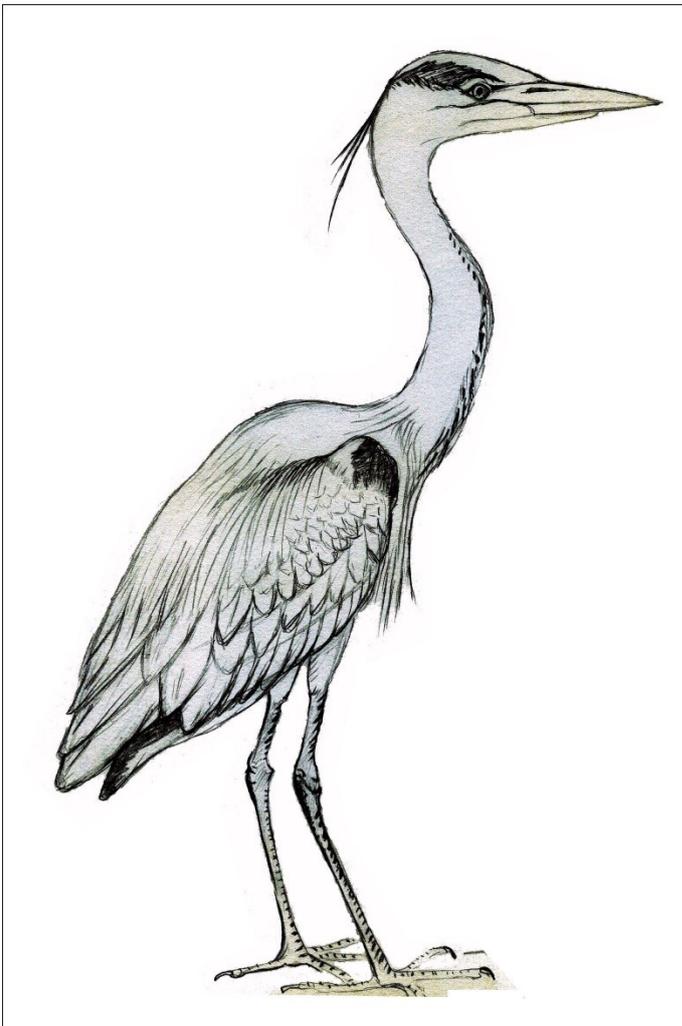


RISLEY MOSS LOCAL NATURE RESERVE
ANNUAL BIRD REPORT

2009



Rob Smith

Foreword

It seems strange at the end of 2010 to be putting out a bird report for 2009, but circumstances this year caused a delay in writing it up. Nonetheless, in the interest of maintaining consistency of record keeping and sharing information as well keeping birders and staff up to date on recent trends, it was decided to put this report out.

It was an interesting year with the unexpected making the news such as the appearance of the Great White Egret in May followed by the Bittern on the mossland in June. But it also good to see some less common species such as Green and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Black tailed Godwits, Little Gull, Waxwing, Ring Ouzel, Marsh Tit and Crossbill dropping onto the reserve or passing over it.

Unfortunately some regular breeding birds did not do quite as well as previous years. Teal numbers were down to just 2 pairs, Meadow Pipit to 1 pair whilst Little Grebe and Redshank failed to breed at all. Reasons for this can be many and varied but the increasing amount of trees and the presence of large numbers of crows well into the breeding season does not help. Fortunately much of the work by the WBC Rangers during the winter of 2010/2011 will set out to rectify the former problem with possibly a more positive impact on the latter as crows progressively lose their perching points.

It's now almost 40 years since the first bird records appeared in print during which time the reserve has seen several major changes providing wildlife watchers with an interesting and at times a challenging time. Consistency of information is always useful and the bird life of the reserve is a good example of a species being monitored almost continuously since the early 1970s, with the editor being involved since the mid-70s.

During this time much has changed on the reserve and certainly among the bird species found there. Fortunately we know a good deal about the reserves bird life and the changes they have undergone. Some of this information has come from staff and students but a good deal has come from the dedication and support of various bird watchers who have consistently submitted their records for inclusion in the annual reports, which in themselves have appeared almost continuously since those early days.

