

Risley Moss
Local Nature Reserve
Bird Report

1999

Compiled by Rob Smith

Introduction

Two important management schemes took place during the year which between them will have a considerable influence on the mossland and its flora and fauna for the foreseeable future.

The most obvious of these was the completion of the second phase of the rewetting scheme which took place in September and which has significantly altered the profile of the northern and drier

areas of mossland, a second but less obvious task has been the steady and progressive removal of birch and willow scrub from the centre areas of the mossland. Where there was once dry overgrown scrub and bracken covered peat cuttings there is now a series of water filled scrapes with raised embankments and an open aspect to the wider mossland

The impact that this work has had on the mossland is plain for all to see, what effect it will have on the flora and fauna of the mossland remains to be seen, the signs are already very encouraging not only for the existing levels and diversity of wildlife but in anticipation of 'something new turning up' as we enter the new millennium .

The signs are already there, by the end of the year twelve species of raptor had been recorded on the reserve. This included a **Montagues Harrier** – a first for the reserve (see article by P. Hilton) and a rather interesting wing tagged **Hen Harrier** for which we are still seeking information.

Merlin was recorded on thirteen separate occasions, whilst **Hobby** and **Peregrine Falcon** fared well. In less than three years the status of **Common Buzzard** has improved greatly and is now fast becoming a regular feature around the reserve. All four species of owl were recorded for the first time for many years, **Tawny Owl** less so than on previous occasions whilst **Barn** and **Short Eared Owls** made welcomed appearances after several years absence and a **Little Owl** made brief showing.

Risley Moss by its very nature is not prime wader habitat but the rewetting scheme previously mentioned has certainly improved conditions for this group of birds. Over the last three years we have enjoyed seeing a range of waders passing through the reserve and this situation continued during 1999. **Oystercatcher, Dunlin, Greenshank** and **Redshank** were noted briefly on passage whilst **Green Sandpiper** was present in varying numbers from June to October. **Little Ringed Plover, Woodcock** and **Common Snipe** bred but struggled whilst **Lapwing** did well.

Tree Pipit, Whinchat and **Sedge Warbler** put in brief appearances and a **Yellowhammer** was unusually heard calling from the Centre Coppice on one occasion, interestingly a **Raven** – a first for the reserve, was energetically and acrobatically noted heading south late in the year.

The results of the Common Bird Census and Warbler survey are included in the appendix as is an article on the **Montagu's Harrier** by Peter Hilton.

Rob Smith
August 2000

SYSTEMATIC LIST

LITTLE GREBE

Tachybaptus ruficollis

A single bird on the pool in front of Peters Hide on 2nd July was the only record for the year.

CORMORANT

Phalacrocorax carbo

For the second year running a bird was present on a mossland pool on 2nd November otherwise records refer to movement of birds flying south at dusk during the winter period. Largest over flying counts were:

Apr	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
31	23	15	17	20

GREY HERON

Ardea cinerea

Single birds noted on the mossland on occasions with the exception of two present on 1st April. Two birds flew east on 12th July and 16th October

MUTE SWAN

Cynus olor

All records refer to overflying birds. Of note, seven circled the moss on 24th May before splitting into two parties and heading away in opposite directions, four flew south on 21st November and eight followed suit on the 11th December.

PINK FOOTED GEESE

Anser brachyrhynchus

Small parties of overflying birds were recorded on occasions in the early part of the year with 40 flying north on 10th April being typical. Larger movements were noted in autumn which began on the morning of the 26th October when 140 flew south. A total of 400 flew south west in three skeins on 17th November whilst a modest 25 was the maximum recorded in December

GREYLAG GOOSE

Anser anser

A single vocal bird flew north west on 10/10 and one was among 10 Canada Geese on 26/10.

