

Birds of Sparrowfeld 2024

Worcester Park - Lower Morden - Motspur Park - Old Malden

Bob Smith



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Cover: Chris Northwood - Richmond, Surrey. Date unknown.

Photo by kind permission of Judith and Matt Leclere

Introduction

2024 was a year different from the others in one main respect; we lost one of our main birders, Chris Northwood, who died unexpectedly in January. This was a blow both on a personal level and from the point of view of one of the main contributors to coverage of the patch. A full appreciation of Chris will follow towards the end of the report.

2024 was a below average bird year with **78 species** recorded. This might well have been because of the absence of myself for large periods in the summer and the loss of Chris Northwood and Simon Osborn (to Saint Albans), although of course Charlie Alpera was regularly observing on the patch. There were no sightings of Willow Warbler, Hobby, Whinchat, Stonechat or Sedge Warbler. However, there were two new species observed, a fly over **Woodcock**, in January, and **Bearded tits** in October. Other highlights included **Grey Herons nesting** in March, an adult **Mediterranean Gull** in February (4th patch record), a fly-over **Raven** in January (third patch record), **Water Rail** in first winter period, regular **Red Kite** observations, **Wheatear** in good numbers in spring but only two autumn observations. Up to two **Cetti's(s) Warbler**, and possibly a third, **Yellow Wagtail** in September, **Firecrest** observations in first winter period and autumn and second winter periods, **Siskins** in March, **Brambling** in December. Last, but not least, two **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** (second patch record since 2006 when recording commenced) on 18th December.

Observers and Coverage

I would particularly like to thank **Charlie Alpera (CA)** who covered the patch on many days. **Bob Smith (BS)** was able to observe regularly in the first and second winter and spring periods. Other observers I would like to thank are **Bill and Janis Reid (B &JR)**, **Danny Ramsay (DR)**, **Mark Bravery (MB)**, **Robin Lloyd (RL)**, **Michael Leonard (ML)**, **Simon Osborn (SO)**(who alas for the patch has relocated to Saint Albans), **Julie Drewett (JD)**, **Graham Huntley (GH)**, **Malcolm and Fiona Miles (MM)**, **Steven Shimwell (SS)**, and **Rowan Thompson(RT)**. Two visiting South African birders, **Lester and Cheryl Van Groeningen**, contributed observations during the last two weeks of December. **Robin Lloyd, Michael Leonard, Bill Reid** and **Lester Van Groeningen** provided photographs.

Changes in Habitat

The Reeds on the Mayflower Park wetlands, especially around the fishing pools, were severely cut back in the first winter period, as was the scrub along the bank, just behind the long water. Fortunately, there was strong reed growth during the spring. The fishing pools are being run by two individuals - Kenny and Russell, and not Cheam Angling as previously stated.

During the month of May, scrub along the north pool edge was cut back. BS sent an e-mail to the Hamptons Office asking why this was done and asked them if they were aware of the **Wildlife and Countryside Act** regarding nesting birds and their protection. This is the reply: *Thank you for the email. The ring of scrub was cut back so that the fisheries could be reopened. However, this together with reed cutting is absolutely what we will discuss in November, and I will invite Kenny and Russell to attend so we all come to a happy equilibrium.*

CA and myself had a meeting with Dale Leeks (who is responsible for the reed cutting), Kenny (one of the fishing pool managers) and management from the Hamptons Office during December regarding maintenance of the pools. We came up with a compromise so that reed cutting would be less severe and to take place during the early part of 2025.

In early spring the willows on the horse field west and Joseph Hood boundary were pollarded and some scrub cleared. Later in the year, early autumn, more scrub was cleared from the area. It is unclear why so much scrub was cleared except for access to tree pollarding. This is a valuable habitat and the site of our first Nightingale, and in 2024 Lesser Whitethroat was in territory.

The gasholders are to be removed, and flats built on the site. Berkeley Group are presenting Kingston Council with plans for development. We are keeping an eye on happenings especially in view of any encroachment into GHW, water pollution in Beverley Brook and concerns with Kestrel and Peregrine use of the gasholders. BS, CA, MM, RT, and JD have sent emails to the company with their concerns. We await further developments.

The patch of dumped soil by the stables is now developing into a nice little wildflower area.

**This is a map produced by Charlie Alpera –
patch boundary outlined in Blue**

The study area remains the same as previous years, comprising The Hamptons Estate (HH), which includes Mayflower Park(MP), Horse Fields(HF), Joseph Hood Park (JH), Gas Holder Wood (GHW), Battersea New Cemetery/Morden Cemetery (MC), Pyl Estate/Derwent Floodwater- called Pyl Floodwater on map (DFW), Sutton and Merton Cemetery (SMC), Rugby Field (RF) and the Paddock (P). Occasional forays were made into the rest of the Hamptons estate and some records pertain to this area



Summary of the Bird Year

January:

49 species were seen during the month. Highlights were a **Woodcock** (first patch record), **Raven** (third patch record), and **Water Rail**.

There were up to 4 **Cormorant** on the pools MP. There were up to 3 **Little Egret** on DFW. There were 7 **Common Gull** on Rugby Field on 3rd. A **Woodcock** flew over on 20th during cold weather. **Peregrine** and **Kestrel** were regular during the period. A **Red Kite** flew over on 1st. Two **Nuthatch** in GHW and on DFW. **Redwing** numbers maximum of 20. **Chiffchaff** in GHW on 16th where one or two **Goldcrest** and **Cole Tit**. **Cetti's Warbler** first heard on 4th. **Goldfinch** regular with maximum 12 in MC on 16th. **Linnet** on HF on 6th. Maximum 27 **Pied Wagtail** on HF on 25th. **Meadow Pipit** on 4th. **Grey Wagtail** with 2 on Pyl Brook and single on Beverley Brook. Maximum **Jackdaw** numbers of 30 on HF on 23rd. 100 **Carrion Crow** regular. A **Raven** flew over on 3rd.