These reports have always been an important source of reference for both bird watchers and WBC staff, so it's important that we continue to ensure that we are able to put as much information into them as possible and to share and possibly debate our sightings with staff and interested parties alike in order to ensure accuracy and detail and most important of all to keep Risley Moss in the mind and eye of everyone during these uncertain times!

The Warbler/Bunting Survey was carried out by R Smith on 15th May 2009.

My thanks go to Dave Beetham for his invaluable monthly reports; Brian Riley for his frequent updates on the board and Rangers Mark and Gaynor for their support.

If anyone wishes to submit their sightings, then please send them for my attention at mail@rimag.org.uk

Rob Smith
December 2010

Species list

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Although the first bird appeared on 18th March it remained scarce and unclear whether breeding took place. The species was last seen on 2nd July.

Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

A species barely recorded currently. On 28th March three separate birds flew east of the reserve in various directions with two noted again on 22nd April

Bittern *Boataurus stellaris*

An unusual record for the reserve especially at this time of year but a bird of this description was noted on the mossland during an evening walk at around 8pm on 16th June by the Ranger and several members of the group.

Great Egret *Egretta alba*

This unexpected species appeared low over the tree tops from the north at 8.30am on 17th May. On clearing the trees and seeing the observer it veered south east and flew low over the mossland looking as if it was about to land but carried on. Initially the bird approaching head-on was mistaken for a heron, but as it turned side on details of the bird were clearly seen. This was a unique first for the reserve.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

A frequent visitor on the mossland with birds noted most months through to August. Seven were noted on 17th June otherwise one or two are more usual.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

A 1st winter bird stood on the ice of the OT scrape before flying out over the north east corner on 2nd February. Birds were also seen over flying the reserve on 20th April and 19th December

Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus*

Watching skeins of Pink Footed Geese in V formation passing over the reserve is always a pleasure but compared with previous years, numbers and frequency were generally down. Two groups totalling over 100 birds flew south east on 24th January. A flock of 200 on the 19th February was the last outgoing birds noted in spring with returning birds being seen on 4th October when 40 flew east. The 400 birds which flew north west on 22nd October were the largest skein recorded.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

A single bird flew south on 11th November

Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*

Present in varying numbers throughout the year. Up to 2 pair attempted to breed with 5 goslings being seen with two adults on the mossland on 25th April. The importance of the mossland to this species is particularly apparent in autumn when large numbers drop onto the pools after dark to moult Regular counts were not made in 2009 but 78 were recorded dropping onto various scrapes on 24th August and 48 were noted heading towards Rixton on 19th September.

Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

A juvenile landed briefly on the mossland before flying off south west on 12th August.

Teal *Anas crecca*

A resident species noted in small numbers throughout the year. Despite evidence of courtship and display the breeding season resulted in only 2 pairs recorded. Winter peaks included 25 on 20th February and 44 on 15th November with up to 20 on several other dates over the same period.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Present all year in varying numbers. Up to 8 pairs bred with a clutch of 13 ducklings being noted on 17th April. The mossland scrapes are frequently used as an overnight roost with many birds coming in at dusk or after dark. Although difficult to count accurately at these times reasonable estimates of between 30 and 90 (as on 24th August) have been made with noticeable increases during the autumn period.

Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

A pair was noted on 21st March and again on 11th, 17th and 28th April with a single male on 12th May being the last seen.

Pochard *Aythya ferina*

A single bird flying low over the mossland on 24th August was the only record.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

A pair was seen briefly on 24th February and again on the 28th February. The main influx began when a pair was noted on B3w on 25th March and throughout April. By 9th May, two pairs were present rising to 5 pairs by 23rd May. Despite this level of presence breeding was not confirmed. Three birds noted on 27th September on the Moorhen Patch were the last recorded.

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*

A male seen flying low over the mossland on 22nd September was an unusual record for the reserve.