CANADA GOOSE

Branta canadensis

A considerable amount of local activity was evident when two pairs were present for most of April & May, however despite this activity neither pair bred. Main interest came in autumn when various sized flocks began to use the reserve as a roosting and preening area. The routine was first noted on the 1st September when a flock of 167 flew low and slow to the south at dusk, a short while later 68 birds returned and landed on open water with other birds joining them after dark. On 6/9 a flock of 70 birds flew south with many turning back to land, a pattern which was repeated on several occasions. By the end of the month and for the remainder of the year numbers declined gradually with flocks rarely exceeding 20 birds.

GADWALL

Anas strepera

Three males and a female were flying around and landing on various parts of the mossland on 27th May. This is the second year running that this species has frequented the reserve in spring.

TEAL

Anas crecca

Although no young were seen two pairs were present during the breeding season. As is often the case winter produced the best results and the following monthly maxima were recorded;

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
	12	38	14				5	19	35	10	8

MALLARD

Anas platyrhynchos

Breeding was confirmed at three pairs. Outside the breeding season numbers remained in single figures with the exception of a count of 55 on 1st September.

TUFTED DUCK***Aythya fuligula***

For the second year running the species returned to the mossland. A pair were present throughout April with a male and two females noted on 9th April. Two pairs were present on 5th May but only one pair was suspected as having bred although no young were seen.

HEN HARRIER***Circus cyaneus***

A female/immature was seen briefly hunting over the mossland on the 19th September before being chased off by a Sparrowhawk. The real interest began when a wing tagged immature male appeared on the 20th November and remained in the area until 11th December. The bird rarely spent more than 10' quartering the mossland before disappearing southwards, although on one occasion (10/11) it landed on the mossland and remained there for some time. Details of the tagged individual are still awaited.

MONTAGUES HARRIER***Circus pygargus***

A bird of this description was seen briefly coming up off the mossland on 12th August by an experienced bird watcher. A full description has been sent to both Leigh & Cheshire Ornithological Societies and a report appears in the appendix.

SPARROWHAWK***Accipiter nisus***

Frequent sightings throughout the year in various parts of the reserve. One pair bred with a second pair a strong possibility. Most sightings involved one or two birds but a family group of three were noted on several dates between 19/8 and 14/9 with four birds present on 15/10 & 4/12. Birds were noted interacting with other species on many occasions but in particular a male carrying prey was chased by Montagues Harrier on 12/8, Magpies and Jays on 14/9 whilst a female chased, caught, straddled and then released a Jay on 12/10.

COMMON BUZZARD***Buteo buteo***

A marked increase in activity which produced some excellent views on many occasions in the latter part of the year. At first birds were seen circling over the southern boundary on 27/6 & 24/7 but on the 1st September three birds were noted drifting northwards over the reserve at midday and this became a familiar pattern until the last sightings on 7/12.

In between these periods the following sightings occurred;

Single birds	-	17 occasions
Pairs	-	10 "
3s	-	8 "

KESTREL***Falco tinnunculus***

Absent during the early part of the year, birds began to reappear in late summer and early autumn. Birds bred outside the reserve with immature and adults observed hunting over the mossland on several dates in September and occasionally in October and November. Of note three birds were seen on 2/9, 16th & 18th October.

MERLIN***Falco columbarius***

Often and easily overlooked there was an increase in sightings. Most records were of immature females which first appeared on 8th September and seven other dates until 10/12, a further five sightings were noted over the same period but sex was indeterminate. During this period birds were noted steeping in spectacular fashion, being harassed by Crows, Kestrel and Pipits and typically hunting fast and low over the mossland.

HOBBY***Falco subbuteo***

A much better year which began when an adult appeared over the mossland on the 6th & 13th June. The species was not seen again until the 12/7 when an adult bird was seen taking dragonflies. Thereafter birds were noted hawking over the mossland frequently, although not consistently, until 15th September. A pair were noted together on 23/7 and an immature bird appeared on 8/8.

PEREGRINE FALCON***Falco peregrinus***

Five records covering the period September to December. A female flew west on 14/9 and was seen tussling with a Sparrowhawk on 21/9, a sub adult flew NE on 28/10 and a sub adult male landed briefly on a scrape in front of the Observation Tower on 10/12. A adult flying south on 11th December was the last record of the year.

