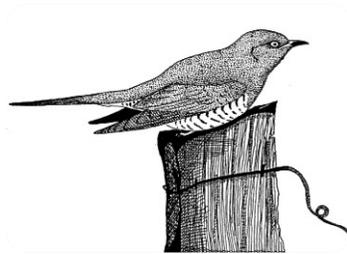


# Risley Moss Local Nature Reserve

## Bird Report 2000



Cuckoo

Compiled by Rob Smith

## THE BIRDWATCHERS YEAR

Another good year which produced a record count of 126 species and included five new to the reserve bringing the total number of species recorded at Risley Moss to an impressive 171 since records began in 1970.

As for the new species, the year began well with the appearance of **Firecrest** on the edge of the mossland on 5th January. On June 6th, a **Quail** was heard calling from the central area of the mossland whilst autumn gave us a glimpse of two **Honey Buzzard** (26/9 & 1/10) as they passed through the area. Later the same month a **Stone Curlew** was seen and heard as it flew up off the mossland and headed south on 16/10. Finally, and with a touch of the exotics, an **Australian Cockatiel** was noted on 13/2, 6/4 and 15/12.

The range of wildfowl and waders dropping in to the reserve continue to provide interest. A **Pintail** appeared on the mossland on June 1st and a small number of the estuarine **Shelduck** over flew the reserve on several dates in spring.

An impressive total of 17 species of wader were recorded during the year among which **Stone Curlew** and **Wood Sandpiper** were exceptional sightings and **Ringed Plover, Dunlin, Ruff** and **Curlew** of note.

Birds of Prey excelled. The east coast influx of **Honey Buzzard** resulted in two birds appearing over the reserve in autumn and provided a treat for those birdwatchers fortunate enough to catch sight of the birds, an event which is unlikely to be repeated for many years to come. Just as interesting though was the presence of an elusive **Goshawk** on two occasions in spring, **Marsh Harrier** and **Hen Harrier** were again in evidence and a **Red Footed Falcon** was noted on 23/8.

All five species of owl were recorded at various times in the year for the second year running.

Among the smaller passerines, sightings of **Firecrest** and **Pied Flycatcher** were an unexpected bonus, Green **Woodpecker, Tree Sparrow** and **Sedge Warbler** put in appearances and there were unconfirmed reports of **Nightingale** and **Redstart** to mull over.

**Rob Smith**

**LITTLE GREBE****Tachybaptus ruficollis**

Casual

A pair were seen and heard in central area of mossland from 30th March to 10th August.

**CORMORANT****Phalacrocorax carbo**

Overflying

The north/south diurnal movement was seen in all months except March, May and June. Exceptionally a single bird flew up off the mossland on 14th April.

Monthly peaks included:

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
6	11	0	3	0	0	2	5	8	2	13	59

**GREY HERON****Ardea cinerea**

Casual

Single birds were recorded on or overflying the reserve in most months.

Exceptionally three birds frequented the mossland area throughout June and on 10/8.

**MUTE SWAN****Cygnus olor**

Casual

Unusually, an immature was present on the pool in front of the Observation Tower on 11th April.

Thereafter, singles were recorded over flying the reserve on 27/8, 20/9, 6/11\*, 25/11\*, 10/12\*, pairs on 17/9, 18/9, 7/12 with three flying south on 5/9 and 25/9. (\*immature)

**PINK FOOTED GOOSE****Anser brachyrhynchus**

Overflying/winter

Flocks flew in various directions throughout the winter period with the following peaks noted;

Jan	Oct	Nov	Dec
750	140	700	200

**GREYLAG GOOSE****Anser anser**

Rare

The only record received was of five birds flying west on 4th November.

**CANADA GOOSE****Branta canadensis**

Casual

Birds use the mossland throughout the breeding season and for a short while in autumn.

Up to three pairs attempted to breed but nests were predated on all occasions. During the period July to September, the number of birds making use of the mossland increases dramatically as the post breeding flocks flight in from the surrounding areas to roost and moult on the acidic pools.

This year the influx began when a flock of 43 came in at dusk on 27th July, increased to 151 by



**TUFTED DUCK**                      **Athya fuligula**

Casual

A species whose presence varies from year to year during the breeding season.

This year two prospecting pairs appeared on the mossland on 23rd March rising to three pairs by April 30th, thereafter two pairs remained raising 8 young between them. A bird flying west at dusk on the 8th September was the last noted.

**HONEY BUZZARD**                      **Pernis apivorus**

Rare/migrant

As a result of the east coast influx, a bird of this description emerged from the edge of the woodland on 26th September. After being mobbed by crows the bird circled the mossland and then flew south.

A few days later on 1st October, a dark coloured individual came in low from the south pursued by a Sparrowhawk, it circled the mossland for c10' and then flew south. Later the same day another bird passed directly overhead flying south. A unique sequence of sightings and a first for the reserve.

**HEN HARRIER**                      **Circus cyaneus**

Casual

Only two records this year.

