

Notes on birds in the Severn and Avon Vales (the “Severn Hams”), Gloucestershire and south Worcestershire January – March 2017

General introduction

The main sites are (from the north):

- Along the Severn in Worcestershire, a series of well-watched gravel workings attract many water birds, notably waders; these are (from the north): Holt and Grimley (on the west bank just north of Worcester), Clifton (on the east bank just south of Kempsey); Ryall (on the east bank opposite Upton Ham), nowadays very overgrown; Ripple Lake (east bank) with two deep lakes, one just south of the M50 and the new pit north of the motorway where excavation was completed in summer 2016, on the opposite bank from Longdon Marsh. (Upton Warren Nature reserve, north of Droitwich, is outside the area covered by the present report, but is occasionally mentioned as it attracts many significant birds).
- Powick Ham, just south of Worcester, the flood meadows where the Teme flows into the Severn.
- Upton Ham (Worcs), where the Upper Ham, a hay meadow east of the town, is an SSSI and is the best conserved of the riverside hams in botanical terms; south of the old railway embankment is the Lower Ham.
- Longdon Marsh (Worcs), a nearly closed basin on the west bank of the Severn, north of the M50; the Longdon or Bushley Brook flows through it into the Severn; Worcestershire Wildlife Trust has a major reserve at Hill Court Farm, south of Marsh Lane, while north of the lane the land is subject to extensive flooding when the Severn is high; a little further downriver, upstream of Tewkesbury on the east bank and just in Gloucestershire, is The Mythe and Mythe Hook.
- The Avon Meadows (on either side of the Avon, going north from Tewkesbury) including: the restored gravel pits at Bredon’s Hardwick (Worcs), nowadays more overgrown and subject to greater disturbance, hence less favourable for birds; Upham Meadow (sometimes called the “Great Hay Meadow”) and Summer Leasow at Twynning (Glos) which form an SSSI on ornithological grounds; Rectory Farm Meadows (Worcs), across the Avon from Upham Meadow and an SSSI on botanical grounds; and Strensham Pits (Worcs), sludge pools below the waterworks. Along the Avon on either side of Eckington Bridge are more hay meadows, notably Asham Meadows (a Lammas Meadow). Upstream of Nafford, a series of new riverside wetlands have been created in the last few years along the Worcestershire Avon by excavation of scrapes and shallow lakes: the Gwen Finch Worcestershire Wildlife Trust Reserve; the new John Bennett Reserve; the Avon Meadows Community wetland and Local Nature Reserve, established in 2008, covering 24 hectares near Pershore Town Centre (where censuses are carried out at least once a week); and land at Lower Moor owned by the Vale Heritage Landscape Trust. North of Lower Moor, between Pershore and Fladbury, is the Throckmorton Landfill Site, which still attracts large numbers of feeding gulls, (as Gloucester LS used to do) and where the lagoons also attract water birds. Just to the east of Bredon is Kemerton Lake (Worcs), a restored gravel pit managed as a nature reserve by the Kemerton Conservation Trust, in the valley of the Carrant Brook, which flows through Cowfield Marsh into the Avon just above Tewkesbury.
- The “Severn Hams” proper, between Tewkesbury and Gloucester, in which the main wetland areas are: Ashleworth and Hasfield Hams; Coombe Hill Canal and Meadows (Coombe Hill Canal is a long disused and overgrown canal running from Coombe Hill to Wainlodes); and Cobney and Leigh Meadows along the River Chelt and Leigh Brook above Wainlodes. Barrow Ponds were created by the artificial damming of a small tributary of the Chelt, east of the A38. Ashleworth Ham and Coombe Hill are Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust reserves, and are particularly well-watched. This area also includes: the Severn Ham at Tewkesbury; the recently established Tewkesbury Nature Reserve along the River Swilgate east of Priors Park; the Severn between Lower Lode and Haw Bridge; and the Severn from Haw Bridge, past Wainlodes, Ashleworth Quay and Sandhurst, to Gloucester. At Sandhurst, Maisemore and at Walham Pools near Gloucester there are a number of abandoned overgrown riverside brick-pits, artificial excavations in the floodplain.
- The River Leadon flows into the Severn just above Gloucester, and its valley extends north eastwards past Highleadon and Upleadon. The four most important sites along the Leadon Valley are: the meadows northeast of Highnam; Dark Barn; Tibberton Meadows (former Lammas

meadows along a tributary); and the ponds at the Orchard Centre at Blackwells End near Collier's Brook, a tributary of the Leadon, which have great potential.

- Maise more Ham is now largely converted to arable farming.
- Sites on the edge of urban Gloucester, once Severn flood meadows: Port Ham, Castlemeads and Over Ponds on Alney Island, Sudmeadow, and the Gloucester Landfill Site (GLS). Port Ham has recently been restored and some shallow scrapes dug; at the southern end of Port Ham is Lower Parting where the two arms of the Severn meet again; Sudmeadow is immediately south of Lower Parting; GLS used to attract large numbers of gulls, but numbers have decreased dramatically since a falconer was employed to disturb them; it has a pond attractive to passage and some resident waterbirds. A little further south, near the Gloucester-Sharpness Canal, are Netheridge Farm and the small Quedgeley Local Nature Reserve. Near the northern bypass, at the foot of Churchdown Hill, is the Horsebere Brook Flood Alleviation Area, established to prevent flooding in the Longlevens suburb of Gloucester, as happened in summer 2007; the area was set up in about 2010, since when the brook has overtopped only once in early 2014.
- Minsterworth Ham, on the west bank of the Severn below Gloucester.
- Walmore Common, on the west bank of the Severn below Gloucester; also the little marsh at Rodley (Wilmer Common), west of Walmore, along the stream west of Boxbush Farm.
- Elmore Back, on the east bank of the Severn below Gloucester, opposite Walmore.

Most of these sites are marshes which flood when the level of the Severn is high (either because of water coming down from North Wales, or because of high tides downstream; or more often a combination of both), thus preventing local streams from reaching the Severn, so that they back flood. When there is a major Severn flood, with water coming over the flood-banks along the river (a "river flood"), there may be extensive floods over the whole floodplain area. The major Severn tributary, the Avon, has only very low flood-banks in some places and so floods easily above Tewkesbury. The River Chelt holds running water throughout the year and, when levels are low, has muddy edges and mud banks.

Weather

At the start of January, a northerly incursion introduced mostly dry, settled and fairly cold conditions with some overnight frost over the UK as a whole. The weather turned mild and unsettled from 6 January, but there was a cold snap between the 11 and 14 January with snow for most places, although lying snow tended to be short-lived on low ground. There was a prolonged settled spell with high pressure in charge during the second half of the month, which brought mild temperatures to the north and west of Scotland, but cold frosty weather to the south-east. It turned mild, cloudy and changeable towards the end of the month. In the Severn Vale, the first few days of the new year were dominated by high pressure, with overnight frost (-2 or -3°C on first three nights), winds very light and variable, mainly from north or northwest, some rain on 1 January; milder with no frost on 4 January, but sharp frost again on the morning of 5 January (-5°C in Gloucester), and night of 5/6 January (-4°C in Gloucester). This high pressure retreated eastwards on 6 January, giving way to southwesterly winds with milder conditions and drizzle from 6 - 10 January (4mm in Gloucester on 6 January); the weather was a bit colder on 10/11 January, as winds went westerly with a touch of northwest; distinctly north-westerly and cold, with rain (6mm), on 12 January, light frost and snowfalls down to lowest levels on the night of 12/13 January; light frost on night of 13/14 January, milder with drizzle on 15, 16 January. From late on 16 January to 18 January, the Severn Vale was at the edge of a European high-pressure system edging westwards, and blocking the path of weather systems from the Atlantic; so overcast, low cloud, winds gone southerly, mild; the high pressure took over from 19-27 January, bringing faint southerly or south-easterly winds off a cold continent, with morning frosts, sometimes sharp (down to -4°C), bright and clear once the early morning mist cleared, little or no rain. This blocking high pressure retreated to the east, allowing Atlantic fronts to arrive from 27 January onwards: no frost, some drizzle each day from 27-31 January. Total rainfall in Gloucester in January was only 36mm.