February and March:

53 Species were seen during the two months. Highlights were a **Mediterranean Gull**, **Water Rails**, **Firecrest**, **Siskin** and an early **Wheatear**.

There were up to three **Cormorant** on MP during the period. During March **Grey Herons** were seen nest building in GHW (CA). It conspired that just one or two pair had established nests in the small wood close to the gasholders across from Beverley Brook. They were still building the nest into April. This is the first patch record of nesting. There were one or two **Little Egrets** on DWF during the period. By the end of the period both **Moorhen** and **Coot** were nesting on MP. There was a confiding **Water Rail** on MP during the period. Another was heard on one date in February. A **Mute Swan** flew over MP in late March. There was a summer plumage **Mediterranean Gull** on the HF on 22nd February (4th patch record) together with 100 **Black-headed Gull**. Regularly 50 of latter on MP. 28th March 32 **Herring Gull** and one **Lesser Black-backed Gull** on JH. **Peregrine** and **Kestrel** regular during period. **Common Buzzard** on 22nd February. Fly over **Red Kite** on Feb 28th, 3rd, 8th, 14th, 25th and 30th March. **Nuthatch** in MC. Variable numbers of **Redwing** but 100 in MC on March 4th was largest. An early **Wheatear** on HF on March 31st. **Firecrest** in GHW on Feb 27th where also **Goldcrest**. **Chiffchaff** there on 23rd Feb then March 4th one MP then up to 9 by months end. March 7th male and female **Blackcap** then male March 20th. **Cetti's Warbler** singing MP during period. **Grey Wagtail** on Pyl Brook

during period. Maximum of 20 **Goldfinch** during period. 7 **Siskin** in MC on March 20th was an excellent sighting (maximum number ever on patch)

April:

45 Species were seen during the two months. Highlights were a **Wheatear** on several dates, **Reed Warbler**, **Red Kite** and **Lesser Whitethroat**.

There was a **Cormorant** on MP on 8th. The two **Heron's** nest beside Beverley Brook were abandoned. A pair of **Coot** on MP had 7 young by end of month. There were 2 **Common Gull** on MP on 2nd. **Peregrine** were noticeable by their absence. One or two **Kestrel** all month especially over MP. **Sparrow Hawk** one or two on several dates. **Red Kite** fly-over on 2nd and **Buzzard** on 10th. There were unusual numbers of **Stock Dove** on HF during month with maximum of 28 on 7th (note on 2nd May there were 35 which is probably a spring maximum). Up to three **Swallow** on three dates late in the month. **Wheatear** on horse fields on 2nd (1), 8th (5), 20th (3), and 29th and 30th (1). First **Reed Warbler** was on 8th and then by end of month six territories. One, probably two, **Cetti's Warbler** in song on MP. Good numbers of **Blackcap** and **Chiffchaff** in territory. **Lesser Whitethroat** singing by GHW on 30th.

May

50 Species were seen during the two months. Highlights were two **Wheatear** on one date, **Red Kite** and **Common Buzzard** over, **Swifts** from 8th, **Swallow** on one date, **Lesser Whitethroat** in territory throughout month, a **Whitethroat** on 30th, a new **Cetti's Warbler** in the nursery area, many **Stock Dove** on horse fields.

15 Canada Geese north on 15th. Pair of **Coot** with four young, and **Moorhen** with young. 2 **Black-headed Gull** adults on pools on 5th. **Peregrine** on one date, **Red Kite** on 9th and **Common Buzzard** on 8th. **Kestrel** male regular. Good numbers of **Stock Dove** on HF with 36 on 2nd. **Swallow** north on 1st and **Swift** from 8th with maximum of 17 on 13th but generally scarce. **Grey Wagtails** on Beverley and Pyl Brooks. Two female **Wheatear** on HF on 8th. 100 **Starling** on HF on 11th when many young. **Common Whitethroat** discovered by CA on MC dump on 30th was still singing into June. **Lesser Whitethroat** in territory by GHW from end of April through May. **Blackcap** 17 territories and **Chiffchaff** 10 territories. A new **Cetti's Warbler** in nursery area for about a week. Good news with **Reed Warbler**, with perhaps eight territories on pools. Good numbers of **Goldfinch** especially around Maple Lodge HH. Sadly, no **Chaffinch** seen or heard. Good numbers of **Greenfinch** territories.

June:

46 Species were seen during the two months. Rather a quiet month with only a few highlights: 3 **Common Buzzard** on 11th and 2 on 21st. The **Common Whitethroat** in MC stayed for at least a week.

2 Egyptian Geese on horse fields and occasionally on pools. A **Cormorant** flew west on 16th. There appear to be only two pairs of **Coot** - one on long water the other on fishing pool five young all told. **Moorhen** – 4 or 5 territories with 10 young. A few observations of adult **Lesser Black-backed Gulls**. A **Peregrine** on three dates. On 11th 3 **Common Buzzard** were seen soaring over GHW. On 21st 2 were soaring distantly over JH. **Little Owl** in MC on 3rd. **Swift** numbers vary often depending on weather conditions. On 24th there were 25 flying over and 6 on the pools. **Grey Wagtails** on Beverley and Pyl Brooks. **Common Whitethroat** in MC continued singing until 6th June at least. **6 to 8 Reed Warbler** territories around pools. Sadly, none appear to be in situ on fishing pool.