A female immature appeared briefly on 28th October, after putting up a few Teal and Snipe it then headed out west. On 18th December another ringtail was seen briefly after being disturbed by a work party.

**GOSHAWK**                      **Accipiter gentilis**

Rare

Recorded in only five previous years and not since 1988.

A bird was seen briefly over woodland on 7th April and again on the late date of 11th May. The latter bird flew low out of the NE woods pursued by Crow and then Curlew before turning and heading back from where it came.

**SPARROWHAWK**                      **Accipiter nisus**

Resident

Birds were noted in different parts of the reserve most days.

There was a total of 90+ 'bird days' (no figures available for December), details were;

single birds	-	40 occasions	
pairs	-	15	"
3 birds	-	2	"
4 birds	-	1	"
5 birds	-	2	"

Two pairs bred with the possibility of a third pair not ruled out, highlights included; two pairs displaying at same time on 7th April – 3 males and two females soaring on 14th April – the

spectacle of an immature male chasing a Reed Bunting into small clump of scrub and then spending the next 15' attempting to seize it as it moved in/out and around the clump – male and female being mobbed mercilessly by 11 magpies – 5 birds soaring overhead on 20th September – two young birds chasing and tormenting Magpies – a bird 'hunting low & slow' sic S.E. Owl over mossland scrapes in November.

### **COMMON BUZZARD**

**Buteo buteo**

Casual

Birds were seen in most months outside the breeding season with a noticeable increase in sightings.

In 2000 there were 104 'bird days' which accumulated in the following way;

single birds	-	58	bird days
pairs	-	14	"
3 birds	-	2	"
4 birds	-	3	"

Highlights; 1, hovering/dropping prey, 6/4 - well marked brown bird, perched & being mobbed by Lapwing, Hobby & Sparrowhawk, 9/7 - 4 present (3 descended & perched on mossland), 29/8 and mingling with Marsh Harrier on 9/9.

### **ROUGH LEGGED BUZZARD**

**Buteo lagopus**

Rare

On 28th September a bird was seen at close quarters as it came in from the east, hovered over the Flashes with legs trailing before perching and then dropping down into the long grass.

This is only the second time this species has been recorded on the reserve (c.f. 25th September 1985).

### **OSPREY**

**Pandion haliaetus**

Rare

A light-coloured bird was seen carrying a fish over the Flashes on 7th May. Escorted by Black headed Gulls, it circled the Observation Tower and then flew out NW. This is only the fourth time record for the reserve (last noted on 27th May 1992).

### **KESTREL**

**Falco tinnunculus**

Resident

The mossland forms part of a local pair's regular territory with up to three birds noted on occasions.

Of note; a pair displaying/grappling in mid-air, 5/4 - a pair hawking insects and transferring to beak, Hobby fashion, 30/4 - bird hunting with two Hobbies, catching prey and sharing tree with Hobby 16/7 - 3 over mossland, 3/8, 20/8, 2/9 and 3/9 - 2 birds sporting with two Hobbies, 10/9

**RED FOOTED FALCON****Falco vespertinus**

Rare

A bird of this description was observed perched and then hunting low over the mossland for 30' on 23/8.

**MERLIN****Falco columbarius**

Casual/winter

An increase in sightings with most records referring to birds hunting over the mossland as they pass through the area. A total of 18 bird days noted as follows;

Female/immature	=	10
male	=	4
unknown sex	=	4

Behaviour noted included;

A female immature cutting through starlings, 10/2 - fighting with Marsh Harrier, 31/8 - hunting floods and buzzing Sparrowhawk, 11/12 - Male attacking and killing Redwing over mossland, 3/4 - perched briefly and then chasing Fieldfare/Redwings, 28/11.

**HOBBY****Falco subbuteo**

Casual

A good year, with up to six individual birds noted hawking over or passing through the reserve including two first years and an immature. Passage began with an adult appearing on 28/4 and ended with the last seen on 23/9.

A total of 80 bird days noted;

Single birds	-	32	Adult	-	63 bird days
pairs	-	19	First year	-	12
3s	-	2	Immature	-	5
4s	-	1			

Interesting behaviour included;

Adult perched for 2 hours plucking Martin in heavy rain, 9/7 - adult chasing Martins over channels - adult chasing and stooping on Martins over channels - taking & dropping Swift when chased by another bird - chasing Lapwing & Magpies - talon clasp/food passing/calling - locking talons with Kestrel and breaking free inches above ground.

**PEREGRINE FALCON****Falco peregrinus**

Casual

Birds noted overflying the reserve and occasionally having a go at local Woodpigeon.

A total of 13 bird days noted with birds absent between 27th March and 7th June, records included;

Males – 7,                      Female – 2,                      Unrecorded - 4

Notable behaviour included;

Adult female flying around mossland for 10', stooping over SW woods before flying off east, 17/3 - two males, 27/3 - adult male racing down mossland scrape, circling and flying east, 29/9 - beating over Floods putting up Snipe, 3/11.

**PARTRIDGE**

***Perdix perdix***

Casual

Birds occasionally used the central area of the mossland as an overnight roost during the year.