Late January weather continued into the first few days of February, with drizzle (but only three or four mm per day in Gloucester), and winds generally southerly, bringing light winds and occasional frosts from 3 February; a European high-pressure zone hovered over the area and took over from 8 to 13 February with cold northeast winds (and a sprinkling of snow on 11 February). Milder from 14 February, with light southwesterly winds and some light drizzle; mildest day of the winter on 20 February, temperature reaching 18°C in London, 14°C in Gloucester; 12°C on 21 February. Named storm "Doris" on 23 February was at its most severe in Scotland and northern England, but

nevertheless proved unusually disruptive inland, producing strong gusts in the Severn and Avon Vales (maximum 46 mph in Gloucester); bright and fine on 24 February, strong cold southwesterly wind again from 25-28 February, with a few mms of rain each day in the last week of the month, but February 2017 was not only a mild but also a dry month with a rainfall total of only 31 mm.

Atlantic weather again in early March, with southwesterly winds, very strong on 2 March; wind sometimes going south or south-easterly from 3-7 March as depressions moved through, wet (6mm in Gloucester on 3 March); ridge of high pressure on 8-9 March with temperature of 16°C in Gloucester; fronts from south and southwest alternating with ridges of high pressure from 10-16 March, remaining mild, temperatures up to 16°C some days, little or no rain. Winds south-westerly from 17-22 March, with fair amounts of rain. Winds easterly from 23-28 March, bright and fine with no rain, warmest day of the year so far in UK on 25 March (19°C, 15°C in Gloucester), but giving way to Atlantic fronts with south-westerly winds bringing some rain from 28-31 March. Total March rainfall in Gloucester was 41 mm, bringing the total for the first three months of the year to only 108mm.

Water levels and flooding: general

No major flood events during the period (the Severn never overtopped its banks); there was light flooding in some floodplain sites as local streams backed up in the first week of February and again from the last days of February into the first week of March.

At the beginning of January, water levels were low everywhere after a very dry autumn, with only one light flood in late November. These conditions continued until the last few days of January and early February when, with some local rain and heavy rain upstream, the Severn rose, causing water levels in riverside wetlands to rise, as streams which could not discharge into the Severn and Avon backed up; there were sharp rises in the Severn level on 1 and 2 February, river levels dropping back gradually from 3 February onwards (despite spring tides from 10-13 February); light flooding remained on the meadows until 10 February, but had receded entirely by 18 February, leaving water only in the usual pools and scrapes. Water levels rose again during the high tide cycle following the new moon on 26 February, as smaller streams backed up; rain in late February and early March kept Severn and Avon levels high, peaking at Haw Bridge on 4/5 March, then dropping until 11 March (but only slowly, so that many meadows remained under water); a new spring tide cycle from 11 March did not affect water levels in the meadows, whereas rain from 17-22 March caused local streams to back up again, causing some light local flooding.

Conditions at the main sites

Sites along the Severn

Longdon Marsh: No flooding in January this year, water on Worcs WT reserve scrape limited; but there was briefly light flooding north of Marsh Lane in the first ten days of February.

Severn Ham, Tewkesbury: No flooding, but some surface water, caused by a ruptured underground pipe, in February and March. The Environment Agency began undertaking repairs to the Mill Avon sluice from February, with potential for disturbance of nesting birds.

Ashleworth/Hasfield Hams: Water levels were very low throughout January on the GWT reserve; no flooding on Hasfield side either; surface water frozen on some mornings. Water levels had risen considerably on 1 February, leading to more extensive water on the GWT reserve and on the Hasfield side, until at least 10 February, but this had cleared by 15 February. Levels rose again from 26 February onwards with high tides; water levels higher on the GWT reserve and on Hasfield Ham from 28 February, still only just beginning to drop from 10 March, much lower by 21 March, but rising again by 24 March, following local rainfall, then ditch levels dropping till the end of the month, though water on the reserve remained extensive but shallow.

Coombe Hill: Water levels were very low through January, with scrapes and flashes full, but no flooding; most water iced over on some days in early January, again on 14 January and on several days in the third week of the month. There was a very slight rise in water levels on 1 February, light shallow flooding (the first of winter, apart from a very short episode in late November) from 2 February, beginning to drop by 10 February; the flooding had gone by 18 February, but waters continued to drop

in ditches and scrapes till 21 February, then rising again in late February and early March; levels waning by 13 March, but higher again on 23 March.

Leigh and Cobney Meadows: No flooding in early January, some ice on 14 January; light flooding in early February, gone by 10 February; a little extra surface water in early March, almost gone by 10 March.

Walmore Common: Water levels were low in January, just a little surface water round the pond on the Common. Some flooding in the first few days of February (first flood of winter). Floodwater almost gone by 12 February, dropped entirely by 27 February.

Sites along the Avon

Upham Meadow, Twyning: Little or no flooding in January, just a little surface water, mainly held back because the M5 acted as a dam, on 1 February, this had disappeared by 6 February; only a little surface water in late February and early March, much of it coming from a broken water main rather than flooding.

Overview of bird records

Numbers of geese, ducks and waders were low at most sites other than Ripple early in the year, with no flooding. Icy conditions in the first few days of the year did not seem to cause birds to depart to the estuary but, with no flooding, numbers dwindled in the following weeks. Ripple Lake, where there was permanent water, attracted as a reservoir, holding the largest number of Wigeon, and some other ducks, in this period. There was a light flood in the first few days of February, which attracted increased numbers of ducks to Ashleworth, Coombe Hill and Longdon; the Wigeon no doubt came from Ripple, but not the Teal or Pintail: Pintail reached the 200 mark, though remaining well short of last winter's peak of 1500; Teal showed a brief peak of over 3000 at Longdon; both these species seem more likely to have come from the estuary; the flooding also attracted a Lesser Yellowlegs first to Longdon Marsh then to Coombe Hill; but the flood was short-lived and had disappeared by 18 February, leaving birds to return to their usual haunts and numbers to decrease.

One or two Great White Egrets wintered.

The first Oystercatchers and Curlews returned from the coast to the meadows in February. Distinct signs of wader passage in February (Lapwings, Golden Plover and Ruff), and passerine passage too (Skylarks, Meadow Pipits and Pied, but not White, Wagtails). In late February a male Green-winged Teal appeared at Ashleworth and a first winter female American Wigeon at Grimley. Passage ducks in late March included the usual few Garganey records, and a Common Scoter at Grimley. The usual passage of Icelandic Black-tailed Godwits was noted in the second half of March in Gloucestershire, with flocks of almost 100 birds.

From early March much attention was devoted to a rerun of last year's survey of breeding Curlews in the Severn and Avon Vales in both counties; in many sites pairs were already back on the breeding ground and holding territories in March.

The present report has much better coverage of south Worcestershire than previous reports, largely thanks to Rob Prudden and Andy Warr who have passed on a large number of records and comments. These records demonstrate the growing importance of Ripple Lake, as a site with permanent water when other sites are dry.

Swans

Mute Swan: A small wintering flock of up to 30 birds proved mobile (perhaps moving down from Worcester, where they are regularly fed). In some places pairs began to occupy territories in March.

