

Risley Moss Bird Report

2008



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A year which saw the usual crop of visitors including Little Egret, Quail, Wood Sandpiper, Redstart and Hooded Crow.

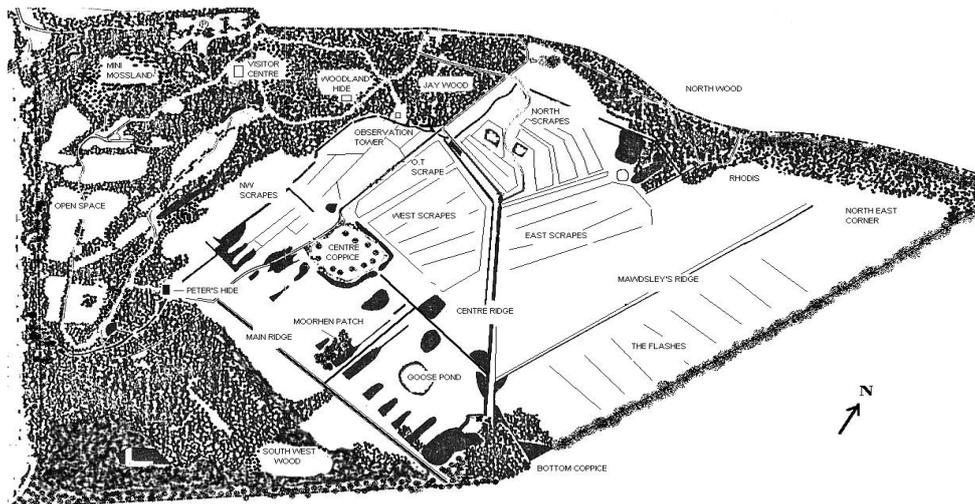
Breeding success was mixed, Stonechat bred on the reserve for the first time since records began and Shoveler, after several years of spring visits also bred. On the down side, Tufted Duck, Common Snipe, Redshank and Meadow Pipit were present during the season but failed to breed.

The Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), carried out in May and undertaken since 1990 monitors the annual breeding success of warblers as well as some of the regular species such as Reed Bunting and Meadow Pipit; full details are included in the species text. Wildfowl and wader breeding counts are ongoing throughout the summer. Peak counts of Common Snipe are carried out during the winter period. The mixed breeding success of some species may be a result of the cool wet summers we have been experiencing in recent years, but it may also be due to the increasing presence and numbers of Carrion Crow around the area as a whole and the reserve in particular. On these occasions, up to 150 birds have been recorded on the moss during winter with large numbers still present well into the breeding season. The impact of these birds can only be surmised but it is quite probable that most open nest species are vulnerable to so many predatory eyes and beaks! Crows also have a considerable impact on most visiting birds of prey who are usually and quickly driven out of the area.

As always, the Woodland Hide is a great place to enjoy the bird life in winter and RIMAG continue to supply the bird food to keep this important area going. It can attract rarities such as Marsh Tit and Brambling but is more likely to give you great close ups of regular species such as Long Tailed, Willow and Coal Tit; Nuthatch; Bullfinch and Reed Bunting.

The success and accuracy of this report is dependant on contributions from birdwatchers who visit the reserve, so if you have seen something of interest send us the details – via the RIMAG web site or hand your records in to the Rangers, for inclusion in future reports. To help with recording the map below gives a number of standard reference points which have been in use for many years, there is also an example of what to record at the end of this report. Annual observations are forwarded to Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society (CAWOS); British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and Record, the Cheshire Biological recording office.

Finally, RIMAG now has its own web site, so to catch up on the latest news about the reserve and it's wildlife or what RIMAG are doing then take a look at www.rimag.org.uk



Systematic list

Little Grebe **Tachybaptus ruficollis**

Although birds were heard as early as 3rd March and seen on frequent occasions after, none were seen or heard after 29th May.