July:

43 species were observed during the month. There were 9 juvenile **Moorhen** on pools. The first **Black-headed Gull** was one west on 22nd and a **Common Gull** on 23rd. Two adult and one juvenile **Kestrel** in MC from 8th. One or two **Peregrine** regular during month. **Sparrow Hawk** in GHW on 8th. **Little Owl** in MC on 23rd. DR found a **Tawny Owl** pellet in HH on 22nd. Up to 15 **Swift** during month. 2 **Sand Martin** south on 26th. Maximum of 60 **Starling** on HF. Maximum of 14 **Pied Wagtail** on HF. Regularly 10-15 **House Sparrow** on HF.

August -November

Observations from CA and B&J Reid

65 species during the period.

Little Egret: HF on 16th Sept and 2 on DFW on 6th Nov. Maximum number of **Black-headed Gull** was JH 140 on 25th Nov. **Greylag Goose** on H F 5th Nov. 19 **Canada Goose** HF 19th October. Male **Pheasant** there on 27th October. Maximum **Stock Dove** numbers 80 on HF 8th October. **Peregrine** regularly, up to three birds. **Kestrel** adults and juvenile in period. **Little Owl** in MC on 14th Sept. **Nuthatch** in MC and DFW. **Swallow**: 3rd October 10 and 78th 1. **Kingfisher** on MP 30th October. **Pied Wagtail** maximum 50 (probably patch record) on HF 6th August. **Grey**

Wagtail on HF and Beverley Brook. **Yellow Wagtail** 2 on HF 27th August. **Meadow Pipit** there on 15th November. **Wheatear** 7th August on HF. **Redwing** 4 10th October. **Fieldfare** 15 west Nov 11th. 2 **Cetti's Warbler** regularly around pools. **Chiffchaff** in October and November. **Firecrest** 2 in GHW in November. **Chaffinch** maximum 20 HF in November. **Goldfinch** maximum of 30 HF on 15th October. **Reed Bunting** female around pools 13th October. **Carrion Crow** maximum of 90 4th August.

December:

48 species were observed.

28th 4 **Mute Swan** flew over. 3 **Cormorant** flew over on 6th and there were single birds on the pools on two days. There were up to 13 **Moorhen** and 3 **Coot** on the pools during the month. **Red Kites** flew over south on 17th and 30th. A **Peregrine** was present on several days as was a **Sparrow Hawk**. **Black headed Gull** numbers had a maximum of 150 on 28th. There were one or two **Common Gulls** during the period. **Kingfisher** seen regularly on pools. **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**. Two visiting South African birders, Cheryl and Lester Van Groeningen, gave a convincing description of two in GHW in late December. This would be the first observation for many years. One or two **Firecrest** in GHW on two dates, where one or two **Goldcrest**. **Grey Wagtail** on Arthur Road channel on two dates and on HF. Maximum number of **Pied Wagtail** of 20 on HF on 6th. **Chaffinch** maximum 26 on HF on 20th. **Brambling** there on 12th. 10 **Goldfinch** in GHW on 23rd. **Mistle Thrush** HF on 12th. **Redwing** scarce with 5 in GHW on 23rd and few elsewhere. **Cetti's Warbler** regularly singing on pools. **Chiffchaff** one or two on MP late December. **Cole Tit** one in GHW on two dates. 22 **Long-tailed Tit** on patch on 22nd.

Species Accounts

Listed according to BOU/IRBC/IOC

Also informal star ratings for some bird species

Canada Goose:

Occasionally on pools with 2 on most of first winter period. 20 there on 4th November may well have been the same as group on HF in October and November. 15th May 15 flew north. Did not breed

Greylag Goose*:

November 6th one with Canada Geese (CA)

Mute Swan:

Occasionally singles on pools. Occasionally flying over with 4 on 28th December

Egyptian Goose

A pair on pools at various times of year especially in first winter period. Goslings reported from MC but none survived.

Mallard:

Up to twenty present all year on pools. No ducklings were seen. Pairs also seen on Beverley Brook and Pyl Brook during breeding season.

Pheasant*:

A male on HF on 27th October (CA). CA also mentioned that a gardener in MC has had sightings of more than one bird.

Swift:

First on May 8th but scarce all month. In June up to six on pools. Numbers very weather dependent with maximum of 25 flying over on 24th June. Up to 15 in July.

Feral Pigeon:

Regularly up to ten birds on pool boardwalk and up to fifteen on HF

Stock Dove:

Present all year on HF. Maximum of 20 on 23rd February 28 on 27th April and 20 on 1st May but 80 on 8th October. Breeding stronghold is MC. Territories also in GHW, DFW and PFA.

Woodpigeon:

Present all the year round and especially obvious in autumn and on HF and GHW.80-100 counted on standard walks in autumn and winter. Unknown number breeding.

Collared Dove:

Scarce. Ones and twos around the stables and pool boardwalk. Four breeding territories.

Moorhen:

Maximum 11 in MP during the first winter period. Five pairs raised 13 young in MP. Maximum of 13 on pools in second winter period. A pair on Beverley Brook and two pairs on Pyl Brook.

Coot:

Very poor showing of only 3 at both ends of the year on the pools in MP. Three pairs bred: fishing pool, pool 2 and long water. Ten young but doubtful if any reached maturity. Seems there is a problem regarding survival of the species on the pools. This may be due to feeding, as there is very little weed growth in any but fishing pool.

Water Rail**

A confiding bird on the pools during January and February. There were assumed to be two present at least on one day in February as a bird was calling in north pool whilst the regular bird was on board walk pool.

Woodcock****

20th January at 1130 one seen flying above trees of lane between HF and MC veered off towards SMC. This was during a period of cold weather. **First patch record.**

Herring Gull:

Always present if only flying over. One or two occasionally present in MP in winter periods. 32 immature birds on JH on 25th March may have included this species as well as Lesser Black-backed Gull. Occasionally up to five on Rugby field in winter.