Worcestershire: At Lower Ham, Upton, 22 (some pairs, some immatures) on 4 March. At Ripple four on 14 February, five on 12 March. At Longdon Marsh Worcs WT reserve 31 on 10 March, 35 on 17 March. Along the Avon; at Bredon's Hardwick pits two on 14 February, eight on 20 February, 12 on 11 March; two pairs between Twyning and Tewkesbury on 17 February.

At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, ten flew south on 4 February; a pair on the Mill Avon, still with four immatures on 20 February, five on 27 February; six flew south on 6 March, seven on 9 March. At Ashleworth numbers varied from one to seven over the period: still some family parties with last year's cygnets early in the year, up to two pairs of adults in March. At Coombe Hill one to four throughout the period, up to two pairs in February and March. At Leigh Meadows one on 10 March. At Barrow Ponds a pair on 21 January. At Horsbere a pair with two immatures on 4 and 5 January, only one on 18 January, just an immature on 21 January; a pair of adults on 29 March had chased off last year's young. At Walmore two adults throughout the period. At Upham Meadow two pairs (one with five immatures) on 21 January and 25 February; three adults on 6 February, an unringed adult pair on 20 and 25 February. Along the Avon between Twynning and Tewkesbury four pairs on 2 March.

Whooper Swan: Worcestershire: at Upton Warren two on 13 January.

At Upper Dumball, Rodley (on the Severn bank opposite Longney Crib) the six reported on 4 January were later considered to have been Bewick's Swans. At Walmore two with Bewick's on many dates from 4 February to 2 March; they appeared to have spent the night there on the night of 12/13 February. At Slimbridge three were on the Rushy Pen early on 9 January, one on 10 January.

Bewick's Swan: None had been recorded anywhere on the Severn Hams in the last months of 2016, and few were noted in 2017. At Walmore none at all recorded in January; but five (one cygnet) with rising water levels on 4 and 5 February; seven (one cygnet) on many dates from 8 to 21 February no doubt included the two birds from Wilmer; one of these was ringed, and proved to be "Widemouth", which had first been seen at Slimbridge this winter on 5 January and had often visited Walmore in previous winters; it was thought they had roosted at Walmore on the morning of 13 February, but they had been seen flying out early from Slimbridge, so were probably commuting between Slimbridge and Walmore; only five (four adults and a cygnet, none of them ringed) were present on 22 February, when Widemouth and mate were at Slimbridge; five on 23 and 25 February, none on 27 February. At Wilmer Common two on floodwater on 4 February. Nearby on the Severn bank at Upper Dumball, Rodley, eight (one cygnet) feeding on short grass outside the river flood-bank with Canada Geese and Wigeon on 7 January, not there on 10 January. At Slimbridge too, numbers were low compared with past seasons: 130 together on 5 January, 155 (26 cygnets) on 15 January; 156 (26 cygnets) on 5 February, then 163 on 20 February (with 29 cygnets) was the highest count at one time of winter 2016/17. The continuing decrease at Slimbridge is undoubtedly the reason for lower numbers in the Severn and Avon Vales

Geese

Greylag Goose: Worcestershire: At Ripple, recorded throughout the period only in single figures. Along the Avon between Twynning and Tewkesbury just one on 17 February, but larger numbers at Bredon's Hardwick pits: 287 on 14 February, 190 on 20 February, 91 on 12 March.

At Ashleworth wintering birds were still recorded in January, but numbers fell through February as birds moved away to breeding grounds: 70 on 10 January; a flock of 61 flew in on 24 January, report of possible large numbers roosting, so they hadn't all left for breeding grounds; 211 on 28 January; smaller numbers in early February, but still 73 on 18 February, 40 on 20 February; not more than four in March, some apparently paired. At Coombe Hill very few records in January and February, always of small numbers; ten, largely in pairs, on 7 March; seven on 23 March. At Barrow Ponds eight on 21 January. At Upham Meadow three on 21 January, just one with Canada Geese in late February and early March. Along the Avon between Twynning and Tewkesbury one with Canada Geese on 2 March.

White-fronted Goose: Worcestershire: At Ripple five flew over to the south on 7 January; a flock of 23 on 1 February was very mobile, moving later in the day to Bredon's Hardwick pits, then departing to the south; one of them remained at Bredon's Hardwick until 28 March.

Canada Goose: As in previous winters, several sightings of birds marked during the moult period in late summer at Windermere with red leg rings, which come to winter in the Severn and Avon Vales.

Worcestershire: At Lower Ham, Upton, 48 on 4 March. At Ripple only two, one with injured wing, on 17 January; 42 on 14 February, 21 on 12 March. At Longdon Marsh (Worcs WT reserve) 32 on 17

January. Along the Avon: at Bredon's Hardwick pits 145 on 14 February, 30 on 20 February, 47 on 12 March; between Twyning and Tewkesbury 130 on 17 February, 80 on 25 February.

At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, two in flight on 27 February. Near Chaceley 23 on Severn bank on 24 March. From Haw Bridge to Chaceley eight on 1 March. At Ashleworth occasional records of over 50 in January: 56 on 10 January, 53 on 17 January, but 175 with raised water levels on 4 February; 270 on 6 February, 150 on 10 February, 101 on 11 February, one with unread red ring on 14 February, then only 15 or less until the end of March. At Coombe Hill less than ten throughout the period, largely in pairs in March. At Cobney Meadows 20 (one with big white patches in wings) on 10 February, 11 on 10 March. At Barrow Ponds ten on 21 January. At Walmore Common two on 11 and 17 March. At Upham Meadow 435, one with a ring from Windermere, on 21 January; at least 300 still on 1 February, 170 (including the colour-ringed bird) on 6 February, still 50 on 17 February, 35 on 20 February, 75 on 25 February, 50 on 6 March. Along the Avon between Twyning and Tewkesbury 230 on 2 March, including two new colour-ringed birds from Windermere.

Feral and Hybrid Geese: At Lower Ham, Upton, the Barnacle x Greylag cross seen at Ripple in December 2015 was present on 4 March. At Bredon's Hardwick pits a Canada x Greylag cross on 20 February.

At Ashleworth a strange hybrid that had elements of both Greylag and Canada, but was surprisingly small.

Egyptian Goose: At Walmore one on 4 February. Along the Avon a pair above Tewkesbury boat club on 5 January.

Ducks

Shelduck: As usual, numbers began to build up in the New Year, and there were pairs apparently preparing to nest by March.

Worcestershire: At Ripple a male on 2 and 7 March. At Longdon Marsh (Worcs WT reserve) three on 7 February, one on 10 March, two on 11 March.

Over the Severn Ham at Tewkesbury one in flight on 2 March, pair on 24 March. At Ashleworth up to three on many dates from 1 February and through March, with four or five on several dates in late March. At Coombe Hill present from the beginning of January with three pairs on 14 January, nine birds on 21 February, eight (seven males) on 6 March and ten (at least two pairs) on 23 March. At Cobney Meadows eight on 10 March, six on 13 March. At Leigh Meadows six on 10 March. At Minsterworth Ham two on 22 March. At Walmore two on 16 January were the first of the winter; two on 17 March.

Mandarin: Worcestershire: At Longdon Marsh Worcs WT reserve a pair on 20 March.

Surface-feeding ducks:

Wigeon: Ripple Lake continued to be the main resort of this species, which moved off to other sites when flood conditions elsewhere were right.