GREY PARTRIDGE***Perdix perdix***

A casual visitor which occasionally uses the central area of mossland as a night roost. Birds were heard calling on 1/4, 5/5, 23/7 and 25/11.

PHEASANT

Records usually refer to birds straying from adjacent farmland. Two birds were heard calling on 1st April and one on 25th November. Interestingly a male bird was seen near the Woodland Hide on 24th December.

Phasianus colchicus**WATER RAIL**

A bird heard calling from the reeds near the Moorhen Patch on 28th April was the only spring record. Other sightings were of individuals seen near newly flooded ditches on 22nd October and disturbed by a Hen Harrier on 25th November.

Rallus aquatica**MOORHEN**

The mossland survey indicated that a total of eight pairs bred, a situation which remains unchanged from 1998. A further 2 to 3 pairs bred in the woodland area.

Gallinula chloropus**COOT**

The only record was of a bird feeding on one of the scrapes on 24th April.

Fulica atra**OYSTERCATCHER**

The mossland is occasionally used as a stopover point for birds passing through the area. Two birds were noted on the scrapes on 27/5, 23/7 & 25/7.

Haematopus ostralegus**LITTLE RINGED PLOVER**

Two birds were noted on 24th April and one on 28th April. No more birds were seen until two pairs appeared on 22nd May with five birds present on the 28th May, thereafter only one pair was seen regularly on the scrapes and reared one young. Last birds were noted on 6/8.

Charadrius dubius**GOLDEN PLOVER**

A flock of 17 birds flew south east over the mossland on 22nd November.

Pluvialis apricaria**LAPWING**

The conditions on the mossland continue to suit this species with 3 pairs rearing six young. The first birds arrived back on the mossland on 15th March and reached a peak of 10 during the breeding season. Post breeding numbers totalled a healthy 45 on 2nd July but this was reduced to 30 by 7th July. A flock of 20 flying off west on 12th September were the last seen.

Vanellus vanellus**DUNLIN**

A single bird landed briefly on the scrape in front of the Observation Tower on 4th October.

Calidris alpina**JACK SNIPE**

Single birds were flushed from similar areas of mossland on 6th February, 15th March and 30th November.

Lymnocyptes minimus**COMMON SNIPE**

The fortunes of this species continue to waver. Based on general sightings during the breeding season one pair bred, however no display flight was heard or seen and no regular pattern of presence emerged. Outside the breeding season peak counts were 6 on 9/4, 7 on 29/7, 9 on 26/9, 5 on 26/10, 12 on 11/11 and singles in December.

Gallinago gallinago**WOODCOCK**

Breeding level and general status were difficult to establish. A bird was seen and heard roding in the Bottom Coppice on 5th May and this is probably a reflection of its status on the reserve. There were five other records of the species during the winter period.

Scolopax rusticola**CURLEW**

Records refer to overflying birds. One flew east on 13th March and west on 1st April and nine in the same direction on 21st June.

Numenius arquata**REDSHANK**

An increase in sightings for a passage migrant which has only been recorded on five occasions since 1972. A bird came up off the scrapes and flew east on 1st April. Returning birds included five present on 20th August and a single on 22nd August and 23rd November.

Tringa totanus

GREENSHANK

An irregular passage species with two present on 6th & 8th August and 19th September.

Tringa nebularia**GREEN SANDPIPER**

A regular autumn passage migrant with three birds noted on the relatively early date of 17th June and the last bird seen and heard on the rather late date of 15th November. Between these periods numbers varied widely on a daily basis with July clearly being the most active period. Peak numbers included six birds on 12th which rose to seven by the 30th July, thereafter numbers tailed off with only occasional singles and pairs noted in August and September. A total of 41 birds were recorded during 14 observation periods.

Tringa ochropus**BLACK HEADED GULL**

Because of the increased areas of open water on the mossland, small groups of birds have begun using the pools for bathing and preening with up to 30 birds occasionally noted.

Larus ridibundus**COMMON TERN**

Two adults and a juvenile flew north on 7th July.