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

Females were noted on 5th and 6th March (before being driven off by crows), 1st April and 10th May. On the latter date the female landed and was then seen later hunting over the mossland. Return passage produced the rare sight these days of 3 birds over the mossland at the same time. Prior to this autumn passage began on 3rd August when a juvenile bird, followed by a transitional male appeared over the mossland. Males were again in evidence on 17th August and then on 1st, 3rd and 5th September. Juveniles were also noted 4th August and again on 19th, 21st, and finally 28th September.

Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*

Birds were recorded on 31st July, 8th August and lastly 8th November otherwise a quiet year.

Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

Single birds frequently noted, pairs common place with 3 noted as on 25th May and 3rd September and 4 separate birds on 28th April

Common Buzzard *Accipiter nisus*

As usual, activity increases pre and post breeding season with peak numbers occurring at these times. Monthly peaks include a splendid sight of 12 soaring on 22nd September otherwise 8 on 4th March; 7 on 2nd April; 5s and 6s on several dates during the year were noted.

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

A single bird flying north west on 31st March was the only record.

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Can be seen hunting over the mossland on occasions. Single birds usually recorded but two were seen on a few dates during the year with three present on 11th & 17th August

Merlin *Falco columbarius*

Birds were seen on 4 dates between 18th January and 1st March. A female flying south on 25th October was the first winter bird with others recorded on three further dates to years end.

Males noted on 18th January; 1st March and 10th December, females on 29th January and 25th October.

Most birds seen flying over but occasionally perched on the mossland.

- Hobby** *Falco subbuteo*
A number of individuals pass through the reserve in both spring and autumn migration with numbers and frequency increasing between July and October.
First returning bird recorded on 17th April with 2 there on 11th May. Birds were seen throughout the breeding season with 3 present on there on 25th June on 9 dates thereafter, four were present on 25th August and three further dates culminating in 5 on 27th August. The last bird was noted on the 11th September.
- Peregrine Falcon** *Falco peregrinus*
Single birds noted on 17 dates between 16th February and 29th December but absent during May and June.
- Pheasant** *Phasianus colchicus*
Probably bred in the area as males were heard on several dates in March/April, briefly in June and then in late autumn.
- Water Rail** *Rallus aquaticus*
Seen or heard in every month of the year and in particular in front of the OT. Breeds in the ditches and among the marginal vegetation around the mossland where young were recorded in two locations in June.
- Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus*
Breeds in the area, with up to two birds frequently and noisily noted on the OT scrape during the breeding season concluding in three being present on several dates in July.
- Little Ringed Plover** *Charadrius dubius*
First bird noted on 18th March, the last – an immature, noted on 18th July. Despite frequent territorial/breeding displays and a pair being present, breeding was not confirmed.
- Golden Plover** *Pluvialis apricaria*
A winter visitor recorded on rare occasions as they move around the area. A flock of 70 were noted south of the reserve on 11th February followed by 16 on 22nd. Towards years end, 24 were noted on 5th October and 16 on 20th December
- Lapwing** *Vanellus vanellus*
Up to 3 pairs attempt to breed on the diminishing areas of mud each year. In 2009, a pair raised a single young.
The mossland is used in greater numbers by post breeding flocks either briefly during daytime or often after dark. On these occasions, up to 60 were noted as on 25th June, with 25 there on 2nd July.
- Jack Snipe** *Lymnocyptes minimus*
A quiet winter with only two birds recorded as on 30th October and 21st November
- Common Snipe** *Gallinago gallinago*
Up to two pairs bred. The mossland is an important roosting area for this species particularly in winter. Winter counts along a set transect have been a feature for several years. In 2009, numbers were down to single figures at the beginning of the year but increased in the latter period. Typically 17 in September rose to 72 in October and 64 in November
- Woodcock** *Scolopax rusticola*
Only four records for the whole year.
- Black-Tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa*
Although an unusual visitor to the reserve, the 7 that took off one early morning on 4th October were an interesting record.
- Curlew** *Numenius arquata*
Occasionally birds drop onto the mossland but more often are noted moving across it. Only four records for the year.

Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Although birds were recorded on the reserve on several dates in spring breeding did not occur. First noted on the 19th March and the last on 10th June

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

A passage migrant whose numbers vary annually. Post breeding records included up to 2 birds on occasions between 6th July and 25th August with 3 present 8th July.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

The only record was a returning bird noted on the 18th July

Little Gull *Larus minutus*

An adult landed briefly on the OT scrape on 21st March.

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*

Although a pair was acting territorially in spring it remains a casual visitor to the reserve which attempts to breed on occasions. A lazy line of 150 birds drifted over the mossland on 30th October.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

Occasionally the odd bird will land briefly on the scrapes as did one with food on 16th July, otherwise up to 50 noted drifting south/south west.

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

Small numbers noted drifting over the mossland in spring and autumn.

Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*

Occasional birds noted flying over mostly in winter period.

Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*

Two flew low overhead on 5th August with 3 noted again on 8th, otherwise a rarity in the area.

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*

Noted in small numbers on a few dates only during the year

Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*

A resident species noted more in winter as hundreds fly in from the surrounding farmlands. As they begin gathering at dusk, flocks vary considerably from a few hundred up to 2000 on occasions.

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Only 1s and 2s on occasions noted crossing the mossland or dropping onto for a brief stopover

Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

A poor year as it continues to be a scarce visitor. Two noted on 11th May and a single bird on 29th June.

Barn Owl *Tyto alba*

Individuals continue to put in frequent appearances. A male was noted sleeping in a tree on the edge of the rhododendron in the north east woodlands on 15th February. A bird was also noted roosting in the owl box in the Centre Coppice on several dates between March and June. The final sighting was of one moving quickly across the mossland on 12th December.

Little Owl *Athene noctua*

Occasionally heard calling from the Bottom Coppice as it did on 31st July and again on 24th August.

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*

Up to 3 pairs breed most years otherwise continues to be seen and heard in various parts of the wooded reserve.

Long-Eared Owl *Asio otus*
A bird was recorded being chased out of Jay wood by Jays on 31st July.

Swift *Apus apus*
First birds of the year appeared on 19th April and the last two on 7th September. In between those dates a group of over 200 were noted hawking low over the mossland during the evening of 7th August.

Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*
Post breeding birds noted crossing the mossland on 23rd August and again on 23rd October.

Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*
An immature was perched on a tree in the Centre Coppice on 31st July, noted flying across the mossland on 12th August and calling from the south west wood on 24th August.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*
Between 2 and 4 pairs bred around the reserve. Seen and heard daily and in particular at the Woodland Hide during winter

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*
A bird was heard calling from Jay wood on 30th March and seen on 31st August.

Skylark *Alauda arvensis*
A few birds moving around the area noted on occasions

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*
A few birds appear briefly on passage and occasionally appear during the breeding season. First of year arrived on 17th March and the last seen was on 2nd July

Swallow *Hirundo rustica*
First birds recorded on 26th March, the last on 4th October. Between these dates' birds frequently noted hawking over the mossland with a group of 40 on the 5th May and a 100+ on 9th September.

House Martin *Delichon urbica*
First birds noted on 4th April, the last on 3rd September. Between these dates small numbers frequently noted over the mossland with a peak of 50 there on 31st July

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*
Individuals occasionally appear for a few days before moving on such as the bird seen on 19th March.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*
A species in decline as far as the reserve is concerned. A bird holding territory was observed on a few dates in April but sadly did not go onto breed. The mossland is a favoured roosting area in winter with small groups dropping in prior to dusk, typically up to 20 on these occasions with 26 noted on 30th October.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*
Single birds noted on a few dates during the year and usually in winter

Pied Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*
Several immature birds appear on the scrapes in post breeding period otherwise singles pass over the reserve on passage and during the winter period.

Waxwing *Bombycilla garrulus*
Birds usually confined to towns/gardens which contain trees or shrubs covered in berries. As such the 22 seen flying low to the east across the mossland on 15th February followed by the 34 flying west on 21st February were a rare and unusual bonus.