Worcestershire: At Grimley 40 on 27 February; numbers decreased sharply on 16 March, but 53 on 18 March, 41 on 23 March. At Clifton Pits 20 on 23 March. At Ripple at least 2000 on 7 January; numbers lower in February, when birds no doubt spread to other flooded areas in south Worcestershire and north Gloucestershire: 1135 on 14 February, at least 800 on 18 February, 540 on 24 February, 700 on 2 March, 900 on 4 March, 600 on 7 March, 893 on 12 March, 253 on 17 March, 400 on 29 March. At Upton Ham 97 on 4 March. At Longdon Marsh (Worcs WT reserve) 756 on 17 January, 280 on 6 February, 120 on 7 February, rising to 950 on 8 February and at least 800 on 14 February, then down to 200 on 10 March. At Bredon's Hardwick Pits numbers remained small, as in recent years: 25 on 14 February, at least ten on 17 February, 40 on 4 March, 45 on 12 March.

At Ashleworth 140 on 3 January, grazing round edge of scrapes, then up to 200 for the rest of the month; much larger numbers with light flooding in early February: 1300 on 10 February, 1200 on 11

February, decreasing, as water levels receded, to 800 on 14 February, 460 on 18 February, 145 on 25 February; usual departures in March: 200 on 1 March, 120 on 18 March, 100 on 21 March, 35 on 28 March, 80 on 29 March. At Coombe Hill January maximum of 220 on 10 January; increase to 1040 on 4 February and to 2400 (including the leucistic bird, presumably the same individual seen in previous winters) on 7 February, 2255 (including the leucistic bird) on 10 February; only 250 on 18 February, 300 on 23 February; 100 on 1 March; 400 (the leucistic bird still there) on 7 March, down to 116 on 23 March. At Cobney Meadows 40 on 10 February, 57 on 10 March. At Barrow Ponds 55 on 21 January. At Horsbere six on 1 January, five on 21 January, three on 28 February. At Walmore six on 22 February, 30 on 27 February, five on 11 March. At Mitton near Tewkesbury 600 on a wet meadow by the Avon on 20 February and 2 March, probably birds from Ripple.

American Wigeon: Worcestershire: At Grimley a first winter female with Eurasian Wigeon from 27 February to 14 March (Wagon Wheel Pits); not found on 16 March when numbers of Eurasian Wigeon had decreased sharply, but relocated nearby at Holt from 18 to 30 March, and sometimes again at Grimley (24 March).

Gadwall: Worcestershire: At Ripple present throughout the period, numbers up to eleven (on 12 March). At Longdon Marsh (Worcs WT reserve) six on 7 February, three on 14 February. At Bredon's Hardwick seven on 14 February.

At Ashleworth surprisingly high numbers in February: 13 on 10 February, 26 on 14 February, then 44 on 18 February, decreasing to six on 25 February (one pair mating); up to 14 throughout March. At Coombe Hill six on 10 February, four on 18 February, five on 21 February and 23 March. At Cobney Meadows four on 10 March. At Mitton two on the wet meadow by the Avon on 20 February.

Teal: Very sharp increases at Longdon Marsh (to over 3000) and in the Ashleworth/Coombe Hill area (to over 1000) during the brief period of light flooding in early February. Interesting to speculate on where these birds might have come from – not Ripple, where this species only occurs in small numbers; perhaps, like Pintail, from the estuary?

Worcestershire: At Clifton Pits 25 on 23 March. At Upton Ham 30 on 4 March. At Ripple at least 200 on 7 January, 154 on 14 February, 154 on 12 March, 20 on 17 March. At Longdon Marsh (Worcs WT reserve) 225 on 17 January, 247 on 19 January; then a massive increase, in light flooding, to 2800 on 6 February, 3400 on 8 February, at least 2500 on 14 February; only 150 left on 10 March.

At Ashleworth 820 on 3 January, good count of birds on the edge of the ice; several more counts of this order of magnitude later in January (at least 320 on 10 January, 550+ on 22 January, 820 on 21 January, 700 on 24 and 28 January); counts of 800 on 4 February, 470 on 10 February, 300 on 20 February, 350 on 21 February, 120 on 28 February; numbers dwindling in March from 300 on 1 March, to 220 on 18 March and 75 on 29 March. At Coombe Hill 270 on 3 January on the edge of the ice, only 62 on 14 January, 175 on 28 January; increase to at least 1000 on 4 February, 1056 on 7 February, 450 on 10 February, only 200 on 18 February, 150 on 23 February; 300 on 7 March, 400 on 13 March, 40 on 23 March. At Leigh Meadows six on 14 January, an unusually high count of 110 on the wildfowlers' scrape on 18 February, three on 10 March. At Cobney Meadows 250 in light flooding on 10 February, 120 on 10 March. At Barrow Ponds 35 on 21 January. At Horsbere nine on 1 January, eleven on 28 February, two males on 29 March. At Walmore 55 on 20 January, 150 on 22 February, 160 on 11 March, 28 on 17 March. At Upham Meadow one on the Avon on 17 February. At Mitton 250 on the wet meadow by the Avon on 20 February, 400 on 2 March – again, probably birds from Ripple?

Green-winged Teal: At Ashleworth a male found on 19 February among Eurasian Teal was seen regularly from 20 February to 27 March.

Mallard: Worcestershire: At Ripple up to 20 throughout the period. At Longdon Marsh (Worcs WT reserve) ten on 17 January, 30 on 7 February. At Bredon's Hardwick pits seven on 14 February, 21 on 12 March.

At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, a pair on 30 March. From Haw Bridge to Chaceley eight on 1 March. At Ashleworth present throughout January with a maximum of 48 on 21 January; February maximum was 50 on 11 and 14 February; maximum in March was 40 on 10 March. At Coombe Hill up to 21

throughout January, up to 40 in February and March (several pairs prospecting for nesting sites on 21 February). At Leigh Meadows four on 14 January and 10 March. At Cobney Meadows 30 on 10 February, 20 on 10 March. At Barrow Ponds 30 on 21 January. At Horsbere Brook up to a dozen in January including 12 with ten males on 18 January; eight on 29 March. At Walmore four on 22 February, eight on 11 March, ten on 17 March. At Upham Meadow 20 in January and February, ten on 25 February. Along the Avon below Twyning 20 on 25 February. At Mitton ten on a wet meadow on 20 February.

Pintail: An influx at Longdon, Ashleworth and Coombe Hill, perhaps from the estuary, during light flooding in early February, but otherwise numbers rarely exceeded 20.

Worcestershire: At Holt, two on 18 January. At Grimley one on 17 March. At Upton Ham two on 4 March. At Ripple present only in single figures in January and March, maximum eight on 12 March. In the northern sector of Longdon Marsh, numbers increased while floodwater lasted, with 170 on 5 February and 200 on 8 February, but they disappeared as soon as the floods receded; on Worcs WT Longdon reserve 20 on 6 February, 18 on 7 February, 46 on 8 February, 75 on 14 February; but only two on 10 and 11 March, a female on 15 March. At Bredon's Hardwick three on 14 February.

At Ashleworth too numbers only increased at times of light flooding in early February: generally present in single figures in January (though 18 on 21 January); just one on 4 February, but 210 on 10 February (highest count of the winter), 52 on 11 February, 67 on 14 February, 41 on 17 February, 63 on 18 February, 38 on 21 February, 22 on 28 February; present throughout March with maximum of 20 on 10 and 18 March. At Coombe Hill smaller numbers but also an early February peak: 21 (12 males, nine females) on 10 January; 48 on 4 February, 67 on 10 February, only five on 18 February; two on 7 March. At Cobney Meadows four on 10 March. At Walmore 100 on 4 February.

Garganey: As usual a few records in late March of migrants passing through from their African wintering grounds: In Worcestershire: at Grimley three (two drakes) on 11 March, a drake on 17 March. In Gloucestershire: at Ashleworth a drake from 17 to 25 March.