Sterna hirundo**STOCK DOVE**

An occasional overflying species which moves between farmland to the north and south of the reserve. Only three records of individual birds were received.

Columba oenas**WOODPIGEON**

A resident species which not only breeds well but frequents the woodland areas in large numbers in winter. The number of birds coming in to the winter roost was down on previous years averaging only 500 to 1000 birds on most occasions.

Columba palumbus**COLLARED DOVE**

A casual species usually seen overflying in pairs to the north and south with the exception of a pair which tended to frequent the area near the Lagoon Pond.

Streptopelia decaocto**CUCKOO**

The first bird of the year was heard on 29th April with the species being subsequently seen and heard on many days throughout May. A pair was present on the mossland on 28th May.

Cuculus canorus**BARN OWL**

After a seventeen year absence a bird was seen hunting over the southern boundary at dusk on 15th November and along the mossland ditches on 2nd December.

Tyto alba**LITTLE OWL**

An infrequent visitor which was seen hunting along the southern boundary at dusk on 31st December..

Athene noctua**TAWNY OWL**

Despite very few records received during the year the distribution suggested that one pair bred with birds being heard more often in winter than at any other time.

Strix aluco**LONG EARED OWL**

An increase in records which included young being heard on several occasions between July and September. Despite the presence of these birds, the species did not breed on the reserve and were considered to be part of a post breeding dispersal from adjacent areas. Aside from the juvenile records, birds were heard until 12th December.

sio otus**SHORT EARED OWL**

After an absence of six years, a bird was unexpectedly seen hunting over the mossland on the very early dates of 23rd and 24th July, a bird was also noted on 6th December. The increased lines of raised embankment have created ideal conditions for small mammals, a situation which could well suit this species in the foreseeable future.

Asio flammeus**SWIFT**

The first returning birds appeared on 14th May when a party of 12 were noted hawking over the mossland. Throughout the summer period numbers fluctuated daily with peaks of c100 on 23rd May, c150 on 17th June and c100 again on 13th July. Thereafter numbers began to tail off with the last bird seen heading south with Swallows & House Martins on 25th September.

Apus apus

GREEN WOODPECKER***Picus viridis***

A bird was present on several occasions in April. This is the third year running that occasional visits from this species has occurred either side of the breeding season. As some areas of woodland begin to mature this could bode well for the future.

GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER***Dendrocopos major***

Two pairs bred. Birds were seen in various parts of the reserve throughout the year and were particularly evident at the Woodland Hide feeders most days during winter.

SKYLARK***Alauda arvensis***

Sadly now only seen on passage or as part of local movement between fields. A single overflying bird was noted in April with occasional records between September and December.

SAND MARTIN***Riparia riparia***

Three birds heading north on 15th March were the first and only record for the reserve.

SWALLOW***Hirundo rustica***

Two birds flying north on 9th April were the first of the year. Birds were present most days with numbers averaging between two and ten birds on most occasions but producing peaks of 50 on 22/5, 32 on 30/7, 40 on 7/9 with the last two birds noted heading south on 18th October. An interesting feature in recent years has been the formation of juvenile night roosts (5 to 10 birds) on reeds and brambles over some of the ditches, exceptionally 40 birds were present in such a situation near the Bottom Coppice on 7th September.

HOUSE MARTIN***Delichon urbica***

Earliest birds noted were a party of 30 over the mossland on 22nd May. Thereafter small numbers only were noted with peaks of 30 on 24/9 and 45 on 29/9. A bird heading south on 6th October was the last seen.

TREE PIPIT***Anthus trivialis***

A bird was noted singing and displaying from an oak tree along Snake ridge on 14th May but it had moved on by the next day. These isolated appearances of a bird during the breeding season has become a feature in recent years.

MEADOW PIPIT***Anthus pratensis***

Recorded throughout the year, the mossland serves as both a roost and breeding ground. The census revealed that 5 pairs bred (c.f. 7 pairs in 1998). Outside the breeding season roosts averaged between 6 – 12 birds with an exceptional 40 on 15th March and c20 on 29th December.