Great Cormorant **Phalacrocorax carbo**

A group of 10 flew south on 9th March and 5 circled the moss on 24th July

Little Egret **Egretta garzetta**

Although still uncommon around the area the 2 birds resting and preening on the OT scrape on 14th April is the fifth record for the reserve since 2001. A short while later the birds took off, circled and headed south

Grey Heron **Ardea cinerea**

Birds were seen on fewer occasions than previous years. Three were on the moss on 9th March, 1 on 14th March and again on 8th September. Two flew low over moss on 7th April

Mute Swan **Cygnus olor**

An adult was seen feeding on the OT scrape on 3rd October. Other records include 4 seen circling the moss before flying out south east on 29th August and 2 adults heading east on 11th October and again on 28th November

Whooper Swan **Cygnus cygnus**

On the 3rd February one flew over south west. On 19th October, 4 immature birds flew low over the mossland

Pink-footed Goose **Anser brachyrhynchus**

Autumn saw some of the best movements of this species in recent years. First arrivals of winter were a flock of 50 flying east on 23rd September. Thereafter, groups of up to 100 were noted on several dates to 7th October with a flock of 200 noted on 11th October.

The most impressive movements included the 3 skeins totalling 350 birds appearing on 8th October. But even this was out done by the 690 recorded on 16th October followed by 4 skeins and 720 birds, two days later on 18th October

Greylag Goose **Anser anser**

A single calling bird came in with Canada Geese after dark on 5th February was the only site record. On 24th November 6 flew over the reserve

Canada Goose **Branta canadensis**

Although 3 pairs attempted to breed, only 1 pair managed to raise 2 goslings and even these had disappeared by the end of May.

The annual survey continued to reveal that sizeable groups of local birds flight in onto the moss after dark. A total of 79 birds were recorded on the first count on 8th August which had increased to 209 birds by 26th August. Thereafter numbers began to decline with the 52 recorded on 3rd October being the last sizeable flock noted

Shelduck **Tadorna tadorna**

A scarce visitor with 2 noted on 10th March

Wigeon **Anas penelope**

A female was present on the OT scrape on 2nd November

Gadwall **Anas strepera**

Normally birds are recorded around the moss in spring, but not this year. A female seen on a mossland pool on 4th October, was the only record

Teal **Anas crecca**

Although 6 pairs were present in March, only 3 pairs bred producing an initial tally of 12 ducklings. Autumn and over wintering numbers continue to fluctuate widely. Peak counts included 30 on 3rd February, 23 on the OT scrape on 13th September and 60 disturbed by a Hen Harrier on 2nd October

Mallard **Anas platyrhynchos**

A good breeding year resulted in 7 pairs and 44 young. This included 2 separate broods of 11 and 15 ducklings, one of which was bright yellow in colour! Peaks included 22 in after dark on 5th February and again on 8th August

Shoveler **Anas clypeata**

A spring visitor, which often disappears or becomes quite secretive. A pair and a male were seen on 29th March followed by a pair on the 7th and 22nd April and eventually a female with 8 young was seen briefly in front of the Moss Hide on 15th June. The final record was of a female on the OT scrape on 11th September



Tufted Duck **Aythya fuligula**

Noted frequently in Spring but a sporadic breeder in recent years.

A male which appeared on the west scrapes on 16th January was followed by a pair there on 2nd February and again on 8th March. On 14th April, the usual activity began when 7 birds (4 males/3 females) flew in from the east. By the 21st May, this had increased to 6 pairs but eventually only resulted in 1 pair raising a single young

Red Kite **Milvus milvus**

On 15th June a bird appeared over the South West Wood, circled the moss for several minutes before being driven away by crows. This bird is becoming an annual visitor

Marsh Harrier **Circus aeruginosus**

The first to appear was a female on the 3rd February followed by further females on 6th May and 25th September. On 7th March, a splendid male circled the moss for several minutes before flying out west. A juvenile was seen on 30th August