Shoveler: Worcestershire: At Upton Ham three on 4 March. At Ripple present in single figures throughout the period, maximum of nine on 18 February. At Longdon Marsh (Worcs WT reserve) 15 on 17 January, 42 on 6 February, 56 on 8 February, 15 on 14 February; then 38 on 9 March and 42 on 10 March.

At Ashleworth present throughout January, with a maximum of 26 on 21 January; present through all of February with counts of 46 on 18 February and 42 on 21 February; numbers almost as high during March with counts of 35 on 10 March and 24 on 28 March. At Coombe Hill present throughout the period with maxima of 31 on 3 January, 30 on 21 February, and 24 on 7 March, but an exceptionally large count of over 200 on shallow flooding on 10 March. At Cobney Meadows one on 10 February. At Barrow Ponds one on 21 January. Along the Avon at Mitton 20 on 20 February, eight on 2 March.

Hybrid ducks: Worcestershire: At Ripple a hybrid drake Teal x Wigeon on 7 January and 14 February.

Diving ducks:

Pochard: The principal concentration again at Ripple.

Worcestershire: At Ripple 65 on 17 January, 20 on 14 February, 20 on 4 March, 23 on 12 March. At Bredon's Hardwick one on 14 February.

Only one record from Gloucestershire of three males on 7 February, a time of deeper flood, at Ashleworth.

Tufted Duck: For this species too, the main "reservoir" was Ripple.

Worcestershire: At Ripple 40 on 17 January, 28 on 18 February, 50 on 4 March, 124 on 12 March. At Longdon Marsh (Worcs WT reserve) one on 7 February. At Bredon's Hardwick 36 on 14 February, 23 on 18 March.

At Lower Lode brick-pits two on 24 March. At Ashleworth the species appeared in small numbers on deeper floodwater in February: three on 4 February, five on 10 and 14 February, three on 18 February; in single figures through March. At Coombe Hill up to eight in February, up to five in March. At Barrow Ponds seven on 21 January.

Hybrid Pochard x Tufted Duck: Worcestershire: a female from 2 to 23 March.

Scaup: Worcestershire: at Grimley (all at Wagon Wheel Pit) two first winter birds from 2 to 14 January, rising to three from 16 to 27 January, then two throughout February and in early March; two to three again until the end of March.

Goldeneye: Worcestershire: at Grimley (Camp Lane Pits); at least three in early January with two drakes on 5 January; then (all females): two from 14 January to 8 February, three between 10 and 14 February, two till the end of February, three on 6 and 8 March, one on 11 March. At Ripple recorded throughout the period, until 26 March, sometimes a pair, never more than two birds. At Bredon's Hardwick a female on 14 February.

No records at all from Gloucestershire this year. It seems likely that birds recorded in Gloucestershire move south from Midland sites in colder conditions.

Common Scoter: At Grimley a female on 22 and 23 March, no doubt a passing migrant.

Divers and Grebes

Little Grebe: Worcestershire: at Ripple two on 7 January, one on 17 January, three on 14 February.

At Ashleworth one on 20 and 28 February, and one on the Hasfield side on 7 March. At Coombe Hill one whinnying on 13 March. At Horsbere one on 28 February.

Great Crested Grebe: Worcestershire: at Ripple five on 17 January, ten on 14 February, seven on 12 March. At Bredon's Hardwick one on 14 February, 12 March.

At Ashleworth one on 10 March (first for long time, shows the water was deep), one on 28 and 29 March.

Cormorants

Cormorant: Worcestershire: At Ripple three on 17 January, one on 14 February, 22 on 12 March. At Bredon's Hardwick pits eight on 14 and 20 February, one on 12 March.

At Lower Lode brickpits, 40 loafing in trees on 22 January, 17 on 24 March. Ones and twos seen regularly throughout the period at Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, no doubt birds from Lower Lode, sometimes fishing on the Severn or Mill Avon. At Coombe Hill one diving on Long Pool on 10 January, one diving on scrapes on 21 February. Along the Avon between Twynning and Tewkesbury one fishing on 2 March.

Herons and Egrets

Bittern: No records this year.

Little Egret: Worcestershire: At Ripple singles in February and March, increasing to four in late March.

At Ashleworth singles throughout the period. At Coombe Hill singles until 21 February. At Barrow Ponds two on 21 January. At Leigh Meadows (along the Chelt below Barrow) up to four from 30 January to 29 March. At Horsbere Brook present throughout with a maximum of four. On Daniel's Brook Relief Drain, Quedgeley near Gloucester, two on 1 January.

Great White Egret: One or two birds throughout the period in both counties at a variety of sites in a fairly restricted area along the Severn and Avon; probably the same birds on each occasion.

In Worcestershire: At Ripple Pits one or two from 7 January to 30 March. Along the Avon: at Nafford one on 2 February; in the Bredon's Hardwick area one, occasionally two, from 1 January to 25 February (when one flew off in the direction of Ripple).

Gloucestershire: At Ashleworth one on 15 and 19 March. At Coombe Hill one on 19 February. Along the Avon above Tewkesbury (and across the Avon from Bredon's Hardwick) one or two on many dates from 13 January to 15 February. Along the Swilgate near Tewkesbury one on 7 March.

Grey Heron: Worcestershire: At Upton Ham one on 4 March. At Ripple two on 14 February, one on 12 March. Along the Avon between Twynning and Tewkesbury one on 17 February. At Bredon's Hardwick pits one on 20 February.

At Ashleworth one to two throughout the period. At Coombe Hill one or two throughout the period but five on 21 February. At Leigh Meadows one on 18 February. At Horsbere one with fish on 5 January, one on 18 January, two on 21 January, one on 28 February. At Walmore Common one on 11 March. At Upham Meadow one on 6 February, two on 17 February, one on 25 February.

At heronries: at Barrow Ponds one on nesting trees on 21 January; at Staverton Court, none on 21 January.

Raptors

Red Kite: Worcestershire: At Ripple one on 18 February.

At Ashleworth one on 19 February. At Twynning one on 5 March.

Marsh Harrier: Worcestershire: At Grimley an adult female on 25 March.

At Ashleworth one on 24 January; a female on 27 February.

Sparrowhawk: At Ashleworth a male on 6 February. At Coombe Hill one on 29 January. At Horsbere a male on 28 February. At Port Ham one on 5 February.

Buzzard: At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, one on 14 March. At Ashleworth present throughout, maximum four on 20 January. At Coombe Hill too, present during the whole period, maximum three on 21 February. At Leigh Meadows one on 14 January and 10 March. At Port Ham three on 4 March. At Upham Meadow one on 1 February, two on 6 February. Along the Avon between Twynning and Tewkesbury two on 17 February. At Mitton one on 20 February.

Osprey: No March records this year.

Kestrel: At Staunton one on 25 February. At Ashleworth one on 20 January. At Horsbere one on 21 January.

Merlin: At Ashleworth one on 11 March. Along the Avon above Tewkesbury one on 26 January.

Peregrine: Worcestershire: At Longdon Marsh (Worcs WT reserve) one on 17 January.

At Ashleworth seen regularly from January to the end of March, often perching on the pylons. At Coombe Hill one hunting on 28 January. At Upham Meadow two on the ground on 1 February, one on 20 February, female disturbing Curlews on 6 March.

Rails and Crakes

Water Rail: Worcestershire: At Ripple two on 14 February.

At Coombe Hill three heard calling in icy conditions on 3 January, one on 10 January, two seen on 29 January; one on 16 February. Along the Avon above Tewkesbury one on 26 January.

Common Crane: Only a single record this spring, fewer than in some previous years: At Ashleworth one on 15 March (from the Slimbridge/Somerset Levels Crane introduction project).