- Wren** *Troglodytes troglodytes*
A resident species found in most parts of the reserve, including, at times, the hostile and open mossland.
- Dunnock** *Prunella modularis*
A resident species found around the reserve.
- Robin** *Erithacus rubecula*
Found in all habitats around the reserve. Up to 5 have been recorded at the woodland hide in very cold weather but territorially disputes were commonplace and this @gathering@ didn't last long. Of note was the presence of a very untidy, unusual, fragile looking specimen (see photo) which survived well into winter.
- Stonechat** *Saxicola torquata*
The success of previous years was absent. A pair were present on 1st March; a female on 19th February and 15th October and a male 28th February and again on 18th March
- Ring Ouzel** *Turdus torquatus*
A male flying north on 12th April was a rare passage migrant and an unusual record for the reserve.
- Blackbird** *Turdus merula*
The rhododendron copse, east of the OT continues to be an important roosting area for this bird in winter. On these occasions up to 30 birds can be seen crossing in front of the Tower at dusk. Up to 20 was also noted at the Woodland Hide on numerous dates in winter.
Another regular feature is a large increase in numbers as a result of the migratory influx of birds onto the reserve in April and again in September/October.
- Fieldfare** *Turdus pilaris*
Last birds noted over Jay wood on 3rd April and the first returning on 17th October.
Autumn passage starts slow but quickly produces a strong westward movement when flocks of up to 200 were frequently noted. A few birds roost in the woodlands on occasions.
- Song Thrush** *Turdus philomelos*
The combination of reserve woodland and open spaces and surrounding housing and hedgerows results in up to 12 pairs breeding annually.
- Redwing** *Turdus iliacus*
As with Field fare, birds begin to appear in significant numbers during October with a number of birds also roosting in the woodlands.
- Mistle Thrush** *Turdus viscivorus*
Up to 2 pairs bred on the reserve with 2-4 birds noted moving around the area on several dates.
- Grasshopper Warbler** *Locustella naevia*
The only record of the year was a brief 'reeling' east of the OT on 19th April
- Sedge Warbler** *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*
The familiar sound of this warbler was mostly absent this year. A bird was heard calling on only 3 dates between 3rd and 23rd May with 3 pairs eventually going onto breed.
- Whitethroat** *Sylvia communis*
Three pairs bred out on the mossland. The first bird was heard on 16th April and the last on 9th September.
- Garden Warbler** *Sylvia borin*
One pair bred with a male seen and heard in front of the OT on several dates between 7th June and 4th July.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

A bird – possibly over wintering, was noted on 5th March. The warbler survey revealed only 9 singing males in the north woodland areas only, down on previous years.

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

Two were heard calling in the oak/ash woodland on 17th March with last noted on 4th November
Four pairs bred in the Main woodland area.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*

The first arrival was heard on 9th April with a significant 'fall' of birds noted overnight on 11th April.
A total of 34 pairs bred on the reserve.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

Mostly seen and heard around the woodlands in winter. Unusually, a bird was heard singing and noted displaying during the breeding season and probable bred on the reserve.

Long Tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*

A resident species found in all parts of the reserve including the mossland. Between 3 and 5 pairs bred with nests often built in gorse, rhododendron or bracken. Of particular note are post breeding flocks containing up to 30 birds seen on occasions in late autumn

Marsh Tit *Parus palustris*

A single bird seen on at the Woodland Hide on 2nd January continues to be rarity for the reserve

Willow Tit *Parus montanus*

Never common but 1 pair was noted during the year and probably bred. Birds are seen regularly at the Woodland Hide in winter

Coal Tit *Parus ater*

One to two pairs bred and up to 4 birds seen daily at the Woodland Hide in winter and occasionally around the reserve.

Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus*

Numbers were down on previous years and very few noted at the Woodland Hide feeders.

Great Tit *Parus major*

Numbers were also down on previous years. Occasionally up to 6 seen at the Woodland Hide.

Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*

A casual breeding species, with a pair present in the oak/ash woodland during summer. Otherwise seen and heard regularly around the woods with up to 2 appearing daily at the Woodland Hide feeding station in winter.

Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*

Often overlooked, this secretive species is seen occasionally in various parts of the mature woodland most months and at the Woodland Hide in winter. A single pair was known to have bred.

Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

Seen and heard in every part of the reserve throughout the year. In autumn birds can be seen flying back and forth across the mossland and other areas carrying acorns for winter use. A group of 12 in territorial argument were noted on 1st April.

Magpie *Pica pica*

A few birds can be seen in all areas of the reserve.

Note on Corvids:

A recent phenomenon has been the increase in Corvids (Crows, Rooks and Jackdaw) gathering on the reserve at dusk. On some nights the combined total can be in excess of 500 birds. Birds begin to appear at sunset and continue to arrive until almost dark when it becomes difficult to identify species in falling light. As darkness falls these birds move en block to the west side of the reserve to roost overnight.

Unfortunately for the wildlife of the reserve, Carrion Crow numbers remain on or around the reserve most of the year and in particular well into the breeding season and are probable responsible for a reduction in several breeding species.

Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*

This noisy species has become a regular feature of the nightly roost. Previously birds were only noted passing over, whereas now small groups gather on the mossland or south wood area at dusk prior increasing to over 200 birds by dark before heading to roost on the west side of the site.

Of particular note is the sight of over 200 birds performing an aerial ballad (aka Starlings) on favourable nights prior to dusk.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*

At dusk small numbers combine with other corvids as they enter the roost at dusk. Up to 150 have been noted on these occasions.

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*

Throughout the year has become a troublesome species. Typically up to 50 can be counted around the reserve well into the breeding season and noted on many occasions taking live prey – often chicks but occasionally rodents, lizards etc. Outside the breeding season, birds continue to be a nuisance as they generally chase off any owls or raptor that appears on or over the reserve, peak counts at these times can be between 200 and 300 birds.

A number of birds seem to have recessive genes that provide them with varying amounts of white on their wings.

Hooded Crow *Corvus corone corone*

With so many crows located on or around the area it's not surprising that we get the odd related visitor. A bird of this description was observed on the mossland on 24th March and flying over it on 3rd May.

Raven *Corvus corax*

Birds were noted on 18th; 19th and 25th August and again on 5th and 11th September. On two occasions the Raven was seen fighting with a buzzard.

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Usually observed passing over the reserve in small numbers although the flock of ca1500 over the landfill on 11th February was exceptional.

Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*

The two seen flying west on 10th December were the only record.

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

A common breeding species encountered in most woodland areas. Up to 25 have been counted at the Woodland Hide in winter.

Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*

The two noted in the north east corner of the reserve on 17th January were the only record.

Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*

Only 1 to 2 pair's bred and small numbers noted occasionally on the reserve.

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

Apart from occasional small groups is generally a scarce species with a group of 10 noted on 12th January and 12 on 19th December.

Siskin *Carduelis spinus*

The early part of the year saw 20+ feeding near the Lagoon pond on 8th January and an impressive flock of 80+ overhead on 14th February. A flock of 12 noted on 24th September was the best for autumn.

Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*

Once a common and regular breeding bird now confined to between 1 and 3 pairs most years.

Lesser Redpoll *Carduelis flammea*

Although noted in most months of the year, only 1 pair bred in 2009. More impressive is the local movement with 60 noted on 29th January and again on 14th February and a flock of 50+ moving along the edge of Jay wood on 8th March. A flock of 20 on 1st April and 15 on the 21st April were the last noted

Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*

A bird of this description was seen on 8th August.

Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

The reserve supports a good population of this species and as a consequence seen in all parts of the reserve including the mossland. Also in recent years up to 4 birds can be seen daily at the Woodland hide feeders in winter with 2 birds wearing rings noted on 6th December.

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*

After many years absence is becoming a frequent visitor and breeding species. A single pair bred on the mossland although others were noted on several occasions. Unusually, a group of 10 came into roost in the rhododendrons next to the OT on 12th December.

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Up to 7 are often seen at the Woodland feeders in winter and continue to breed successfully on the mossland where 24 territories were noted.

Corn Bunting *Miliaria calandra*

Birds are occasionally seen around the boundaries of the reserve such as 4 noted on 6th December, otherwise an uncommon species.

Contributors:

D.Beetham; B. Riley; R.Smith