Hen Harrier **Circus cyaneus**

A ringtail was seen over the moss on 27th February; 2nd October; 7th October, 9th October and 3rd November. A possible male was seen on 22nd April

Sparrowhawk **Accipiter nisus**

Rarely does a visit go by without seeing this raptor. With various displays of wing clapping, soaring and plunge diving in spring, up to 3 pairs bred around the area with family groups of 3 – 5 noted in late summer. Behaviour of interest included a male circling and trying to get above chaffinch on 14th March and being chased by crows on 16th August. During a survey of Common Snipe on 17th October, a male took a rising bird in mid flight on Mawdsley ridge

Common Buzzard **Accipiter nisus**

The population remains at 2 - 3 pairs around the reserve. As is typical with this species, butterfly display flights and diving noted on a number of occasions in spring.

With the exception of the 8 seen on 22nd April, post breeding tends to produce notable groups of birds soaring on thermals around the reserve such as the 7 on 23rd August; 9 on 20th September; 10 on 25th and 28th September and an impressive 11 on 6th October

Osprey **Pandion haliaetus**

A sporadic migrant which is occasionally seen flying over the reserve as was the bird being mobbed by gulls on 9th April



Kestrel **Falco tinnunculus**

Birds noted throughout the year. Three were seen displaying together over the north east corner on 23rd February with 4 doing the same, over the south west wood on 19th March. A post breeding party of 5 were present on 6th October

Merlin **Falco columbarius**

Continues to be seen frequently throughout winter. Unusually and out of normal period, a bird was seen crossing the mossland on the late date of 29th May with the first returning bird noted on 20 September. Whilst hunting in the area birds were seen perched on a post plucking a bird on 4th February and 13th February and attacking a Starling flock on 22nd September

Hobby **Falco subbuteo**

The reserve continues to be one of the best places to view this species. First bird noted on 21st April; last on 30th September. With the exception of June; males, females and immature were seen on frequent occasions feeding, perched or passing through between April and September. Single were normally recorded but 2 were noted on 11th, 13th, 14th and 29th May; 14th, 21st, 25th and 28th August; 3rd and 17th September with 3 there on 8th May, 24th August, 1st and 7th September

Peregrine Falcon **Falco peregrinus**

Recorded on frequent occasions during the year. Records included a pair on 2nd September. Males on 5th and 13th (immature); 22nd February; 12th May; 4th June; 1st August; 16th and 28th September; 16th October. Females were recorded on 9th July; 21st September (immature); 10th October (immature) and 5th November. Several unidentified birds were also recorded on a further 7 dates during the year

Common Quail **Coturnix coturnix**

A bird was heard calling from the OT scrape embankment at dusk on 15th July

Pheasant **Phasianus colchicus**

A bird on the mossland on 17th March was the only record for the year

Water Rail **Rallus aquatica**

A species which is now present throughout the year. The fringes of the wet, central areas of the mossland are ideal for this species and in 2008 two pairs bred with young seen on both occasions

Moorhen **Gallinula chloropus**

Despite the presence of Mink in May, a total of 4 pairs bred on the moss. This is an improvement on 2007 (c.f 1 pair) but down on several years previous to that (c.f 6 to 8 pairs)

Coot **Fulica atra**

A casual visitor noted in a fire ditch on 17th; 18th and 23rd March

Oystercatcher **Haematopus ostralegus**

A species which becomes locally active during the breeding season. Three flying low over the mossland on 14th April was the first noted. Thereafter, 1 was seen on the OT scrape on 22nd and 23rd April; 14th, 20th, 21st and 26th May; 10th June; 5th July and 2nd August. Four were present on 15th June with the last 2 recorded as coming in at dusk on 8th August

Little Ringed Plover **Charadrius dubius**

The wet summers, increasing plant growth and predation have become a problem for this species in recent years. A bird was noted briefly on the OT scrape on 6th May and again on 28th June. The 2 adults and fledged juvenile noted on 2nd July, followed a few days later by an adult and fledged young. The last bird was noted on 14th July.