Lesser Black -backed Gull:

As above species often present if only flying over. One or two adults on JH and Rugby in winter period and in June.

Black-headed Gull:

Present daily during first winter period up until mid-March. Maximum 100 on HF 27th February. Regularly 50 on MP pools. February. 5th May 2 adult on pools. Maximum 150 on 28th December. Up to 50 on pools during second winter period.

Common Gull:

Irregular. 7 on rugby on 3rd January. Up to two JH and HF in December.

Mediterranean Gull *:**

An adult in breeding plumage on HF on 22nd February (BS) Fourth patch record and second in breeding plumage-other two were first winter birds.

Cormorant:

First winter period up to 3 on pools.8th April one there and 16th June one flying over.6th December 3 flew over and one on pools on two dates.

Little Egret:

Regular in first winter period on DFW with maximum of three. HF on 16th Sept and one on DFW on 6th

Grey Heron:

Always present - one or two on MP or resting in GHW (up to five). An intriguing observation was of one nesting in the small wood, across the Beverley Brook and near the gasholder. CA noted nest on 13th March and then a second nest on 20th March and still carrying nest material there on 2nd April when there were two birds at one nest. These attempts were abandoned. These are the first nest records for the patch. There is clearly potential for nesting but Carrion Crow predation could be a problem.

Sparrow Hawk:

male and female observed intermittently during the year usually GHW,HH,HF,MC.

Red Kite:

A return to normal number of observations with 11 sightings (24 observations in 2023) of single birds flying over. Monthly observations with as usual most in spring

01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09 10

1 5 2 1

11 12

2



Photo: **Lester Van Groeningen**

Common Buzzard:

A poor year with observations on four dates but multiple records of birds flying over 27th February 1, 9th May 2, 11th June 3 (these seem to be birds coming out of GHW and flying of), 21st June 2 high

Little Owl:

One or two present in MC most of year. Becoming increasingly difficult to find in MC

Tawny Owl*:

The only record was from a pellet found in HH by DR. in July.

Green Woodpecker:

Regularly seen in MC and also HH and SMC. Four breeding territories

Great Spotted Woodpecker:

Regularly seen in GHW, and MC. Probably five breeding territories: 2GHW, 2MC, 1MP

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker:****

Two, presumably a pair were in GHW on December 18th. Two visiting South African birders, Cheryl and Lester Van Groeningen, gave a convincing description. They particularly mentioned the small size, barring on the back and lack of red on the vent area. They had already seen Great Spotted Woodpecker in the same locality. This is an outstanding observation of a very rare species. This is **the second patch record** in the modern period of observing (since 2006). The previous observation was about five years ago when Bill and Janis Reid found one in MC.

Kingfisher:

Regular on the pools during first winter and second winter periods. Also seen occasionally on Beverley and Pyl Brooks.



Kingfisher by Michael Leonard

Kestrel:

Male and female regular throughout year in MC, HF and HH. Bred with adults feeding a juvenile in MC in July.

Peregrine:

Two birds occasionally, one regular, throughout year. On pylons in HF and HH, and also on Gasholders. No evidence of breeding.

Ring-necked Parakeet:

Resident all year and breeds in GHW, MC and DFW.

Jay:

Present all year. More obvious in the autumn when seeking for acorns. Probably breeds in GHW and MC

Magpie:

Present all year. No estimate of breeding population.

Jackdaw:

Present in variable numbers on HF with various maxima of 30 on 21st January, 15 each on 8th July and 26th July and 20 on 30th December. CA saw 300+ there at a pre-roost on last day of the year. Also often in MC where it breeds. Also breeds in GHW. A particular individual with a sprained wing (wing hanging down) has been seen for at least the last five years on HF.

Carrion Crow:

Present all year with between 80-100 birds primarily on HF and MC. Biggest count was 115 on December 30th may well be a patch record. Estimate that ten pairs bred. The large group which seems to be around the whole year may consist of non-breeding birds. A group of crows was seen roughing up an unfortunate Jackdaw in late December. The Jackdaw escaped and certainly looked the worst for wear.

Raven:***

Third patch record of one flying east and calling over Green Lane School on 3rd January. Its interesting that the species seems to be seen more frequently locally as Mark Bravery has heard them recently over Colliers Wood.

Blue Tit:

Present all year unknown number breeding

Great Tit:

Present all year unknown number breeding.

Cole Tit:

Present in first winter and second winter periods in GHW. CA found 12 in MC on June 7th which is strongly indicative of breeding there.

Sand Martin:

26th July 3 flying south (BS) the only observation.

Swallow:

Very poor year. 25th April 1 north, 26th 3north, 1st May 1 north, 7th May 2 north then 3rd October 2 south and 7th October 1 south.

Cetti's Warbler:**

Two singing birds very vocal around the pools during the year. One frequented the north end and the other middle to south end. Intriguingly perhaps a third bird towards Arthur Road and the nursery on several days in mid-May.

Long-tailed Tit:

Present all year. Unknown number of breeding territories-estimate 10 pairs. 22 counted on December 16th in GHW+MC+DFW

Bearded Tit****

B&JR discovered a pair on the pools on 27th October (first patch observation)

Janis and I saw the Bearded Tit in the Reeds at the south end of the ponds. Initially we caught a glimpse of something darting into the reed bed. We stopped to look out of the corners of our eyes.

After a little while the Male bird climbed up to the top of the reeds. At that point, it was about chest height on me. It turned to look at us. We've seen birds like these in East Anglia, both captive and wild.

It was face on, and we saw the black moustaches, grey head and pale front. After a short while, it flew off to the north, along with what looked like a female.

Intriguingly two were seen on the same day at Hogsmill Reserve West Ewell.