**QUAIL**

***Coturnix coturnix***

Rare

Presence was suspected in 1999.

A bird was heard calling from dry raised embankment on the mossland on 3rd June as a result of strong southerly winds at the time.

**PHEASANT**

***Phasianus colchicus***

Casual

Occasionally used the reserve for feeding and roosting purposes but not as common as once was. Birds were recorded on at least one occasion each month except May & August and an eggshell was found on the mossland on 12th June. A male was also noted at the Woodland Hide on two occasions in February.

**WATER RAIL**

***Rallus aquaticus***

Casual

Bred for the first time with an adult and young bird heard on several dates in August.

Birds were also heard on several dates between September and 23rd December.

**MOORHEN**

***Gallinula chloropus***

Resident.

A total of 9 pairs bred on the reserve (mossland 7 pair/woodland 2 pair) (c.f. 7 pairs 1999)

**COOT**

***Fulica atra***

Casual

A bird was on a mossland pool on 30th April.

**OYSTERCATCHER**

***Haematopus ostralegus***

Casual

Records usually confined to birds overflying the reserve but was noted on the mossland on several occasions this year. Most records occurred during the breeding season which began when two birds were noted in the area on 3rd April.

Thereafter between one and four birds were present on the reserve on 17 occasions until 15th July. Of note; One pair on scrape in front of Observation Tower on 7th and 28th May with four there on 17th May and 15th July.

**STONE CURLEW****Burhinus oedicnemus**

Rare

A bird of this description was heard calling from the mossland for several minutes on 16/10, it subsequently flew up, circled the area before flying south calling mournfully as it went. A unique first and only record for the reserve.

**LITTLE RINGED PLOVER****Charadrius dubius**

Casual

Birds have been frequent visitors to the reserve in recent years.

First record for the year was on the 21st March when a bird was noted flying north over the Observation Tower. Thereafter between one and four birds were noted regularly on the reserve until the last on 9th September. Breeding was attempted but proved unsuccessful due to heavy predation.

**RINGED PLOVER****Charadrius hiaticula**

Rare

A bird landed on the scrape in front of the Observation Tower on 10th April and again 14th April. This is only the fourth occasion that this species has been noted on the reserve.

**GOLDEN PLOVER****Pluvialis apricaria**

Rare

Confined to occasional flybys with 4 noted flying south on 20th September and 10 on 13th November.

**LAPWING****Vanellus vanellus**

Casual

Has become a regular visitor in recent years as a direct result of the mossland rewetting schemes.

Birds were present on the reserve between March and August and around the area thereafter. Three pairs attempted to breed but faced extensive harassment from two pairs of crows operating over the mossland. Despite this one pair successfully reared two young.

Monthly peaks were;

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
12	12	5	8	12	30	27	n/c	97	60	n/c	4

**DUNLIN****Calidris alpina**

Rare

Sightings confined to passage movement only.

Recorded in only three previous years, this year's highlights included; A single bird in the company of Lapwing in front of Observation Tower on 23rd February with two birds there on 4th September, a bird calling from the mossland on 16th October and again on November 25th.

**RUFF*****Philomachus pugnax***

Rare

An unusual record and recorded in only two previous years (1983 & 1994).

A female was noted flying around the mossland on 14th August; five flew north on 21/9 and 6 flew north east on 17/12

**JACK SNIPE*****Lymnocyptes minimus***

Casual/winter

Single birds were recorded on 13 occasions during the winter period. Exceptionally, four separate birds were noted on 24th November and two on 30th November. The last outgoing bird was recorded on 7th April and the first autumn return on 29th September.

**COMMON SNIPE*****Gallinago gallinago***

Resident

The mossland is used regularly for roosting, feeding and occasionally breeding.

The rewetting scheme of recent years has considerably improved conditions for the species and this is reflected in the monthly figures which are comparable with the counts of the early 1980s.

Sadly, breeding did not achieve the same levels confined to only one pair having bred.

Monthly peaks were;

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
3	14	70	13	-	-	4	14	20	41	43	24

**WOODCOCK*****Scolopax rusticola***

Resident

Most records referred to over wintering birds flushed from various parts of the reserve.

Outside the breeding season birds were noted on 11 occasions.

**CURLEW*****Numenius arquata***

Casual

Species normally confined to passage through the area.

With three birds present on 14th March and two present on many occasions until the 19th June, breeding was suspected but never proven. Territorial behaviour was noted on several occasions and included vigorous defence against Crows and interestingly, a Goshawk (11th May). Three birds were again noted on 9th June whilst a bird heard calling from the south on 22nd September was the last of the year.

**REDSHANK*****Tringa totanus***

Rare

An increase in records for the year. Single birds were noted feeding on the scrapes on 10 occasions between 11th March and 6th October with a pair present there on 1st April.

**GREENSHANK*****Tringa nebularia***

Casual/passage

A slight improvement on previous years. Two birds were noted on the mossland on 4th July and 20th August and a single – the last of the year, on 9th September. In between this period, seven flew off west calling as they went on 1st September and a single was heard on 4th September.