Ringed Plover **Charadrius hiaticula**

A bird flew down onto a scrape on 6th March, 10th June and 16th June

Golden Plover **Pluvialis apricaria**

Mostly seen flying around the area as were the 10 that flew south on 8th September. Interestingly a group of 5 leaving the mossland on 30 November was unusual

Grey Plover **Pluvialis squatarola**

On an early morning migration watch one flew over calling loudly on 12th October

Lapwing **Vanellus vanellus**

Although up to 3 pairs were present, breeding was unsuccessful. Small flocks gather on the moss on occasions whilst larger groups are often seen around the area such as the 200 on 17th September, 250 on 22nd September and 150 on 3rd October

Dunlin **Calidris alpina**

A single bird flew over the moss on 3rd November

Ruff **Philomachus pugnax**

Two flew south on 23rd March

Jack Snipe **Lymnocyptes minimus**

Never that common but singles were seen on 1st January; 29th September; 2nd October with 2 birds recorded on 9th October; 2nd and 12th November

Common Snipe **Gallinago gallinago**

Although a bird was seen displaying in early spring, breeding was unproven. Monthly counts, along a set transect, have been a regular feature in winter for several years; peak counts for 2008 included

12 on 1st January; 64 on 8th February; 25 on 14th March.
67 on 3rd October; 18 on 28th November 47 on 28th December



Birds are also recorded leaving the reserve after dusk. These estimates – based on calling birds as they take off are less accurate but include 71 on 2nd October; 95 on 12th November

Woodcock **Scolopax rusticola**

A quiet year saw singles on 1st and 5th January; 6th and 8th February; 3rd March and 2nd and 12th November

Whimbrel **Numenius phaeopus**

The only record was of 2 flying north on 6th May.

Curlew **Numenius arquata**

Some years are better than others. The only record was of one flying low over the moss on 10th April

Redshank **Tringa totanus**

The anticipation of a 3rd successful year of breeding did not materialise. Birds were present and displaying on a number of occasions in May but only recorded on 2 dates in June.

Other records included a party of 5 flying east on 24th March

Greenshank **Tringa nebularia**

A bird calling at dusk on 19th September and one seen landing on the mossland on the late date of 4th November were the only records

Green Sandpiper **Tringa ochropus**

A species which has undergone a decline in recent years. Two came in at dusk on 3rd October otherwise singles were recorded on 7th and 8th September; 12th and 27th October and again on 2nd and 6th November

Wood Sandpiper **Tringa glareola**

One noted on the scrapes on 2nd July and 26th August

Common Sandpiper **Actitis hypoleucos**

A single bird was recorded on 21st July

Black Headed Gull **Larus ridibundus**

Although a pair were acting aggressively for a short period on one of the west scrapes, breeding did not occur. The pools are occasionally used by groups of gulls for preening and cleaning rituals, on these occasions up to 250 have been noted

Lesser Black Back Gull **Larus fuscus**

Birds are often drawn into and pass over the reserve as they head for the adjacent waste tips

Iceland Gull**Larus glaucoides**

A single bird was seen drifting over with Herring Gulls on 18th January and again on 13th March

Glaucous Gull**Larus hyperboreus**

A similar situation to the previous species when a bird was seen with Black Backs on 27th February

Stock Pigeon**Columba oenas**

Only small numbers noted most years. Three flew north on 13th April, 5 landed on a scrape on 7th May with 2 there on 14th July

Woodpigeon**Columba palumbus**

At times the large number of birds coming into roost at dusk can be impressive. A total of 1500 were counted on 13th February with smaller numbers of 1000 noted on 16th February; 25th November and again on 28th November