Moorhen: Worcestershire: At Bredon's Hardwick one on 12 March.

At Ashleworth three on 10 February. At Coombe Hill ten concentrated on one un-iced ditch on 3 January, three on 14 January. At Cobney Meadows four on 10 March. At Leigh Meadows three on 14 January. At Barrow Ponds five on 21 January. At Horsbere five on 5 January, two on 21 January, at least four on 29 March.

Coot: Worcestershire: At Ripple 35 on 17 January, 36 on 14 February, 22 on 12 March. At Longdon Marsh (Worcs WT reserve) four on 7 February. At Bredon's Hardwick pits 38 on 14 February, seven on 12 March.

At Ashleworth present in single figures through January; increase with higher floodwater levels to 25, some looking territorial, on 10 February, up to 52 for the rest of the month and similar numbers until the end of March. Situation at Coombe Hill similar: only single figures in January, then ten on 4 February, 20 on 21 February; 34, with two nests along the canal on 16 March; 20 on 23 March. At Cobney Meadows four on 10 March. At Barrow Ponds five on 21 January. At Horsbere present in single numbers in January, then four pairs on 29 March.

Waders

Oystercatcher: Breeding birds returning to nesting areas from late February, perhaps some passage birds too?

Worcestershire: At Clifton Pits eight on 23 March. At Ripple two on 14 and 18 February, six on 24 February and until 12 March, four on 29 March. Along the Avon between Bredon and Tewkesbury one on 25 February, probably from Bredon's Hardwick pits; at Bredon's Hardwick one on 14 February, two on 12 and 28 March.

At Ashleworth the first one on 7 March, then a pair from 10 to 30 March. At Coombe Hill the first of the year on the scrapes on 21 February, then singles on 22 and 23 February and on 1 March; two on 2 March, three on 6 and 7, four on 9 March, three on 13 March, two from 18 to 29 March. At Cobney Meadows a pair displaying noisily on 10 March. At Upham Meadow two on 25 February, probably birds from Bredon's Hardwick; two, maybe three, pairs on 6 March.

Avocet: Worcestershire: Some migrants, perhaps on their way to breeding colonies at Upton Warren. At Clifton one on 23 March. At Ripple one on 23 March.

Little Ringed Plover: Worcestershire: At Clifton Pits one on 23 March. At Ripple one on 12 March, two on 23 March, three on 28 March, five on 29 March.

At Coombe Hill the first migrants were noted on 18 March (two birds), singles on 25 and 26 March, eight on 27 March, three on 28 March, two on 29 March. At Minsterworth Ham one on 22 March.

Golden Plover: As usual a few records of small parties, no doubt northward migrants, mainly in February. At Ashleworth 14 on 17 February, six on 18 February, 29 with Lapwings on 20 February. At Coombe Hill one among Lapwings on 7 February; 24 on 16 February; a late single on 28 March.

Lapwing: Worcestershire: At Ripple at least 300 on 7 January, three on 14 February, two on 12 March. At Longdon Marsh (on floodwater north of Marsh Lane) 1850 on 6 February and 2200 on 8 February. As floodwater there receded, birds moved to the Worcs WT reserve at Hill Court Farm: 1250 on 7 February, 1320 on 11 February, at least 500 on 14 February. Below Bredon's Hardwick pits one in breeding plumage on 25 February. Along the Avon: between Twyning and Tewkesbury 27 on riverside meadow on 2 March; at Bredon's Hardwick one on 12 March.

In Gloucestershire, flocks of Lapwings were present during January on fields away from Ashleworth and Coombe Hill, mainly on autumn sown cereals or sheep grazed fields, occasionally appearing at wetland sites. At Ashleworth none on 3 January, but at least 200 on 7 January and 440 on 10 January,

346 on 17 January, 20 flew in on 28 January; but on rising water on 1 February a very large noisy flock of 2000 looked like migrants preparing to depart, and good numbers continued throughout February: 500 on 10 February, 1000 on 16 February, 640 on 18 February, 860 (very noisy and excited) on 20 February, 780 on 21 February, dropping to 270 on 24 February and 298 on 25 February; numbers much lower in March: 67 on 1 March, just four, all in winter plumage, on 10 March, 31 on 15 March, 20 on 21 March, just two on 28 March. Just east of Ashleworth between Corse and Staunton some on cereals on 21 January, flock of 400 there on 24 January, only 30 on 4 February, still 125 on 20 February, but none on 25 February.

At Coombe Hill none recorded in January, but 340 on 4 February, 1500 on 7 February, 800 on 10 February, no more than 30 for the rest of February; 23 on 1 March, 35 on 13 March, smaller numbers until the end of the month. Just east of Coombe Hill, between Knightsbridge and Boddington, a flock of 200-300, present from the beginning of year, was still there on 11 and 18 January, 500 on a sheep-grazed field on 21 January, 200 on 24 January; only five on 4 February; these were probably the birds missing from Coombe Hill. At Cobney Meadows 130 on 10 February. At Elmore Back eight on an unimproved field on 29 March. At Walmore none recorded throughout the period. At Mitton 15 on 20 February.

Breeding birds: At Lower Lode five displaying over maize stubble on 24 March. At Ashleworth, some tail-up display on 21 March, just one bird on 30 March. At Coombe Hill ten on 7 March were in breeding plumage, with some aerial display; a pair doing aerial display on 20 March.

Dunlin: None on the very limited flood waters in January and February. The few records in March were probably passing migrants.

Worcestershire: At Ripple one on 4 March, three on 12 March.

At Ashleworth one on 28 March. At Coombe Hill one on 1 and 2 March, four on 13 March, one on 22 and 23 March, two on 29 March.

Ruff: Worcestershire: At Ripple four from 28 to 30 March. At Bredon's Hardwick two on 16 March.

At Coombe Hill an unusually large flock of 18 appeared briefly on the afternoon of 21 February. Another flock of ten on 26 March.

Jack Snipe: At Coombe Hill the only record was of two on 26 January. At Leigh Meadows two on 14 January. At Horsbere singles on 5 and 24 January. Along the Avon above Tewkesbury boat club one on 5 and 20 January.

Snipe: Worcestershire: At Ripple five on 7 January, one on 12 March.

At Forthampton, one in a game crop in maize stubble on 22 January. At Ashleworth, good numbers showing well throughout the cold snap in January in rough vegetation in front of the hide, which in most years would have been under water: 25 in long grass on 3 January, 39 on 8 January, 26 on 10 January, 33 on 20 January, 35 on 21 January, 25 on 24 January, 16 on 28 January. Numbers lower in early February: 13 on 6 February, but only four on 10 February, but about 30 from 15 to 17 February and again on 1 and 20 March. At Coombe Hill, in contrast, numbers were low: none in early January, just one after the thaw on 28 January; numbers only in single figures in February and March. At Leigh Meadows five on 14 January, 12 on 18 February, two at dusk on 13 March. At Horsbere Brook 40+ on 1 January, only three in milder conditions on 4 January, but at least 30 in frosty conditions on 5 January; none at all found in milder conditions on 8 January; do they use this site in frosty conditions? Only one on 18 January, ten in heavy frost on 21 January, 14 on 24 January, but 50 in mild wet conditions on 31 January, 50+ on 8 February, eight on 28 February. At Rea Lane Hempsted two on 7 January. At Walmore none on 22 February, one on 27 February, two on 17 March. At Minsterworth Ham three on 22 March.

Black-tailed Godwit: Odd winter records, no doubt up from estuary. Then (as usual) passage in earnest of migrants en route to Iceland from mid-March.