**GREEN SANDPIPER*****Tringa ochropus***

Regular/passage

A good year. A total of 66 bird days were recorded with two spring records on 7/4 and 27/4 being an unusual and a first for the reserve. Return passage began on 8th June with birds present most days thereafter until 5th September with a late bird heard on 5th October. In between these dates 3 birds were noted on 30/6, 14/7 & 16/7, 4 birds on 19/7 & 21/7, 6 birds on 18/7 and a peak of 8 birds on 22/7.

**WOOD SANDPIPER*****Tringa glareola***

Rare/passage

An increase in sightings for a species which had only been recorded previously in 1983, 1989 & 1998. Of particular note was the presence of two birds on the mossland on 18th & 21st July, a situation which had only occurred once before in 1983. A single bird was also noted on the mossland between 30th June and 10th July and again 20th to 26th August.

**COMMON SANDPIPER*****Actitis hypoleucos***

Casual/ passage

Uncommon generally and particularly in spring.

A bird was noted overflying the reserve on 16/4 and 26/4. Returning birds were recorded on the mossland on 23/8, 26/8 and 4/9.

**LESSER BLACK BACKED GULL*****Larus fuscus***

Casual/overflying

Small numbers of 1st/2nd year birds noted overflying the mossland during spring and autumn.

Exceptionally a post

breeding flock consisting of 72 birds flew south and then veered west on 20/6.

**STOCK PIGEON*****Columba oenas***

Casual

Birds noted mostly overflying the reserve. A few more records received this year than previous with a pair frequenting the area from May through to December.

**WOODPIGEON*****Columba palumbus***

Resident

Good numbers bred on site with reasonable but variable sized roost in winter.

The roost this year averaged between 500 – 1300 birds on occasion and spread over most of the wooded area of the reserve.

**COLLARED DOVE*****Streptopelia decaocto***

Casual

Birds tend to frequent the north edge of the reserve and are occasionally noted flying over it. A pair bred on the north edge of the main woodland area.

**TURTLE DOVE*****Streptopelia turtur***

Rare

Not recorded in the area since 1995. Birds were noted on three occasions with a pair present on 14th May and single on 1/6 and 24/6.

**CUCKOO*****Cuculus canorus***

Casual

A good summer locally and an improvement on records in recent years.

First record of the season was of a male bird noted alternating between perch and ground on the 18th April. Birds were seen or heard on many dates in April, May and June including two on 28/5 and 30/5. On 8/6 two birds were noted working their way methodically through a line of shrubs for over an hour in front of Observation Tower whilst a third was heard calling nearby. A bird flying south on 15/6 was the last record of the year.

**BARN OWL*****Tyto alba***

Rare

With no records since the late 1980s, birds were occasionally noted in 1999 and improved upon in 2000.

All sightings occurred during the winter period with birds noted hunting over the Flashes and edge of the reserve giving a Total of 8 bird days (c.f. 2 in 1999) which were; January (5), February (1), November (1) and December (1).

**LITTLE OWL*****Athene noctua***

Casual

An occasional bird was recorded as it strayed over the boundary from adjacent farm land. One was heard on the mossland on 23/11 and briefly again on 26/12.

**TAWNY OWL*****Strix aluco***

Resident

Seen and heard in various parts of reserve and at various times of the day throughout the year. With up to two pairs frequenting the area their presence was often given away by the raucous and persistent clamour of Jays and Blackbirds. Of interest; 2 present along south edge on 5/4, 20/11, 12/12 & calling from either side of the Tower, after dark on 22/9, 27/10 - bird calling around noon on 10/9, 11/9, 20/9, 25/9 & 26/9, 1/10.

**LONG EARED OWL*****Asio otus***

Casual

A slight decline compared with 1999. A bird was heard calling from bushes near the Observation Tower on 28/3 and noted in flight in broad daylight on 28/4 causing alarm and

panic among local birds in the process. Interestingly, two birds were noted together in the south west wood on 10/11 with one there on 30/11.

**SHORT EARED OWL**

***Asio flammeus***

Casual

Not as regular as it once was. A bird was seen hunting over the mossland at dusk on 28/11, 2/12 and again on 6/12.

**SWIFT**

***Apus apus***

Summer

Two birds heading north on 27/4 were the first and earliest arrival dates for the reserve since records began.

Birds hawking for insects over the mossland are a familiar sight throughout the summer months with numbers varying considerably on a daily basis. Numbers were down on previous years but up to 70 birds were noted on a few dates in May. Improvements were noted when post breeding flocks of 200+ began to appear over the mossland on several dates in late June and early July. Thereafter numbers began to drop steadily with the last bird noted on 4/9.

**KINGFISHER**

***Alcedo atthis***

Rare

A colourful rarity with only a handful of records received over the years.

To date, all records have referred to post breeding or passage birds as was the record on 29/8 when a bird was first heard and then seen flying low and fast along a fire ditch on the edge of the mossland. A second bird perched briefly in front of Peter Hide and then headed out across the mossland on 1/11.