Chiffchaff:

GHW one on January 16th and 23rd February and MP 4th March. By months end 9 on patch. 10 breeding territories(9 in 2023 and 13 in 2022). Present during the autumn in MP and small numbers extending into November and late December when 2 present around pools.

Reed Warbler:

First on 8th April same date as 2023 and perhaps 6 territories by months end. Six breeding territories in MP same as 2023. The cutting of the reeds during the winter seemed not to have been detrimental to breeding prospects although none were breeding on the fishing pools. Perhaps the cutting of reeds there forced birds into a smaller area. Still present in August.



Reed Warbler by Robin Lloyd

Blackcap:

March 7th male and female MP then male March 20th. Numerous birds in April. 17 territories (12 in 2023 and 24 in 2022). Present into late September

Whitethroat:

A terrible year for the species with just one observation of a male in territory for a week from May 30th on MC dump.

Lesser Whitethroat:

30th April one singing by boundary of HF west and JH may well have been the bird that held territory until at least 27th May so counts as one breeding territory.

Firecrest*:

February 27th one in GHW. Two there on one date in November and one or two on two dates in December.



Photo **Lester Van Groeningen**

Goldcrest:

One or two in GHW on two dates in January, February and March. and one or two there in December. Two observations for November from MP

Wren:

Present all year. Estimated 35 breeding territories of this vocal bird

Nuthatch:

First winter period one present in GHW, MC and DFW. No breeding observations. August 26th GHW. Autumn and winter singles in MC and 2 DFW but not GHW

Starling:

Present all year. Mainly on HF but scarce in winter with maximum of 50 on 28th March. Breeds in HH, house on HF and entrance to MC and probably elsewhere. Largest counts on HF when juveniles fledged – 11th May 50 (100 in all areas) and 60 10th July. Maximum of 50 on HF 9th December.

Song Thrush:

Present all year. Nine estimated breeding territories .

Mistle Thrush:

12th December one on HF (CA) was the only observation.

Redwing:

Only small numbers during first winter `period with maximum of 40 on HF on 10th March but 100 in MC on 4th March so to a certain extent maybe overlooked because spread over patch. In autumn 4 on 10th October and 4 on 12 November flying over. Rather scarce on patch during second winter period with only 10.

Fieldfare:

November 11th 15 flew west (MB) was the only observation

Blackbird:

Present all year. Unknown number of breeding territories

Robin:

Present all year. Estimated 50 breeding territories.

Wheatear*:

A good spring passage but scarce in autumn. 31st March 1, then April 2nd 1, 8th 5, 20th 3, 29th 1, 30th 1, 8th May 2 then 17th Aug 1, 3rd October 1. The five on 8th April is probably a patch maximum. (MB,BS)



Wheatear by Bill Reid

House Sparrow:

Present all year particularly in three areas: scrub beside path to HF, feeders by stables and boardwalk by pools. Maximum of 20 HF.

Duncock:

Present all year. Estimated twenty breeding territories.

Yellow Wagtail*:

Only observation 27th August 2 on HF (CA)

Grey Wagtail:

Present all year but no evidence of breeding although pairs on Beverley Brook in GHW and Pyl Brook. Also seen occasionally on HF and channel towards Arthur Road.

Pied Wagtail

Present all year especially on HF. Maximum first winter period 27 on 25th January. No evidence of any spring passage. Adults collecting food on HF during breeding season and juvenile birds seen there. Numbers increase in late summer and autumn as presumed migrants pass through. An amazing 50 on HF on 6th August (CA) is a patch record count. Maximum in December of 20 on 6th.

Meadow Pipit:*

Very poor showing all on HF: one on 4th January and 15th November.

Chaffinch:

Another poor year. Just one observation in first winter period with one on HF 27th January. No breeding territories. Better in December with a flock of 20-26 from November mid-month on HF.

Brambling**

Male in hedgerow by HF/ stable gate on 12th December (CA).

Greenfinch:

Non- existent during both winter periods. Good numbers of breeding territories throughout the patch but not counted. Especially evident in MP and MC.

Linnet:

Just one observation of a single bird on HF on 6th January (BS)

Goldfinch:

Present throughout the year. Regular in January, with maximum of 12 on 16th in MC. In February and March maximum of 20. Difficult to estimate breeding numbers but particularly common in HH. Regular in autumn with maximum of 30 on HF 15th October. Up to 10 in second winter period.

Siskin*:

Only observation were seven on March 20th in MC (MB). This is a maximum patch count

Reed Bunting:

Very poor showing. November 13th a female on pools. There has been a decline in wintering birds around the pools and this cannot be due to the lack of reeds. There were no birds in the breeding season.

Cumulative Species Total 2007-2024

With the addition of **Woodcock** and **Bearded Tit**, the patch list is **122 species**. There are in addition **14 species*(one addition see below)** from the period prior to 2007. For the full list see report 2020.

Addition-birds prior to 2007

Little Ringed Plover: old sewage works circa 1966 (BS)

Redshank; old sewage works probably bred (BS)

Bar-tailed Godwit: circa 1985 one flew south west (BS)

Jack Snipe: During 2000 old sewage works (A . Quinn per BS)

Golden Plover: About 40 in cold weather 1970 (BS)

Short-eared Owl: 1997 one flew south west (BS)

Water Pipit: During 2000 old sewage works (A. Quinn per BS)

Tree Pipit: passage migrants in mid 1960-1970 (BS)

Wryneck: mid 1960's one in old allotment by Arthur Road (BS)

Willow Tit: occasionally lane north/south mid 1960's (BS)

Grasshopper Warbler: lane north/south mid 1960's and 1970 (BS)

Rook: bred GHW, last 1968 (BS)

Corn Bunting: 10 on old allotments in 1970

A **Knot** was reported in **Surrey Bird Report for 1963 Wheatley's book Birds of Surrey (2007)** this was on **Worcester Park Sewage Farm on March 22nd**

Intriguingly, a further species is a possibility, as on **February 26th 1986** a **Black-throated Diver** was found in bad condition on **Beverley Brook, Worcester Park** and taken into care by RSPCA but subsequently died.

