



## **BIRDS of HENLEY** and its **SURROUNDINGS** **2010 -2011**

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Blue tit:



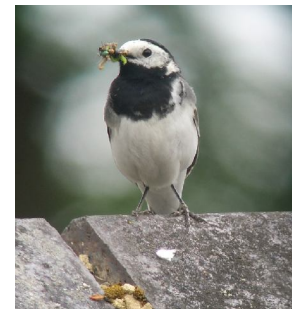
Great tit:



Redwing: a winter visitor that likes to feed on berries such as pyracantha and cotoneaster.



Pied wagtail: occasional visitor to gardens; more often seen near the river.



Goldfinch: a frequent visitor to gardens where food, especially seed, is provided.



Great crested grebe: often to be seen on the river towards Marsh Lock.



# The Henley Garden Bird Survey

This report is based on a survey of the bird species occurring in Henley, a survey that was organised by the Henley Wildlife Group during 2010-11. It also includes a comparison of the results with those of a similar survey carried out in 2000-01. In both surveys most of the data came from observations made in the gardens of about 27 households who recorded their sightings (as described in more detail on page 10). In the recent survey 24 households completed the entire 12-month period, compared with 23 in 2000-01, and their observations have been used to assess the frequency of sightings at intervals of three months during the year. Some observers also recorded additional species seen elsewhere in Henley; and, in addition, the report includes a number of observations from the rural area surrounding Henley.

Table 1 lists the birds that have clearly increased in number during the 10-year period and those that have clearly decreased, while Table 2 lists in rank order the 40 most commonly seen species in the recent survey. Although only three of the gardens and observers took part in both surveys, it is thought that the results are comparable. Certainly, blackbirds and robins, which are known to have maintained fairly stable populations nationally over the 10-year period, produced similar 'sighting scores' (see page 10 for definition) in the two surveys. So, although small differences in sightings cannot be regarded as significant, it is clear that those species listed in Table 1 have shown definite increases or decreases during the 10 years. The results from the earlier survey were reported in some detail in 'Wildlife and its Conservation in Henley-on-Thames' that was published by the Henley Wildlife Group in 2003.

**Table 1 Bird species (excluding occasional visitors) showing marked increases or decreases between 2000-01 and 2010-11.**

Increases	Decreases
<b>In and over survey gardens (sighting score &gt; 75 % greater in 2010-11 than in 2000-2001)</b>	<b>In and over survey gardens (sighting score &gt; 50 % less in 2010-11 than in 2000-2001)</b>
Buzzard	Goldcrest
Goldfinch	Green woodpecker
Jackdaw	House martin
Long-tailed tit	House sparrow
Red kite	Mistle thrush
Redwing	Rook
Ring-necked parakeet *	Treecreeper
Siskin	
Sparrowhawk	
<b>Non-garden locations</b>	<b>Non-garden locations</b>
Egyptian goose *	Swallow

\* not seen at all in 2000-01

In total, 59 different species were reported from the Garden Survey. They were seen either in or flying over the gardens taking part in the survey. Some species, of course, were seen only during the winter and others only during the summer, and some only on rare occasions. Table 2 shows the 40 species seen most commonly in the garden survey, listed in rank order of sighting score for the year as a whole. The table also includes their rank order in Henley in 2000-01 and their rank order in the national BTO Garden Birdwatch for the period July 2010 – June 2011. In addition, the sighting scores are given separately for each of four quarters of the year in the recent survey.

**Table 2. The 40 species recorded most commonly in the Henley Garden Bird Survey of 2010-11, ranked in order of 'sighting score' for the year as a whole. Other columns show the rank order of the species in the survey of 2000-01 and their rank order in the national BTO Garden Birdwatch for the period July 2010 – June 2011. Finally the actual 'sighting scores' for the two Henley surveys and for each quarter of the survey period in 2010-11 are included.**