**GREEN WOODPECKER**

***Picus viridis***

Rare

A bird was heard calling from the mossland and later in the main wood on 4th May and recorded flying north east over the mossland on 10/12

**GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER**

***Dendrocopus major***

Resident

Seen and heard in most parts of reserve and in particular at the Woodland Hide area in winter. Two pairs bred.

**LESSER SPOTTED WOODPECKER**

***Dendrocopus minor***

Rare

A male was heard tapping on 19/1 and seen amongst a mixed tit flock on 11/11. A bird was also heard calling from the south west wood on 24/10 and 27/10

**SKYLARK**

***Alauda arvensis***

Casual

Occasional birds noted over flying the reserve with a flock of 34 recorded on 6/10.

**SAND MARTIN*****Riparia riparia***

Summer

A better than average year for this irregular species.

Two early birds flew north east on 26/3 and a flock of 50+ birds were noted hawking over the mossland on 27/4. Up to 8 birds noted on occasions in May, June and July with the last birds recorded on 1/8.

**SWALLOW*****Hirundo rustica***

Summer

Feeds regularly over the mossland but with considerable variation in numbers.

Two birds flying north west on the early date of 27th March, were the first arrivals of the year with the last seen heading south on 22/10. In between these dates and in particular early spring and mid – August, flocks can reach 100+ birds as they gather to hawk over the mossland. In recent years, small groups of juvenile birds tend to roost in small numbers in the reeds of the mossland, between 22/8 & 8/9 up to birds were noted on several occasions.

**HOUSE MARTIN*****Delichon urbica***

Summer

A regular sight over the mossland throughout summer.

Five birds flying north on 7/4 were the first of the year whilst three flying west on 22/10 were the last seen. Between these dates up to 50 birds could be seen hawking over the reserve most days reaching a peak of 90+ on 29/9.

**TREE PIPIT*****Anthus trivialis***

Rare

Sightings now confined to Spring passage only. In recent years birds remain for only a short period before moving on as was the case this year when a bird was noted singing and displaying from an oak tree between 30/5 and 1/6, before moving on.

**MEADOW PIPIT*****Anthus pratensis***

Resident

The mossland serves as both breeding ground and winter roost on occasions in winter.

A total of seven pair bred with a bird still displaying there on 22/8. Winter roosting peaks included 18 birds on 9/2, 30 on 27/10, 10 on 23/11 and a few on 26/12.

Birds moving south on passage in autumn are also a regular feature and included a light southerly movement of 15 on 13/9, 25+ flying south in 1s & 2s in 1 hour on 29/9 - 23 south on 1/10 - 59 flying south in 1.5 hours on 5/10.

**YELLOW WAGTAIL*****Motacilla flava***

Casual

Birds occasional noted on passage. An adult was present on a scrape on 23/4 with return passage producing a juvenile on 18/7, 4/9 and a bird flying south on 9/9.

**GREY WAGTAIL*****Motacilla cinerea***

Casual/winter.

A single bird on the peaty edges of the mossland on 26/2 was the only record for the early part of the year. Autumn passage produced 5 records in September, singles on several days in October including 3 flying north west at dusk on 27/10 and three birds over the remaining two months.

**PIED WAGTAIL*****Motacilla alba***

Casual

Occasional birds noted in early part of year with most activity coming later in the season. Post breeding dispersal began as early as 8th June and mostly included immature birds. Passage movement in September peaked at 7 birds moving south on 29/9 with occasional birds in the last two months of the year.

**WREN*****Troglodytes troglodytes***

Resident

Noted throughout the reserve and around the edge of the mossland. Interestingly a number of birds were noted feeding/roosting out on the relatively open and hostile mossland on many days in winter in all but the harshest of weather.

**NIGHTINGALE*****Luscinia megarhynchos***

Rare

A bird of this description was seen and heard briefly as it flitted through trees near the Woodland Hide on 27/6. Subject to notes being submitted, this would only be the second sighting since records began.

**REDSTART*****Phoenicurus phoenicurus***

Rare

A male was observed between Peters Hide and the Central Coppice area on 22/5 and two flying south on 25/9. This is only the 8th occasion that this species has been seen on the reserve.

**WHINCHAT*****Saxicola rubetra***

Rare

A male was present on a gorse bush on the mossland on 11/10, 13/10, 19/10 and 20/10.

**STONECHAT*****Saxicola torquata***

Rare

A species whose presence, when it does arrive, produces a clutch of results. A female was present on the mossland on 17/3, 1/4 and 4/11 and a male was observed on 31/8, 20/10 and 21/10. This is only the fourth year the species has been recorded on the reserve.

**WHEATEAR****Oenanthe oenanthe**

Rare

An unusual light influx produced a bird on south edge of the reserve on 20/3, a female on the edge of a mossland scrape on 21/4 and perched on scrub on 23/4.