Standard Walk Counts:

The route for the standard walk is the entrance to HF then through GHW across JH into MC where the west boundary is taken to the main entrance and then back through the east side of MC to the small gate. Along the N/S path to the stables then E/W path to MP. Follow along long water to boardwalk then back up through MP past tennis court to MP entrance.

This usually takes two hours and I generally start at 1000.

I count all birds that are interacting with the patch in some way so would include birds feeding over the area for example Swifts but not birds flying over.

31st Jan 1000-1215 8/8 cloud, wind SW 2

303 birds of 35 species.

Top Ten: Black-headed Gull 54, Carrion Crow 53, Ring-necked Parakeet 29, Woodpigeon 23, Robin= Blue Tit=Redwing 13, Moorhen=Magpie =11, Jackdaw=9

9th June 1000-1200 6/8 cloud, wind NW 1

202 birds 31 species

Top ten: Carrion Crow 56, Magpie 16, Wren= Blackbird=11, Woodpigeon 10, Starling=Moorhen=Mallard= 9 Jackdaw=robin=8

31st July 1000-1200 0 cloud, NE 1

178 birds 24 species

Top ten: Carrion Crow 57, Starling 32, woodpigeon =9, Blue Tit=Mallard=8, Ring-necked Parakeet=7, Moorhen=6 , Pied Wagtail=Jackdaw=4



**Standard Walk Route from field entrance via horse field, path back to field entrance
Encompasses all the patch habitats except brooks**

Some notes on Birds in Gas Holder Wood (GHW)

I'm starting to do some censusing of birds in GHW. I did one breeding season census and then two winter counts. This will continue into 2025.

For the winter counts I take a route from the south entrance and along the side of the Beverley Brook out into JH.

26TH April:

Record of birds singing:

Wren 6, Robin 7, Great Tit 2, Jackdaw (nest), Stock Dove 1. Blue Tit 1, Goldfinch 3, Blackbird 2, Chiffchaff 2, Great Spotted Woodpecker 2.

9th December:

Spot counts

15 species 145 birds

Carrion Crow 80 Jackdaw 20 Ring-necked Parakeet 15 Song Thrush 1 Magpie 5 Blackbird 1 Robin 1 Blue Tit 8 Cole Tit 1 Wren 2 Woodpigeon 4 Great Tit 2 Redwing 3 Great Spotted Woodpecker 1 Goldcrest 1

23rd December

Spot counts

15 species 69 birds

Wren 2, Ring-necked Parakeet 20, Magpie 4, Goldfinch 10, Robin 4, Long tailed Tit 10, Blue Tit 10, Redwing 1, Great Tit 4, Woodpigeon 4, Great Spotted Woodpecker 1, Goldcrest 1, Stock Dove 4, Carrion Crow 2, Heron 1

Recollections 1

A new section will be presented each year of some memories of the patch from previous years (from 1960 at the earliest). In this report I have decided to mention periods in winter and autumn of 1970. Firstly a period of snow **in March 1970**, then a wonderful day **September 15th 1970** followed **by two or three days of bird passage during the same month.**

Although a large area of the patch has not changed there have been some substantial changes which I will mention here. The most obvious change has been the conversion of the old Sewage Works into the Hamptons Estate. The works stopped working in 1996 and building commenced in 2002. I commenced watching here in 2006. The Sewage works had three sludge beds and earth dumpings (It's called the dump) beside Pig Farm Alley.

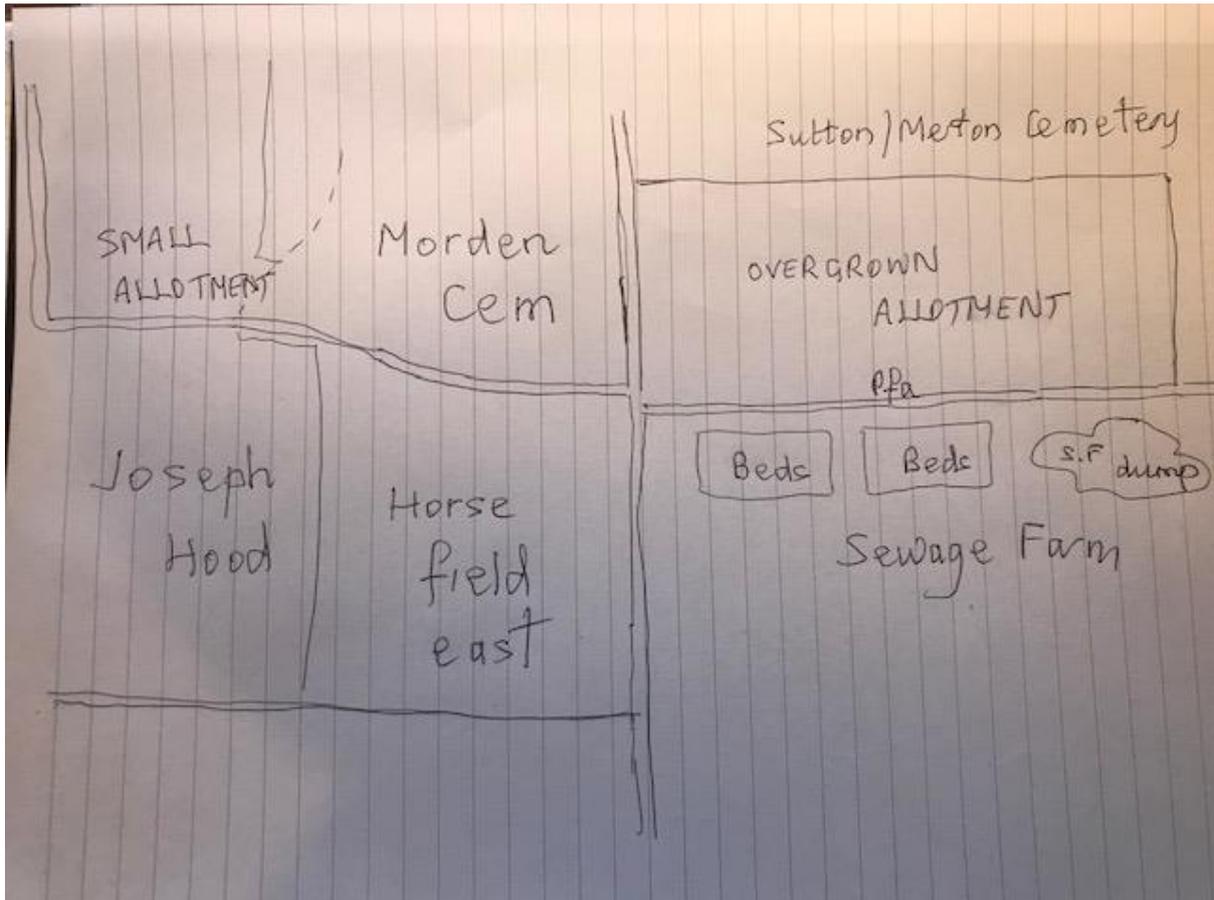
Where the stables and paddocks are now there was a large disused allotment, which stretched all the way along Pig Farm Alley until the Sutton and Merton Cemetery extension took a large part of the area. It consisted of disused allotment plots and rough grassland. The cemetery used part of this area to dump soil into mounds.