YELLOW WAGTAIL***Motacilla flava***

Two juveniles were present on 13/7 with one noted on 29/7, 22/8 and 8th September.

GREY WAGTAIL***Motacilla cinerea***

Essentially an autumn and early winter bird with singles in September, October and November.

PIED WAGTAIL***Motacilla alba***

An adult seen on 1st April was the only record for the early part of the year. The mossland is widely used as a post breeding feeding area with juveniles beginning to appear as early as 28th May, with singles recorded on many days thereafter and 4 birds present on 17/6 and 29/7, 3 on 19/9. Six adults flew west on the 2/10 and ten on 7th October.

WREN***Troglodytes troglodytes***

Not well recorded but of note was the 4 pairs of birds breeding in the mossland scrub areas.

ROBIN***Erithacus rubecula***

Of note were the number of birds at the Woodland Hide feeders in winter.

WHINCHAT***Saxicola rubetra***

Unusually for the reserve these days a female was present near the Observation Tower on 4th & 5th September.

BLACKBIRD***Turdus merula***

Noted throughout the year with up to 15 birds frequenting the Woodland hide on many days in winter. A recent trend has been the number of birds that venture out to feed on the exposed mossland scrapes and bunds.

FIELDFARE

Present in small numbers in the earlier part of the year with the last birds seen on 13th March. Although the first birds to return were noted on 14th October, a flock of c270 birds moving westwards on the 15th was quite exceptional. Thereafter numbers dwindled steadily with an average of fifty in November and a mere 5-10 in December. A few birds occasionally roosted in the main woodland.

Turdus pilaris**SONG THRUSH**

Birds were occasionally seen around the woodland glades and three pairs were estimated to have bred.

Turdus philomenos**REDWING**

Small parties of 20 –30 birds noted in the earlier months with the last seen on 13th March. Returning birds were noted on 8th October when ten flew west across the mossland. A flock of c170 flew south on the 23rd October, thereafter numbers declined gradually with a maximum of c75 on 7th November and 30 in December. Once again a number of birds tend to use the main woodland as a roosting area on occasions.

Turdus iliacus**MISTLE THRUSH**

Breeding estimated at 2 pairs with three birds noted on 29th July. Outside the breeding season birds were occasionally seen around the area and in particular on the 28th December when a bird was noted singing loudly from the tree tops in the car park.

Turdus viscivorus**SEDGE WARBLER**

A bird was recorded singing from an area of willow scrub on the mossland on 17th June. This is only the fourth time the species has been noted on the reserve (c.f. 1983, 1995, 1997).

Acrocephalus schoenobaenus**WHITETHROAT**

An irregular species which did not breed this year. A bird was noted along the east edge of the reserve on 27th May and calling in front of the Observation Tower on 7th July with two present on the mossland on the 13th July.

Sylvia communis**BLACKCAP**

An early bird was recorded on 4th April and the last, a female, was noted on 30th November. The C.B.C. recorded a total of 19 breeding pairs (woodland 15 pairs/ mossland 4 pairs) (c.f. 15 pairs in 1998).

Sylvia atricapilla**CHIFFCHAFF**

An early bird was recorded on 14th March and the last on 17th September. Breeding remained at 6 pairs.

Phylloscopus collybita**WILLOW WARBLER**

First recorded on 6th April, a total of 57 pairs bred (c.f. 59 pairs, 1998). Last bird noted was among a mixed flock on 26th September.

Phylloscopus trochilus**GOLDCREST**

Very little was seen of the species during the breeding season otherwise one to two birds were present among roving tit flocks in various parts of the reserve during the remainder of the year. Notably and exceptionally, four birds were seen together on 5th November.

Regulus regulus**LONG TAILED TIT**

Two pairs bred. Outside the breeding season ten to fifteen birds was an average size of flock to be seen roving the reserve and in particular on the feeders at the Woodland Hide, exceptionally, a flock of 20 birds was noted there on 3rd February.