**BLACKBIRD****Turdus merula**

Resident

Up to 20 birds noted feeding out on the scrapes and banks of the open mossland during June and July. With birds virtually absent during August, a large influx was recorded in September with 50+ birds noted in loose groups on several occasions in the woodland area. Thereafter good numbers were noted entering a regular roost area near the Observation Tower for most of the winter period. Up to 20 birds could also be seen at the Woodland Hide on many dates during over the same period.

**FIELDFARE****Turdus pilaris**

Winter

Small numbers occasional roosted in the main woodland area with small groups being fairly mobile around the area as a whole. Peaks numbers included; 50 into woodland at dusk on 22/1, c150 along south edge on 9/2, c100 entering the Bottom Coppice on 25/3 (last spring record). First returning birds noted when 60 flew east on 29/10 with peaks thereafter of 200 on 19/11 and 300 over NE boundary on 3/12.

**SONG THRUSH****Turdus philomelus**

Resident

Outside the breeding season noted in small numbers only. Census revealed 8 pairs bred around the reserve.

**REDWING****Turdus iliacus**

Winter

Small numbers use the main woodland area throughout the winter. Peaks included 70+ into woodland at dusk on 8/1, c100 put up by a Merlin on 25/2, c20 in March with 40+ over the mossland on 14/4 being the last noted. Return migration saw 10 overhead on 19/10, 110 over east boundary on 4/11 and 36 overhead on 2/12.

**MISTLE THRUSH****Turdus viscivorus**

Resident

Two noted on occasions outside the breeding season and two pairs bred on the reserve.

**GRASSHOPPER WARBLER****Locustella naevia**

Rare

A bird was heard reeling at dusk in the centre of the mossland on 27/7. This species has only been recorded in five previous years since 1972.

**SEDGE WARBLER*****Acrocephalus schoenobaenus***

Rare

A bird was present on the mossland between 28/4 and 13/9 but breeding was not confirmed. This only the fourth year that the species has been recorded on the reserve.

**LESSER WHITETHROAT*****Sylvia curruca***

Casual

Occasional visitor and breeding species. The only record received this year was the brief presence of a bird in the north east corner of the reserve on 27/4.

**WHITETHROAT*****Sylvia communis***

Casual

A breeding pair was present on the edge of the mossland between 25/4 and 17/8.

**GARDEN WARBLER*****Sylvia borin***

Casual

A poor year with only the one pair having bred (c.f. 3 pairs 1999).

**BLACKCAP*****Sylvia atricapilla***

Summer

First returning bird noted on 5/4 with the Common Bird census producing a total of 18 breeding pairs (c.f. 19 pairs in 1999).

**CHIFFCHAFF*****Phylloscopus collybita***

Summer

First returning bird noted on 16/3 and the last was seen amongst a tit flock on the relatively late date of 20/11. Between these dates and in keeping with recent years 6 pair bred on the reserve.

**WILLOW WARBLER*****Phylloscopus trochilus***

Summer

The most common warbler on the reserve. A total of 34 pairs bred which represented a 20% reduction on last year's results (45 pairs). The reduction came as no surprise and was due almost entirely to the loss of birch scrub on the mossland. With more worked planned it is likely that this figure will reduce further in the future. First returning bird noted on 5/4 with the last being heard on 29/9.

**GOLDCREST*****Regulus regulus***

Resident

Usually only seen in 1s & 2s and then mostly in the roving mixed tit flocks of winter. Exceptionally, a total of six birds were noted in mixed flock on 15/3.

**FIRECREST*****Regulus ignicapillus***

Rare

A first for the reserve. A bird was seen at close quarters in the company of a Goldcrest and a mixed flock of tits on the mossland edge on 5/1. The bird was seen again on the 18/1 and 31/1. Interestingly the species was noted again on 27/11 & 1/12.

**LONG TAILED TIT*****Aegithalos caudatus***

Resident

Present throughout the year with winter flocks producing the main interest.

Flocks averaged between 10 to 15 birds on most occasions with the exception of 20 on 5/1 (which included the Firecrest), 18 on 22/8 and an impressive flock of 24 birds in mixed flock of 40+ birds on the mossland edge on 13/9. Birds were also a regular feature at the Woodland hide during winter providing many people with close views. Three pairs bred.

**WILLOW TIT*****Parus montanus***

Resident

Generally overlooked but singles and occasionally pairs seen among the roving flocks around the reserve and at the Woodland hide in winter. Exceptionally, 4 birds noted near Peters Hide on 25/3, 6 birds in two separate flocks on 18/7 and 3 birds together on 20/11 & 30/11. Two pairs bred.

**COAL TIT*****Parus ater***

Resident

Similar situation to the previous species.

Seen most frequently in the mixed flocks of winter and in particular at the Woodland Hide where three were present on 6/1 and in the woods on 25/7. Two pairs bred.

**NUTHATCH*****Sitta europaea***

Casual

Confined to just a few sightings this year. Birds were seen or heard on 6/1, 1/7, 12/7 and 21/11.