There was a small overgrown allotment adjacent to Morden Cemetery by the path towards Arthur Road. This is now occupied by a nursery. This was largely overgrown with blackberry and gorse.

There was another large allotment just past Onslow Garage in Green Lane. This was then occupied by a computer centre and then the Hampton's Estate.

There was no public right of way across the horse fields. Up until about 1960 the west horse fields towards GHW was a landfill site. The path running from the stables between Morden Cemetery and the horse fields was lined with magnificent Elm trees. There was a landfill tip towards the end of PFA. Because of the landfill sites, gulls were very common. Jubilee Clump by GHW is a fairly new addition.

The area which is now the housing estate in Lower Morden (just before DFW) was an area of fields. This was often waterlogged and was often a good place to find Teal.



Note: Sutton and Merton Cemetery extended into the overgrown allotments. Most of this area is now the Paddock. Small allotment is the nursery by Arthur Road. The old sewage Farm (works) beds are the pools of MP.

March 4th-6th 1970.

During these three days snow came overnight and settled and then froze

March 4th: Snow overnight and into the morning stopped at 1100 when wind briefly west but heavy snow again and wind then east-north east at 1200 onwards.

Massive hard weather movement of **Lapwings** to south and south east. In the period 1250-1340 (when watching became impossible)

4000 passed over in large groups.

Also 12 **Golden Plover** flew over at 1250 and then at 1330 26 with Lapwing.

Skylark: 1340- 1430 220 south

Redwing: 140 south

Fieldfare: 50 with Redwing.

March 5th: wind light N-NE mainly overcast with some blue sky .Snow of 4th remains.

0930-1100

Lapwing: 30 south

Skylark: 200 south

Fieldfare: 100 south

Birds feeding in the area of large allotment and sewage works

Reed Bunting: 23

Yellow Bunting: 20

Corn Bunting: 10.

Skylark: 160 moving between sewage works and SMC

Brambling: 40 sewage works

Linnet: 20 sewage works

Also 10 **Redwing** and 21 Fieldfare in allotment

Meadow Pipit: 20 in area

March 6th: Wind W-NW clear with cloud by 1230.Ground beginning to unfreeze.

Return movement of **Lapwing** moving north to north-north east from 1000- 1230 when **2000** counted.

Birds in large allotment: 30 **Yellow Bunting**, 8 **Corn Bunting** and 6 **Reed Bunting**. 80 skylark, 10 **Meadow Pipit** and 30 Linnet.

September 14th 1970-One of the best days for species on the patch

Rain overnight but not after 0900 then becoming clear and warm, wind light south west.

At 1000 hrs 3 **Sand Martin** flew south and 3 **Cormorant** flew very high east. First part of call was the large allotments. At least two **wheatear**, one flew across towards the piles (these are piles of grave diggings from SMC), the other sitting on the cemetery fence. A solitary pipit flew up from cultivated patch to a bean pole. As it flew away it called with characteristic teez (the call of **Tree Pipit**). 10 **Meadow Pipit** also there. **Goldfinch** and **Linnet** were also present but most were on the Sewage Works

dump. By the allotment earth piles and elders were **3 Blackcap** and **Chiffchaff**. On the Sewage Works were a **Whinchat** and **Sedge Warbler** calling. Here were 30 each of **Linnet** and **Goldfinch**. In the Small allotment were a **Blackcap**, **Lesser Whitethroat**, **Chiffchaff** and **Whinchat**. A new species for the area was a **Grasshopper Warbler**. It was flycatching from a burnt-out area of gorse and then it flew into a blackberry bush where I had just time to see the delicately freckled head and dunnock like marking above. Many **Lesser Black-backed gulls** today with 100 adults resting on the rugby field and 60 at dump and 30 on fields at Grand Drive.

The period in 1960's and early 1970's was a period when visible migration watching was quite popular in the London area.