Species	Ranking			Sighting score					
	Year, 2010-11	Year, 2000-01	BTO	Year, 2010-11	Year, 2000-01	Jan - Mar	April - June	July - Sept	Oct - Dec
Wood pigeon	1	2	2=	83	69	88	87	73	83
Blackbird	2	1	2=	76	74	86	88	65	66
Blue tit	3	3	1	76	68	83	71	71	80
Red kite	4	17		67	15	68	72	62	68
Robin	5	4	4	59	65	71	64	43	58
Great tit	6	10	5	57	35	60	53	54	60
Dunnock	7	8	6	55	43	55	61	53	50
Chaffinch	8	5	7	49	48	57	49	41	47
Collared dove	9	9	8	35	40	37	36	35	30
Magpie	10	6	9	34	45	37	38	31	32
Greenfinch	11	7	12	31	45	34	32	30	28
Carrion crow	12	12	16	31	24	35	35	26	27
Goldfinch	13	19	11	24	14	24	24	20	27
Coal tit	14	13	14	20	21	20	11	20	28
Starling	15	15	13	15	19	15	23	8	10
Song thrush	16	16	21	15	17	19	23	15	6
Great spotted woodpecker	17	20	15	15	12	15	12	14	17
Long tailed tit	18	28	19	11	3	21	6	7	11
Black-headed gull	19	23	30	10	7	16	1	2	21
Wren	20	18	20	10	15	10	12	8	9
Nuthatch	21	21	18	8	9	9	6	7	9
Jackdaw	22	33	17	7	3	8	9	5	6
Pheasant	23	29		7	4	9	5	2	9
Bullfinch	24	21	26	6	8	7	7	6	5
Jay	25	24	22	6	7	8	5	3	7
Swift	26	26		5	6	0	16	6	0
House sparrow	27	11	10	5	32	6	6	5	3
Blackcap	28	32	25	3	3	8	<1	0	1
House martin	29	25		3	6	0	3	7	0
Redwing	30	35		2	1	2	0	1	7
Siskin	31	36	28	2	1	6	1	0	2
Pied wagtail	32	30	24	2	4	4	<1	0	4
Green woodpecker	33	27		1	5	2	<1	1	2
Tawny owl	34	40		2	1	3	3	1	1
Buzzard	35			1		1	2	1	1
Swallow	36	38		1	1	0	<1	3	0
Fieldfare	37	44		1	<1	<1	0	0	3
Sparrowhawk	38	45	22	<1	<1	<1	1	<1	1
Ring-necked parakeet	39			<1		<1	1	0	0
Mistle thrush	40	31	31	<1	1	<1	<1	<1	1

In general for the year as a whole, and in each quarter separately, the three species seen most frequently were wood pigeon, blackbird and blue tit, and these same species also topped the lists for the 2000-01 Henley survey and the BTO survey. The one exception to this general statement was the red kite which crept into the no.3 position in two of the quarters. Again if the red kite is omitted, the robin was the fourth most frequently sighted bird in all three annual surveys (Table 2).

Notable increases were shown by red kite, buzzard, long-tailed tit, and jackdaw, whose sighting scores more than doubled. The most notable decreases were shown by goldcrest, green woodpecker, house sparrow, mistle thrush and treecreeper.

In addition to the species included in Table 2, a number of others were occasional visitors to gardens but were too infrequent for a comparison with the previous survey to be reliable. These occasional visitors are listed in Table 3.

**Table 3. Occasional visitors in or over gardens in 2010-11**

Brambling	Hobby *
Canada goose *	Kestrel *
Chiffchaff	Linnet
Cormorant *	Raven *
Fieldfare	Reed bunting
Goldcrest	Rook *
Great black backed gull *	Swan
Grey wagtail	Treecreeper
Herring gull *	Yellow wagtail
Heron	

\* flying over

As would be expected, there were marked differences between the Henley gardens in the number of species seen during the year, the range being 17 to 51. The differences reflected various factors including location, the extent to which food was provided, the expertise of the observers and, no doubt, the numbers of predators such as cats.

Goldcrest: this one was apparently stunned by colliding with a window in Station Road and was taken to a nearby house to recover.



Siskin: an irregular visitor to Henley gardens, usually in the winter months



Green woodpecker: occasionally seen in town gardens, usually feeding on a lawn.



## Birds in non-garden locations of Henley

The most important non-garden bird habitat within the town boundary is the river and riverbank, and species seen in this area are included in Table 4. A few, such as Canada goose and swan, were also seen flying over gardens (see Tables 2 and 3). Other open spaces within the town boundary, such as the areas of allotments and part of Lambridge Wood, produced few additional species, though there were several reports of tawny owl being heard and three reports of cuckoo. In total, the non-garden locations produced sightings of nine species not seen at all in the gardens. The river also yielded more frequent sightings of some species, such as mallard and swallow, that were seen only occasionally in the Garden Survey.

