12/7 and again on the 9/8.

REED BUNTING *Emberiza schoeniclus*

resident

The CBC indicated that 19 pairs held territories on the mossland. Outside the breeding season, birds were seen or heard on the mossland in most winter months with two birds being seen at the Woodland Hide feeding station on 6/3.

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Line drawings by Bill Morton

Common Bird Census results:

Mossland-Breeding pairs:

Little Grebe	1
Mallard	4
Teal	1
Moorhen	10
Snipe	1
Meadow Pipit	7
Redpoll	3
Reed Bunting	19

Warbler-Breeding pairs:

Blackcap	15
Garden Warbler	3
Whitethroat	1
Willow Warbler	59
Chiffchaff	6