Collared Dove**Streptopelia decaocto**

Small numbers noted around the area throughout the year

Cuckoo**Cuculus canorus**

A species very much in decline. The only records were of a male calling over moss on 29th May and a juvenile flying over on 18th August

Barn Owl**Tyto alba**

Continues to appear and hunt over the moss on several occasions during the winter period. Birds were noted on 9th October and a further 9 dates in November and 2 dates in December

**Little Owl****Athene noctua**

The territory of this species seems to border the reserve with birds heard calling on 4 dates in winter

Tawny Owl**Strix aluco**

Birds are seen and heard on frequent occasions around the wooded areas of the reserve throughout the year

Long-Eared Owl**Asio otus**

Birds were recorded on 23rd March and again on 9th October

Short-Eared Owl**Asio flammeus**

The year began well when two were observed hawking low over mossland at dusk on 1st January and again on 3rd February. Thereafter singles were seen on 30th January and several dates in March. Later in the year birds were recorded on 3rd, 9th and 17th October and 22nd November

Swift**Apus apus**

First of the year recorded on 27th April with the last 2 seen drifting slowly south on 6th September. Between these dates 200 were recorded feeding over the reserve on 30th April and 25th July with 150 there on 15th June

Kingfisher**Alcedo atthis**

A regular post-breeding visitor. Birds were recorded perched over a fire ditch on 3rd August and a moss pool on 8th and 23rd August and flying past observers on 29th August; 16th October and 2nd November

Great Spotted Woodpecker**Dendrocopos major**

Resident and seen in or over most areas of the reserve throughout the year and especially at the Woodland hide in winter. 3 pairs bred

Skylark**Alauda arvensis**

Mostly seen flying over or around the reserve although a bird was seen to land on Mawdsleys Ridge on 4th May. Over flying birds included 22 on 26th September and 60 over the conifers on 8th November

Sand Martin**Riparia riparia**

First birds recorded on 14th March when 3 flew fast and low to the north. Otherwise an occasional pair noted feeding over the reserve itself during the summer

**Swallow****Hirundo rustica**

First of the year noted on 3rd April; last recorded on 17th October. Birds recorded feeding over the reserve in small numbers throughout the breeding season. The mossland is also used as roost by up to 100, mostly immature birds, which drop into the reeds or bushes at dusk

House Martin**Delichon urbica**

First of the year recorded on 11th April; the last going south on 3rd October. Small numbers recorded feeding over the reserve during the summer with a few dropping into roost later in the season

Tree Pipit**Anthus trivialis**

Birds are usually only recorded on migration. Only records this year were birds flying south on 29th August and again on 8th September

Meadow Pipit**Anthus pratensis**

Although the BBS in May revealed the presence of 3 pairs, breeding failed for the first time in years! Outside the breeding season birds can often be seen circling the moss before dropping into roost for the night. Typically, 40 flew in on 6th February; 77 on 9th February; 25 on 25th March and 39 on 29th October

Yellow Wagtail**Motacilla flava**

One flew over the moss on 12th May and again 18th June

Grey Wagtail**Motacilla cinerea**

Although breeds in the area birds only appear outside the breeding season as noted on 8th and 26th September; 2nd October; 9th and 14th November

Pied Wagtail**Motacilla alba**

Post breeding birds noted on 8th September; 2nd October – 5 heading north west and 26th December

White Wagtail**Motacilla alba**

Two landed briefly before setting off north on 29th March

Wren**Troglodytes troglodytes**

Present around the reserve's woodlands and also on the moss in all but extreme weather

Robin**Erithacus rubecula**

Occasionally found on the mossland but mostly in the woodlands around the reserve. Several birds can be seen, in an uneasy truce at the Woodland Hide, during winter including a very strange straggly specimen. Despite its unusual and somewhat scary look, it was seen at the feeders on many occasions

Common Redstart**Phoenicurus phoenicurus**

Only record was of 1 near the main gate on 20th April

Whinchat**Saxicola rubetra**

A male was seen briefly on the mossland on 21st April and again on 29th September