Worcestershire: At John Bennett NR one flew over on 2 February. At Avon Meadows, Pershore, two on 16 March.

At Coombe Hill a single in winter plumage by floodwater on 4 and 10 February; at Ashleworth one on 15 February, perhaps the Coombe Hill bird. Passage birds at Ashleworth: 32 on 18 March, at least 50 on 19 March, 30 on 20 March, 81 on 21 March, 24 on 22 March, 58 on 24 March, at least 15 on 27 March, 86 on 28 March including a colour-ringed bird (the latter had been ringed as a juvenile on the Axe estuary in 2013 and later recorded in winters 2013/14 and 2014/15 in Brittany, on passage at Slimbridge in April 2015, and in winter 2015/16 on the Axe estuary); 83 on 29 March, only 38 on 30 March. At Coombe Hill the first migrants were 34 on 9 March, 18 on 13 March, two on 16 March, a single on 18 March and 35 on 22 and 23 March. Not clear whether the flocks at Coombe Hill and Ashleworth were separate or whether there was movement between the two sites, only five miles apart.

Curlew: The first birds of the year were seen on 4 February, and for the rest of February and March birds noted probably included a mixture of local breeders and migrants en route for nesting sites to the north-west, as far off as Sweden and Finland.

Worcestershire: At Arley pastures north of Kidderminster a territorial pair on 19 and 31 March. At Upton Ham a pair on 4 March, distant bubbling on 6 March, four birds on 21 March. At Uckinghall Meadows distant bubbling on 4 March and a pair on 6 March. None found at Queenhill Rough, a traditional breeding site, this year. At Ripple one over on 23 March, two on 29 March. Along the Avon between Twyning and Tewkesbury two, probably a pair, at Fleet Lane on 2 March; at Bredon's Hardwick a flock of nine on 17 February, five on 20 February, 15 on 25 February and 21 on 2 March, four on 12 March were no doubt mainly migrants.

At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, the first observation was of a pair with courtship display and three flying over on 27 February; up to five, including two probably pairs during March. From Haw Bridge to Chaceley, normally a breeding area, none on 1 March. At Ashleworth one on 19 February, five on 26 February; five (including the colour ringed bird ringed on the estuary in 2010 which has returned to breed at Ashleworth every spring since 2011) on 1 March, and two or three for the rest of the month. At Coombe Hill the first of the year on 4 February was clearly nervous and a recent arrival, but not found on 7 February, so perhaps a passing migrant. Flocks of five on 17 and 18 February, eight on 21 and 23 February, six on 24 and 26 February, and 13 on 1 and 6 March were probably passing migrants; 13 came to roost at dusk on 13 and 23 March. At Cobney Meadows none on 10 February, four on 10 March. At Leigh Meadows, another regular breeding site, none on 18 February or 10 March. At Elmore Back none on 29 March. At Walmore none in February, but two on 5 March, none on 11 March. At Upham Meadow none on 6 February, but three on 17 February, including a different colour-ringed bird recorded as a breeder in previous summers; five on 20 and 23 February, six on 25 February; 17 including the colour-ringed bird on 6 March. Along the Avon below Twyning none on the Gloucestershire side on 17 and 25 February, nor on 2 March.

Redshank: Worcestershire: At Clifton Pits one on 23 March. At Ripple two on 24 February were the first of the year; three present in the first three days of March, four on 4 March, then 20 (an unusually large number, including prospective breeders but also perhaps some passing migrants?) on 23 March, 16 on 29 March.

At Coombe Hill, the first of the spring on 28 March.

Lesser Yellowlegs: Worcestershire: at Longdon Marsh, one rather poorly seen on the evening of 5 February. Gloucestershire: what was presumably the same bird was well seen at Coombe Hill on the morning of 7 February (third county record) but did not stay.

Green Sandpiper: Small numbers wintering, signs of through passage in March.

Worcestershire: At Ripple a singleton on 7 January; then ones and twos, probably migrants, throughout March.

At Forthampton one on 22 January. Winters along the Chelt at Leigh Meadows, with singles on 14 January and 10 March. At Minsterworth Ham one on 22 March. At Elmore Back one on 29 March. At

Upham Meadow (where the species is rarely seen), one along the Avon on 6 February. Along the Avon below Twynning one on 25 February, two together on 2 March.

Common Sandpiper: Worcestershire: At Ripple an early bird on 2 March, singletons on 17, 23 and 29 March.

Gulls

Mediterranean Gull: Worcestershire: At Holt an adult on 14 March. At Kemerton Lake an adult on 17 March.

Black-headed Gull: Worcestershire: At Ripple 18 on 12 March, 13 on 23 March. At Bredon's Hardwick 53 on 14 February.

At the Severn Ham, Tewkesbury 20 on surface water on 2 March. At Ashleworth only one on 10 February; 360 on floodwater on 10 March. At Horsbere 20 on 5 January, 30 on 18 January, 20 on 21 January.

Common Gull: Worcestershire: At Longdon Marsh Worcs WT reserve, two on 4 March. Along the Avon: At Kemerton Lake 16 on 28 March; at Bredon's Hardwick six on 28 March.

At Ashleworth, 37 on floodwater on 10 March.

Lesser Black-backed Gull: Worcestershire: At Bredon's Hardwick 22 on 12 March.

At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, two on grass on 24 and 30 March. At Horsbere five on 5 January.

Herring Gull: Worcestershire: At Bredon's Hardwick three on 12 March.

At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, four on 24 March. At Ashleworth just one on floodwater on 10 March. At Horsbere 20 on 5 January, five on 18 January.

Great Black-backed Gull: Worcestershire: At Bredon's Hardwick two on 18 March.

Pigeons

Stock Dove: At Coombe Hill ten on 21 February. At Upham Meadow 20 feeding on 20 February.

Wood Pigeon: At Upham Meadow 100 feeding on 20 February.

Owls

Little Owl: Only a few records of this species which was once ubiquitous in the Vales, especially among pollarded willows: at Coombe Hill one on 16 February, two on 19 and 27 March.

Long-eared Owl: Worcestershire: At Lower Moor one on 2 February.

Short-eared Owl: Worcestershire: At Grimley (Camp Lane) one on 8 February.

Kingfisher

At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, one along the Mill Avon on 27 February and 9 March, two by the Severn on 14 March, one on the Severn on 24 March. At Forthampton two along the Severn on 24 March. At Ashleworth one on 25 January. At Coombe Hill one on 18 February. At Leigh Meadows one on the Chelt on 10 March. At Horsbere one on 11 January. At Port Ham one on 9 February. At Upham Meadow one on 17 February.

Woodpeckers

Green Woodpecker: At Coombe Hill one calling on 3 January.

Great Spotted Woodpecker: Near Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, one drumming on 9 and 24 March. At Ashleworth one on 25 February. At Coombe Hill up to three drumming throughout the period. At Cobney Meadows one drumming on 10 March.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker: At Forthampton one heard calling on 22 January - the only record of this retiring species.

Passerines

Skylark: Worcestershire: At Upton Ham two or three singing on 4 March.

At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, just one on 4 February, two singing on 27 February, up five (several singing) in March. At Ashleworth, three singing on 1 March. At Coombe Hill four on 10 January, at least four singing on 21 February; at least one singing on 7 March. At Leigh Meadows one singing on 18 February, three singing on 10 March. At Cobney Meadows one on 10 March. At Walmore one singing on 22 February and 11 March. At Upham Meadow one singing on 6 February; a flock of 100 must have been migrants on 17 February, at least ten on 20 February; just one singing on 25 February and 6 March.

Sand Martin: Worcestershire: At Ripple at least 30 on 17 March, 40 on 29 March.