Aegithalos caudatus**WILLOW TIT**

Single birds were noted in mixed flocks in various parts of the reserve throughout the year and in particular at the Woodland Hide in winter. Breeding was estimated at one to two pairs.

Parus montanus**COAL TIT**

As with the previous species noted singly in mixed flocks with the exception of a pair seen near Pond 2 on 5th March. Breeding estimated at one to two pairs.

Parus ater**BLUE TIT**

Present throughout the year with up to 12 birds feeding regularly at the Woodland Hide in winter.

Parus caeruleus

GREAT TIT

Similar status and distribution as previous species.

Parus major

NUTHATCH

A poor year with very few sightings. A single bird was seen at the Woodland Hide feeders on two dates in February and on only five dates between 5th October and 10th December.

Sitta europaea

TREECREEPER

Often and easily overlooked in the breeding season otherwise singles noted on many dates during winter. Frequently seen at the Woodland Hide but occasional in other areas of woodland. Breeding status unclear.

Certhia familiaris

JAY

Present throughout the year with up to eight birds seen in both woodland and mossland areas on many days. On quiet winter days can also be seen feeding at the Woodland Hide. Breeding status estimated at three pairs.

Garrulus glandarius

MAGPIE

An estimated 4 – 6 pairs bred on the reserve. Over the winter period the numbers of birds entering the roost area adjacent to Peters Hide provided the following counts: 85 on 25/1, 120 on 3/2, 91 on 15/3 and 120 on 29/12.

Pica pica

JACKDAW

All records refer to overflying birds which formed part of the mixed flocks moving north/south and vice versa at dusk during the autumn and winter period. Typically numbers begin to build up in September and average 50 to 150 birds most evenings through to late January. Exceptionally, a mixed flock of 170+ were recorded mobbing a Sparrowhawk on 29th December.

Corvus monedula

ROOK

Situation as previous species but with numbers averaging between 50 and 100 birds.

Corvus frugilegus

CARRION CROW

One pair bred on the edge of the mossland with up to seven birds roosting in the main woodland on many occasions. Interestingly a family trait among this group of birds was the varying amount of grey/white primaries each bird displayed.

Corvus corone

RAVEN

A bird flying high to the south whilst calling and carrying out a series of acrobatics on 2nd November was the first record of this species for the reserve.

Corvus corax

STARLING

Restricted to occasional birds flying over the reserve during the breeding season and at dusk in winter.

Sturnis vulgaris

HOUSE SPARROW

The only birds noted were a flock of 20 on set aside land alongside the southern boundary.

Passer domesticus

TREE SPARROW

A single bird was noted among a flock of House Sparrows on 29th December.

Passer montanus

CHAFFINCH

A regular at the Woodland Hide feeders in winter where up to 15 birds were seen on most days. Elsewhere eleven birds flew north east on 1st October and small numbers tended to roost in the rhododendrons in Jay Wood.

Fringilla coelebs

BRAMBLING

The only record was of a male bird at the Woodland Hide on 7th February.

Fringilla montifringilla

GREENFINCH

The only records received was a single bird feeding among the alders on 3rd November and at the Woodland Hide on 22nd December.

Carduelis chloris

GOLDFINCH

An irregular visitor which had a better showing in the latter part of the year. Two birds were noted near the Observation Tower on 26th September, four feeding on Alders on 3rd November, several among a mixed flock near the Lagoon pond on 1st December and a single bird at the Woodland Hide on 23rd December.

Carduelis carduelis

SISKIN

Very few noted in the early part of the year. A party of ten near the Observation Tower on 19th October were the first returning birds noted, never common eight were noted there on 29/10, six in the woods on 10/11, four on Alders near the Woodland Hide on 24th December with 1s & 2s to the years end.

Carduelis spinus**LINNET**

A casual species. Two birds flew north over the Flashes on 27th May and over Jay wood on 29th July.