Stonechat**Saxicola torquata**

A species which bred for the first time on the reserve since records began. Birds were seen frequently around the reserve since the beginning of the year, with a pair going onto raise 5 young in June. A pair was last seen on 15th November

Northern Wheatear**Oenanthe oenanthe**

A single female perched on a tree on 29th March was the only record

Ring Ouzel**Turdus torquatus**

A pair landed briefly on a tree on the moss on 21st April and 1 flew across the reserve on 16th August

Fieldfare**Turdus pilaris**

Birds are at their most noticeable during the autumn migration period. Occasionally seen around the area or roosting on the reserve overnight. Early arrivals heard on 1st September otherwise several flocks of up to 200 noted on several dates to November

Song Thrush**Turdus philomelos**

BBS revealed 8 territories in the main woodland area otherwise single birds seen on occasions

Redwing**Turdus iliacus**

Birds were first heard on 1st September with movements of up to 150 noted on several dates to year end

Mistle Thrush**Turdus viscivorus**

One pair bred on site otherwise a casual visitor

Grasshopper Warbler**Locustella naevia**

A bird was briefly heard on 10th April and again on 1st May but not thereafter

Sedge Warbler**Acrocephalus schoenobaenus**

First heard on 26th April and then on a further 5 dates to 1st June but not after that date

Reed Warbler**Acrocephalus scirpaceus**

A casual visitor seen and heard briefly near the Moorhen Patch on 1st May and again among bracken near Jay Wood on 29th August

Whitethroat**Sylvia communis**

Recorded in front of the Observation Tower on 22nd April and last noted on 4th September. BBS revealed 7 territories in May but these had reduced to 3 by mid June

Garden Warbler**Sylvia borin**

Another poor year with the species only being recorded on 4th and 10th May

Blackcap**Sylvia atricapilla**

Breeding population is down on previous years with the BBS revealing only 6 pairs on the reserve. An overwintering bird was recorded on 27th February

Chiffchaff**Phylloscopus collybita**

First bird heard calling in the Main wood on 27th March, the last on 9th October. BBS produced 11 pairs a slight increase on previous years

Willow Warbler**Phylloscopus trochilus**

First recorded on 7th April and the last noted on 3rd October. A total of 56 pairs recorded on the annual BBS

Goldcrest**Regulus regulus**

Up to two birds seen frequently during winter and mostly with the tit flocks that roam the reserve. Interestingly for the second year, a singing bird was heard in late May

Spotted Flycatcher**Muscicapa striata**

A bird was seen in Centre copse area on 20th May and in front of the Observation Tower on 25th September.

Long Tailed Tit**Aegithalos caudatus**

Up to 3 pairs bred otherwise seen in most areas of the reserve throughout the year. Winter flocks of up to 12 were noted

Marsh Tit**Parus palustris**

Almost an annual but brief visitor as was the bird seen at the Woodland Hide on 22nd March

Willow Tit**Parus montanus**

Up to two seen almost daily at the Woodland Hide in winter and around the reserve at other times. One to two pairs breed on the reserve but difficult to estimate accurately

Coal Tit**Parus ater**

Up to 4 seen frequently at the Woodland Hide feeders in winter and among mixed tit flocks at other times. BBS produced 2 – 4 pairs on the reserve

Blue Tit**Parus caeruleus**

Seen regularly at the feeders and in the mixed tit flocks roaming the reserve. The new bird boxes in the main woodland area are being increasingly used by this species

Great Tit**Parus major**

As per the previous species

Nuthatch**Sitta europaea**

Largely absent between May and August with the exception of a bird noted on 11th June. Present around the main woodland area and frequently at the Woodland Hide feeders the rest of the year

Treecreeper**Certhia familiaris**

Up to 2 pairs bred. Mostly seen in the mature wooded areas and occasionally at the Woodland hide feeders