**TREECREEPER*****Certhia familiaris***

Resident

Overlooked during the breeding season but seen often among the mixed flocks that roam the reserve in winter. Occasionally noted at the Woodland Hide with two there on 9/1, 18/2 and 11/11. Exceptional five were noted in two flocks on 30/11.

**JAY*****Garrulus glandarius***

Resident

Seen or heard in most parts of the reserve throughout the year. Of note, 6 present on 23/4, 8 scolding an Owl near the Tower on 13/9, 12 birds in a group on 22/9 and 10+ around ivy covered tree on 26/12. Three pairs bred.

**MAGPIE*****Pica pica***

Resident

Several pairs bred with the winter roost providing the main feature where 100+ birds could be found on most nights between October and March.

**JACKDAW*****Corvus monedula***

Overflying

The diurnal movement of birds overflying the reserve in autumn and winter provided the main interest. Typically, 50 and 250 birds provide the bulk of the mixed flocks of 3-400 corvidae that move between the roosting area in the south in the evenings and the feeding grounds to the north in the mornings.

**ROOK*****Corvus fruilegus***

Overflying

As per the previous species but numbers vary between 50 and 100 birds. A group of 55+ adults and juveniles noted flying south at dusk on 30/6

**CARRION CROW*****Corvus corone corone***

Resident

A number of birds with varying degrees of grey or white primaries were present around the area. Two territorial pairs operated regularly over the mossland and causing havoc among local birds throughout the breeding season. Exceptionally, a group 28 flew south on 6/10 and 50 flew north on 17/10.

**RAVEN*****Corvus corax***

Rare/passage

A bird passed southwards on 17/11.

**STARLING*****Sturnus vulgaris***

Resident

Localised and overflying in small numbers. Of particular note was the sight of a Merlin cutting through a flock of c100 birds on 10/2 and 150 flying west on 6/11.

**TREE SPARROW*****Passer montanus***

Rare

Two birds landed briefly on birches in south west wood on 30/11. First record for several years.

**CHAFFINCH*****Fringilla coelebs***

Resident

Birds seen most often in winter at the Woodland Hide where up to 16 regularly fed. Two roosts on the edge of the mossland held up to 50 birds on occasions.

**BRAMBLING*****Fringilla montifringilla***

Casual/winter

Only small numbers recorded in recent years.

Typically, one was seen at the Lagoon pond on 6/3 with 3 near the Tower on 31/10.

**GREENFINCH*****Carduelis chloris***

Casual

Numbers much reduced in recent years. An occasional bird was seen at the Woodland Hide otherwise records refer to the two regular roosts around the edge of the mossland, which between them can contain up to 150 birds most winter evenings.

**GOLDFINCH*****Carduelis carduelis***

Casual

On rare occasions up to 10 birds were noted feeding briefly in the woodland or overflying the reserve. Exceptionally c40 birds noted feeding on alders on 10/11.

**SISKIN*****Carduelis spinus***

Casual/winter

Small numbers noted in the woodland. Typically, up to 12 in January, February and November and exceptionally a flock of 24 on 6/12.

**LINNET*****Carduelis cannabina***

Casual

Up to four birds were recorded on four occasions on the mossland in April. Exceptionally a flock of c40 birds were noted near the finch roost in the north east corner on 26/12.

**REDPOLL*****Carduelis flammea***

Casual

Occasional birds noted in the woodland in winter and over the mossland during the summer months with 8 birds noted there on 7/4. One pair bred on the mossland.

**BULLFINCH*****Pyrrhula pyrrhula***

Resident

Seen and heard in most parts of the reserve throughout the year. Up to two pairs operated around the area and occasionally appeared at the Woodland Hide in winter.

**YELLOWHAMMER*****Emberiza citrinella***

Casual

Of the two records received, one was along the southern boundary on 18/4 and two on the Flashes on 11/5.

**REED BUNTING*****Emberiza schoeniclus***

Resident

A common bird on the reserve.

Up to 19 pairs bred with birds using the mossland as a winter roost in all but the harshest of

weather.

Unusually, birds were noted at the Woodland Hide on occasions with a pair there on four dates in February with 4 birds there on 6/3.

**CORN BUNTING**

**Miliaria calandra**

Rare

All records refer to birds along southern edge of reserve.

Details were 17 on 2/1, 9 flying SE on 16/3, 1 along south edge on 18/4 and 3 there on 21/8.

**AUSTRALIAN COCKATIEL**

A bird was caught and taken to the R.S.P.C.A. on 13/2. A screeching bird was heard on 6/4 and again on the 15/12 as it flew overhead calling as it went.

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**COMMON BIRD CENSUS AND WARBLER SURVEY**

Each year two types of breeding bird survey are carried out on the Reserve these being the Common Bird Census (C.B.C.) and the Warbler survey.

The C.B.C. gives a consensus of information of territorial species over an extended period during the breeding season (April – July), whilst the Warbler survey is based on a count of birds holding territory throughout the whole of the reserve on one date in mid-May.