Carduelis cannabina**REDPOLL**

Confirmation of breeding status is always difficult with this wide ranging species. With up to four birds present around the mossland from February onwards and seven birds noted flying in and out of a favoured breeding area on 24th April, the population finally settled down to produce one, possibly two breeding pairs. Thereafter small numbers were noted in various parts of the reserve until the years end, with the exception of a flock of 12 seen over the mossland on 26th October and 15 along the woodland edge on 15th December.

Carduelis flammea**BULLFINCH**

Present throughout the year with up to two pairs seen or heard in various parts of the woodland. Estimates indicate 1 to 2 pairs bred with occasional birds being seen at the Woodland Hide in winter.

Pyrrhula pyrrhula**YELLOWHAMMER**

Only three records received, a bird was heard calling near the Central Coppice on 15th March, the north east corner on 1st April and 27th May.

Emberiza citrinella**REED BUNTING**

An estimated 24 pairs bred on the mossland (c.f. 19 pairs in 1998). Outside the breeding season birds would roost on the mossland in all but the harshest weather.

Emberiza schoeniclus**CORN BUNTING**

Only two records received and these referred to birds along the boundary of the mossland, eleven were present on 14th November and five on 29th December.

Miliaria calandra

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**Montagu's Harrier at Risley Moss**

Following a couple of days of southerly breezes, Thursday 12th August 1999 proved to be the "Glorious Twelfth" in more ways than expected. The previous day had seen the long awaited eclipse and it was just a thought that this could have been the reason for the juvenile Montagu's Harrier turning up on the mossland after having lost its bearings?.

The 12th was a warm day with a southerly breeze, a Hobby was perched on the mossland with plumage that seemed dark brown but with a hint of slate grey at times. It was to ascertain the plumage of this bird that I went out on the mossland and down towards the Bottom Coppice.

As I traversed the causeway at 11.43 am, a bird appeared from the very wet area of water channels, birch and willow scrub in front of the Bottom Coppice and flew past me a few yards away. It was obviously a Harrier with a graceful and very buoyant flight, strong dark facial pattern and long slender wings which were not as 'muscular' as a Hen Harriers. The underparts of the bird were ruddy coloured and unstreaked and as it flew past the rump patch was narrow and not as intrusive in to the tail as a Hen Harriers. The wings appeared more pointed akin to long winged falcons whilst the upper parts were similar to that of Hen Harriers. A female Montagu's Harrier I watched in Norfolk earlier in the year had the same long winged appearance.

A spokesman for the B.T.O. to whom I reported the sighting was not surprised at its appearance as this species has a habit of wandering and turning up unexpectedly. The bird must have been passing through because it did not re-appear, however we did learn that a juvenile Montagu's Harrier had been recorded at Swillingham Ings near Leeds, two days later.

This means that all three harriers, Hen, Marsh and Montagu's had been recorded at Risley Moss during 1999

## **Survey Results**

(Surveys undertaken by Rob Smith in mid-May)

### **Common Bird Census – mossland only (pairs)**

|                      | 1999 | 1998 | 1997 |
|----------------------|------|------|------|
| Little Grebe         | 0    | 0    | 1    |
| Mallard              | 3    | 3    | 4    |
| Teal                 | 1    | 1    | 1    |
| Tufted Duck          | 1    | 0    | 0    |
| Moorhen              | 8    | 9    | 10   |
| Common Snipe         | 1    | 0    | 1    |
| Little Ringed Plover | 2    | 0    | 0    |
| Meadow Pipit         | 3    | 5    | 7    |
| Willow Warbler       | 44   | 22   | 19   |
| Redpoll              | 3    | 2    | 3    |
| Reed Bunting         | 24   | 14   | 19   |

### **Warbler Survey – whole reserve (pairs)**

|                |    |    |    |
|----------------|----|----|----|
| Blackcap       | 19 | 15 | 15 |
| Garden Warbler | 0  | 3  | 3  |
| Whitethroat    | 0  | 1  | 1  |
| Willow Warbler | 57 | 59 | 59 |
| Chiffchaff     | 6  | 6  | 6  |

### **List of contributors; to report:**

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