I was very keen on watching birds flying over then, so it's difficult to know whether what I saw then was commonplace and likely to occur today. I suspect though the numbers of meadow pipits and House Martins would not occur now.

September 16th: Overnight rain but clear at dawn, wind NW force 3

Watch from 0700-0900:

Meadow Pipit: 220 south west in small parties from between 3 and 20 birds.

Swallow: 71 south

Sand Martin: 10 south

House Martin: 70 south

Also 0700: 8 pipits in a group of which some or perhaps all were **Tree Pipit**

Mistle Thrush: 4 high to south west

September 17th: Clear 0/8, wind SW force 3

Watch 0700-0830

Meadow Pipit: 60 south west

Swallow: 50 south

House Martin: 10 south

Yellow Wagtail: 1 south at 0700

Mistle Thrush: 1 south at 0700

A tribute to Chris Northwood

Bob Smith's memory of Chris.

I first met Chris on the patch about five years ago. I was looking for birds along a hedgerow and we had a chat about birds in the area. He asked if there were any 'hotspots' (that is places where unusual birds might turn up). Since then, he had regularly visited the area-usually 100 visits each year. I can safely say that without his careful observations - he had a very good eye and years of training in field work- we would not have observed such a variety of birds on the patch. He turned up some firsts for the patch: **Nightingale, Wood Warbler, Red legged Partridge** and, outstandingly, a **Little Bunting** in late 2022 as well as some scarce visitors. The Little Bunting caused quite a stir locally and put the patch on the map as it is a national rarity. However, after his discovery he typically kept a low profile. He was a private individual, but I enjoyed and valued sharing sightings with him. The friendly rivalry proved an important stimulus to look more carefully. One particular day remains a lovely memory. It was a mid-May day in 2022 when together we walked down Pig Farm Alley and discussed the possibility of seeing a **Spotted Flycatcher** (a patch rarity). And there, low and behold, was one perched for all to see on a bare branch. Then as we progressed across the horse fields, we saw two more towards Gas Holder Wood perched again in a bare tree. Quite by chance we were soon joined by Mark Bravery and Simon Osborn (a couple of patch regulars) and found a **Wheatear** and a **Whinchat** on the fields. This must have been the only day to my knowledge when there were nearly all the patch regulars together. I particularly liked joining him on Queen Elizabeth Mound in the Hamptons Estate where together we would scan for fly-over birds. There I realised he liked to track aircraft in and out of Heathrow. I know Chris had other irons in the fire: his trips to the Scillies in the autumn, as a regular on the Selsey Peninsula, his love of Mull in Scotland, his excursion on seeking whales and dolphins in the Bay of Biscay and across the channel to Cherbourg, and his volunteer wardening on Ramsay Island in Wales.

I had my last communications with Chris by text just before he went into hospital in January. He was telling me about a Muntjac Deer he had seen in Norwich. This was in connection with the friendly Roe Deer we have on the patch in Morden Cemetery. I had my very last communication with him by text, as it were beyond the grave, when I told him I had a patch tick - a **Woodcock** flying over. I really wish he could have read it. No doubt as I wander around the patch in the future, I will have my communications with him.

I produce an annual report, and in 2020 he was the years patch personality. This is what Chris had to say:

I've lived in Worcester Park for 30 years and have been birding for about 50 (can it really be that long?). For most of that time I tended to do most of my birding further afield, especially in Sussex, Kent and my native Hampshire. I can remember when The Hamptons was a disused sewage works, and I recall seeing Redshank and Snipe from there flying over my house. Since it was transformed, I have walked there occasionally until about 18 months ago (written in 2020). However, I've discovered the pleasure of local patch watching there recently, partly because having retired in 2019 I had more time on my hands, but mainly on account of the various lockdowns in 2020 seriously limited my ability to travel elsewhere.

My favourite spot is the scrub by the stone circle in Joseph Hood Park-the site where I found the Nightingale this spring.

Bill and Janis Reid contributed this in memory of Chris.

We didn't know Chris well but we liked him a lot.

Janis and I are still novices but he was always happy to stop and talk to us when we met. He'd often paused to show us a bird that we hadn't seen. He was happy to share what he knew and was always patient with us. We will both miss him.

What follows is a copy of a tribute paid to **Chris from the local birders on the Selsey Peninsula:**

Editorial: It was with great shock and sadness that we learned today of the recent passing of our friend and regular observer Chris Northwood , at the early age of 66yrs. Chris will be known to many of the Selsey faithfuls and although he resided in Surrey , he would make frequent attendances at both the Bill and other sites on the Peninsula, often visiting his sister in the process(who conveniently resided in Selsey!). He was a lovely and rather humble man with a pleasant manner likened by all, but also a keen and competent birder who always enjoyed his birding here, especially during the spring and autumn. I last saw him at the Bill in November 2023, during the excitement of the Leach's Petrel movements, when he was so pleased to finally get the species onto his Bill list (as indeed was I)-perhaps a fitting tribute to a lovely bloke. Rest in peace old friend (Owen Mitchell and friends)

Plans for 2025

- Continue to monitor breeding species of pools
- Continue to survey numbers of breeding summer visitors
- Census breeding Song Thrush, Greenfinch, Chaffinch
- In view of possible threat to GHW from building development survey bird species in winter period and estimate numbers of breeding territories.
- Amend the standard walk to include stream-essentially shift the walk through GHW to include a bit of Beverley Brook



A Cockatoo and Grey Parrot taken for a walk

Photo by Bob Smith

POSTING LIST:

Charlie

Bill/Janis

Mark b

Julie

Rowan

John mc

Michael I

Robin

Vici

HH office

Michael Freiter

Michael Dempsey

Fiona

Steve s

Chris H

Graham

Frank

Simono

Woman who came to LB.....