The results were as follows;

|                      | <b><u>Common Bird Census (pairs) – mossland only</u></b> |             |             |             |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
|                      | <b>2000</b>                                              | <b>1999</b> | <b>1998</b> | <b>1997</b> |
| Little Grebe         | 1                                                        | 0           | 0           | 1           |
| Mallard              | 3                                                        | 3           | 3           | 4           |
| Teal                 | 2                                                        | 1           | 1           | 1           |
| Tufted Duck          | 1                                                        | 1           | 0           | 0           |
| Moorhen              | 7                                                        | 8           | 9           | 10          |
| Common Snipe         | 1                                                        | 1           | 0           | 1           |
| Little Ringed Plover | 0                                                        | 2           | 0           | 0           |
| Meadow Pipit         | 7                                                        | 3           | 5           | 7           |
| Willow Warbler       | 16*                                                      | 44          | 22          | 19          |
| Redpoll              | 1                                                        | 3           | 2           | 3           |
| Reed Bunting         | 19                                                       | 24          | 14          | 19          |

**Warbler Survey – mossland/woodland (pairs)**

|                | <b>2000</b> | <b>1999</b> | <b>1998</b> | <b>1997</b> |
|----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Blackcap       | 18          | 19          | 15          | 15          |
| Garden Warbler | 1           | 0           | 3           | 3           |
| Whitethroat    | 1           | 0           | 1           | 1           |
| Willow Warbler | 34*         | 57          | 59          | 59          |
| Chiffchaff     | 6           | 6           | 6           | 6           |

\* reduction due to habitat change

## **The Current Situation**

So, what has changed and why the recent surge in records? well putting the vagaries of bird watching aside (weather, species/habitat decline, being in the right spot at the right time!) the situation at Risley Moss has improved in two ways in recent years.

The first and most significant reason has been the resultant effects of the mossland rewetting schemes of 1994 and 1999. This innovative and somewhat unique project resulted in the simultaneous increase in areas of low-lying open water and bare peat mossland and strips of dry raised peat embankment, a combination which has provided two quite diverse habitats in close proximity to each other. This has proved attractive to a wide range of animals and in particular birds, as illustrated by this report's species list.

How long this situation will last is of course fairly predictable, the main purpose of the mossland scheme was to provide the right sort of conditions for acidic loving mossland plants to recolonise those particular areas, a situation which is already well under way on those scrapes created in 1994.

In time this will have an influence on the range and number of species we are currently experiencing on the reserve, particularly among the wildfowl and waders as areas of open water and peat reduce.

Of course, the only way we will really know what is happening is to keep watching – and recording!

Secondly, the reserve is currently receiving good levels of coverage from a number of bird watchers which has resulted in much more information being made available on both common and not so common species. Particular thanks here must go to Peter Hilton, Dave Stewart, Dave Beetham, Ken Dawbarn and John White who between them manage to cover the period either side of midday on most days of the week and in most weather conditions, but we know there are quite a number of other bird watchers who regularly visit the reserve whose records would be most welcome.

Whilst on the subject of records .....

## **Records and Recording**

Because of the improved coverage, the amount and quality of information coming in has increased considerably in recent years, as a result it is becoming necessary to present some information in this report in abbreviated form to ensure that we include as much information as possible. Reporting in this way should not detract from the quality or content of information but enable a more concise and measurable method of comparison for future reports and surveys. The main changes in this report are;

- ⇒ Referral to some species in terms of 'bird days' ie the number of birds seen over a period of time.  
(three birds seen in one day or 1 bird present on three days = 3 bird days).

⇒ Referring to some species in terms of singles (1s), pairs (2s), threes (3s) etc.

Of course, noting down what we see and passing that information on is the key to successful recording which will in turn enables us to produce more meaningful reports, discern trends more accurately and improve our general knowledge of what is happening on the reserve. So, if you visit Risley Moss regularly, why not let us have your records for inclusion in future reports.

Enclosed with this report is a standard recording form and map of the main features and reference points around the reserve. Ideally your records should be brief and to the point and preferably in systematic order (as per the layout in this report). The reverse side contains guidance notes on recording and who to contact for further information. Completed forms should be placed in the donations box in the forum of the visitor centre where further copies can be obtained.

#### **Access & Times**

Please note that there is no public access to the mossland and that the reserve is only open to the general public at the following times;

|                   |                                                           |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| Monday – Thursday | 9.00 am - 5.00 pm                                         |
| Saturday/Sunday   | 10.00 am - 6.00 pm (Summer Weekends & Bank Holidays only) |
| Closed            | Fridays, Christmas & Boxing Day, New Year's Day           |

And finally, .....

#### **Risley Moss – Three decades of birdwatching**

Believe it or not, birdwatchers have been recording information on the bird life of Risley Moss since 1970, during this time the reserve has undergone considerable change and so has much of the bird life, but what has changed, and which species have come and gone? If you would like to know more about these changes then this comprehensive report not only documents the changing face of the reserve but the impact that this has had on its unique and occasionally rare birds over this period.

#### **List of contributors**

|               |             |             |            |             |
|---------------|-------------|-------------|------------|-------------|
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**Illustration by Bill Morton**