At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury one on 30 March. At the Forthampton colony five on 24 March. At Ashleworth three on 16 March, one on 22 and 30 March. At Coombe Hill three on 16 March, at least 30 on 27 March. At Horsbere four on 17 March.

Swallow: First of the year an early bird at Horsbere on 5 March. At Coombe Hill one on 28 March.

Meadow Pipit: Rather small numbers are encountered in winter in the meadows of the Severn and Avon Vales; at this time of year they seem to prefer arable fields on higher ground; but there were some signs of passage in February. At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, one on 4 February, but a flock of at least 47 on 20 February, 20 on 27 February; a singleton on 21 March. At Ashleworth four on 30 March. At Coombe Hill only ones and twos in January; five on 7 February. At Horsbere three on 1 January, singles later in the month, ten on 17 March. At Port Ham three on 17 March. At Upham Meadow, ten on 1 February; 50 in a migrant flock on 6 February, 25 on 17 February, at least ten on 20 February, six on 25 February, none on 6 March. Along the Avon above Tewkesbury 40 on 26 January.

Grey Wagtail: At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, one on 27 February.

White/Pied Wagtail: Distinct signs of passage of Pied Wagtails, with little flocks of migrants on grassland in February; no records at all of White Wagtail throughout the period. At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, six on 6 February, 43 on 20 February, ten on 27 February, 14 on 2 March. At Ashleworth a flock of five on 10 February. At Coombe Hill a flock of 16, probably migrants, on 4 February; flocks of six and thirty on 7 February; two on 23 March. At Cobney Meadows flock of 12 migrants on 10 February. At Horsbere two on 18 January. At Upham Meadow ten on 1 February, 18 with pipits on 6 February, 25 on 17 February, at least ten on 20 February; flock of 90 on 25 February, none on 6 March.

Black Redstart: At Deerhurst one in a riverside meadow on 18 January, not a species often recorded in the vales.

Stonechat: At Ashleworth a male on 10 February. At Coombe Hill two males on 22 January, two on 24 January, one on 29 January. At Horsbere five on 28 February. At Port Ham a pair on 9 February, one on 4 March.

Wheatear: Worcestershire: At Grimley one on 12 March. At Ripple a male on 28 March.

Ring Ouzel: Worcestershire: At Defford one on 17 March.

Fieldfare: Worcestershire: Along the Avon below Bredon's Hardwick 100 on 25 February; a massive flock of 700 (perhaps birds from Severn Ham?) on 2 March.

At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, a large flock of 500 on the grass on 27 February. At Forthampton 100 feeding on pasture on 22 January. At Staunton a huge flock of 1200 on sprouting arable on 4 February. At Ashleworth 25 on 10 March. At Coombe Hill up to 40 in January, 50 on 7 February, 20 on 21 February. At Walmore 20 on 27 February, seven on 17 March.

Redwing: Worcestershire: Along the Avon below Bredon's Hardwick 200 with the massive flock of Fieldfares on 2 March.

At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, 50 with Fieldfares on 27 February. At Forthampton 100 feeding on pasture on 22 January. At Staunton flock of 300 with 1200 Fieldfares on sprouting arable on 4 February. At Ashleworth five on 10 March. At Coombe Hill up to 15 in January, 20 on 7 February. At Horsbere 50 on 5 January, four on 18 January.

Mistle Thrush: At Coombe Hill one on 28 January. At Upham Meadow four on ground on 25 February and 6 March.

Cetti's Warbler: At Coombe Hill one on 21 February; one singing strongly on 7 and 9 March. At Port Ham one on 5 and 9 February, one singing on 17 and 19 March.

Blackcap: At Ashleworth one singing on 30 March. At Walmore one feeding on 11 March. At Twyning a male and a female in a garden on 22 January, two along the Avon on 26 January.

Chiffchaff: At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, two singing on 17 March, one on 21 and 24 March. At Ashleworth one singing on 9 March, then two or three singing until the end of the month. At Coombe Hill two singing on 13 March. At Horsbere two on 11 January, one on 18 and 21 January and on 8 February, at least two on 28 February; two singing on 29 March. At Port Ham three on 5 February, two on 4 March. At Walmore one singing on 11 March.

Siberian Chiffchaff: A possible at Port Ham on 5 February was confirmed on 9 February, still present on 19 February and 4 March.

Goldcrest: At Ashleworth ones and two recorded regularly throughout the period. At Sandacre Farm, Twyning, one singing on 6 March.

Long-tailed Tit: At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, half a dozen on 14 March. At Coombe Hill ten on 28 January.

Great Tit: Worcestershire: at Ripple one singing on 17 January.

At Coombe Hill one singing on 10 January, two singing on 14 January.

Nuthatch: At Ashleworth two on many dates throughout the period.

Treecreeper: At Ashleworth one singing on 10 March. At Cobney Meadows one singing on 10 March.

Great Grey Shrike: Worcestershire: at Longdon Marsh one from 17 to 19 March.

Jay: At Coombe Hill one on 3 January.

Carrion Crow: Worcestershire: At Upton Ham 11 on 4 March. Along the Avon 15 on Curlew field behind Bredon's Hardwick pits on 20 February.

At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, up to 30 feeding on grassland throughout February and March. At Elmore Back lots on Lapwing field on 29 March. At Walmore 100 on big hayfield on 22 and 27 February. At Upham Meadow 20 on 20 February, one with white feathers in wing; 20 on 25 February, 50 on 6 March.

Raven: At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, one on 27 February, two on 2 March, one on 14 March. At Ashleworth one on 18 March. At Port Ham two on 4 March. At Minsterworth Ham three on 22 March.

Starling: At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, five feeding on grass on 20 March. At Boddington 100 feeding among sheep on 4 February. At Walham Pools near Gloucester a pre-roost gathering of 3000+ on 3 and 4 March. At Walmore 500+ gathering to roost on the evening of 27 February.

Waxwing: Gloucestershire: After reports of flocks from all over the county in January and early February, eight were found near Walmore on 8 February, 25 in the same place on 10 February; then a late record of eight at Coombe Hill on 25 March.

Lesser Redpoll: At Elmore Back one on 29 March.

Bullfinch: Worcestershire: at Longdon Marsh one on 17 January.

At Coombe Hill two on 3 January, five on 10 January, two on 14 January.

Yellowhammer: At Coombe Hill one on 22 March.

Reed Bunting: Though common and widespread in summer, few appear to winter in the meadows.

Worcestershire: At Queenhill Rough one singing on 4 March. At Ripple one on 17 January.

At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury, one braving the gale to sing on 2 March, three singing on 6 March, two singing on 9 March, three (one singing) on 14 March. At Ashleworth one on 18 February, four singing on 1 and 10 March. At Coombe Hill a male on 10 January; four, one trying to sing, on 4 and 18 February, five trying to sing on 21 February and 7 March. At Horsbere four on 1 January, five on 21 January and 8 February, four males on 28 February. At Port Ham a massive roost of 98 individuals on 5 February, a male on 4 March. At Upham Meadow one trying to sing on 6 February, one on 25 February and 6 March. At Twyning a male in a garden on 22 January, two on 5 March.

Corn Bunting: At Severn Ham, Tewkesbury none found in February or March.

These are unconfirmed records, compiled by M. Smart from his own observations and those of Les Brown, with additional records from David Anderson, Gordon Avery, Martin Greenish, Mervyn Greening, Steve Heaven, Andy Jayne, Julia Newth, Rob Prudden, Simon Roberts, Graham Smith, Andy Warr and John Wiltshire, and the Ashleworth and Coombe Hill logbooks, with some cherries picked from the Gloster Birder and Worcester Birding websites and the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust website.