Jay**Garrulus glandarius**

Up to 8 seen and heard in all areas of the reserve. Particularly noticeable in autumn as birds fly back and forth across the mossland

**Magpie****Pica pica**

Present throughout the year. A group of 20 perched along the edge of moss on 26th September were the largest gathering noted

Jackdaw**Corvus monedula**

The waste tip to the south east of the reserve has been attracting large numbers of corvids in recent years. Typically, a group of 100+ were perched in the boundary trees and the field outside the boundary on 31st January and flocks of up to 150 passing over head as per the 150 seen on 18th November

Rook**Corvus frugilegus**

Similar situation to previous species. Typically, 100+ using the southern tree line before evening dispersal

Carrion Crow**Corvus corone corone**

This species has become a major nuisance on the reserve. The constant presence of up to 150 birds throughout winter and often well into May has had a noticeable impact on the breeding success of some ground nesting birds. Birds of prey are also given a hard time and rarely stay around for long once a posse of crows start harassing them

Hooded Crow**Corvus cornix**

A bird of this race was perched on the mossland on 2nd; 3rd and 24th November and lastly on 1st December. This is only the 2nd record of this species since records began (cf 19th September 1996)

Raven**Corvus cora**

Birds noted over the reserve on 3rd March; 29th May; 11th June; 8th and 25th September; 17th November (2) and 26th December.

Starling**Sturnus vulgaris**

Mostly seen passing over the reserve although a group of 20 appeared to enter a roost on the mossland on 30th October

Tree Sparrow**Passer montanus**

A flock of 8 flying over the reserve on 12th November were the only record

Chaffinch**Fringilla coelebs**

Mostly seen in any numbers at the Woodland Hide where up to 30 have been recorded on occasions in winter

Brambling**Fringilla montifringilla**

One noted on 13th March followed by a ringed male at the Woodland Hide on 1st April. Later in the year singles noted on 24th November and 12th December

Goldfinch**Carduelis carduelis**

Small flocks appear around the woodland areas on occasions such as the 15 on Alders near the Lagoon on 1st January and again on 26th January. A flock of 60 were also seen flitting across the moss on 29th September

Siskin**Carduelis spinus**

The last winter birds noted on 15th March but recorded back on the reserve by 14th July. Small numbers noted during winter but flocks of note included 10 on 14th September with 14 there on the 22nd September; 24 noted on 11th October and 20 on 12th December

Linnet**Carduelis cannabina**

One pair bred which continues a recent trend with this species. A group of 10 were noted on 22nd September and again on the 1st October

Lesser Redpoll**Carduelis flammea**

The BBS suggested that 4 pairs bred on the reserve which is an improvement on previous years

Common Crossbill**Loxia curvirostra**

A pair was perched and calling near the Football field on 10th May before heading out south

**Bullfinch****Pyrrhula pyrrhula**

Seen and heard in most parts of the reserve throughout the year. Although breeding is difficult to assess, BBS data suggests 4 pairs were active around the wooded areas. Outside the breeding season up to 6 have been noted moving and feeding around the wooded areas with 4 frequently noted at the Woodland Hide feeders in winter

Yellowhammer**Emberiza citrinella**

Although 4 males were present on the 23rd May, there was little evidence that breeding took place. Outside the breeding season 15 were noted over the north east corner on 14th March

Reed Bunting**Emberiza schoeniclus**

The BBS revealed 13 territories which is above average levels of recent years. Birds continue to roost on the mossland in all but the harshest of weather and can also be seen at the Woodland Hide feeders during the winter period where up to 7 were on occasions and present until 1st April

Corn Bunting**Miliaria calandra**

The occasional bird appears on the northern edges of the reserve.

Contributors

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Appendix 1 – Recording form (excel)

Minimum information required for submission of records in pink, additional data useful and if known in grey

Species	Date	Site Location	Observer	Sex/Stage	Abundance	Comment
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