**Table 4. Birds recorded in non-garden locations of Henley (more commonly than in or over gardens).**

Black-headed gull	Hobby
Canada goose	Herring gull
Common gull	Lesser spotted woodpecker
Common tern	Mallard
Coot	Moorhen
Cormorant	Pochard
Cuckoo	Sand martin
Egyptian goose	Swallow
Great crested grebe	Swan
Greylag goose	Tufted duck
Grey wagtail	Waxwing
Heron	

Overall, the total number of bird species seen within the town boundary during the years 2010 and 2011 was 70, which compares with 69 in 2000-01.

## Birds of nearby parishes

### Garden birds

The garden bird survey was completed by two observers in the nearby villages of Stoke Row and Cookley Green and, as would be expected, their sightings included a few species that were not seen at all in the Henley gardens (Table 5). For many species the average sighting scores for these two gardens were similar to those for the Henley gardens but some species were seen more often in the villages (Table 5). In contrast, black-headed gull and wood pigeon were seen much less than in Henley.

**Table 5. Birds reported in gardens at Stoke Row and/or Cookley Green and not seen, or seen much less often, in Henley gardens.**

<b>Seen in village gardens but not at all in Henley gardens</b>	<b>Seen in village gardens much more often than in Henley gardens</b>
Cuckoo	Chaffinch
Garden warbler	Goldcrest
Marsh tit	Great spotted woodpecker
Red-legged partridge	Jay
Skylark	Nuthatch
Stock dove	Pheasant
Yellow hammer	

### **Birds of non-garden locations**

The birds in the parishes around Henley have not been surveyed comprehensively but, overall, include all those reported from Henley itself. Additional species, not included in Tables 2, 4 or 5, that have been seen in surrounding parishes during 2010-11 are listed in Table 6.

**Table 6. Non-garden birds of surrounding parishes seen during 2010-11 that are not included in Tables 2, 4 or 5.**

<b>Species</b>	<b>Parish where seen</b>
Barn owl	Hambleden
Kingfisher	Hambleden, Shiplake
Little owl	Hambleden
Meadow pipit	Hambleden, Remenham
Merlin	Remenham
Reed warbler	Hambleden
Sedge warbler	Shiplake
Spotted flycatcher	Fawley
Tree sparrow	Remenham
Willow warbler	Hambleden, Fawley, Bix
Whitethroat	Rotherfield Greys

Ring-necked parakeet: a species new to Henley that could, in future, have a negative impact through competition with native species.



Sparrowhawk: an occasional visitor to Henley gardens, more common in the countryside.



Spotted flycatcher: last seen in the town of Henley in 2001 but seen more recently in the surrounding countryside.



## Comments on noteworthy species

**Blackcap** Wintering blackcaps were reported from 10 of the Henley gardens. This reflects the trend for birds of this species from Central Europe to migrate westwards rather than to the south. Blackcaps also nest in the areas surrounding Henley.

**Buzzard** Seen on several occasions flying over Henley gardens and, of course, over surrounding areas. Once common in much of the UK, the buzzard had become rare in lowland areas by the early 1900s due largely to the actions of gamekeepers, and it was further reduced in numbers a few decades later through the use of insecticides such as DDT. More recently it has been increasing its range again in the south and east of England. An observer at Cookley Green witnessed a buzzard defending its ownership of a dead pigeon against a red kite: the buzzard won. At least one pair nested in woodland near Rotherfield Greys, during the summer of 2011.

**Egyptian goose** This species is a relative newcomer to the Henley area, not being seen at all in 2000-01. A substantial flock spent much of the winter of 2010-11 on and around the meadows near Fawley Court, up to 48 being counted on one occasion. Egyptian geese were introduced to the UK as ornamental wildfowl in the 1700s and until recently occurred mainly in parklands in East Anglia. At least one pair bred close to Henley in 2011, and the adults and up to eight young were attracted to the riverside in the town by passers-by offering food to the various ducks and geese.

**Hobby** The hobby, which is a type of falcon, is a summer visitor. In appearance it is like a large swift, with long pointed wings. It feeds on large insects and small birds and often hunts for its prey in the late evening. In recent years a pair is thought to have been based in woodland in the grounds of Park Place. There have been occasional sightings, especially from the riverbank beyond Marsh Lock.

**House martin** House martins have suffered a substantial decline. In 2003 it was reported that, in 2001, 2002 and 2003, there were small colonies of four-six nests in both St Mark's Road and Berkshire Road whereas, in 2010 and 2011, there were only one or two nests in St Mark's Road and none at all in Berkshire Road. However, martins did continue to nest on the Leander Club building (just outside the town boundary) under the eaves on the downstream side.

**House sparrow** The house sparrow has a very localised distribution within Henley, apparently even more so than in 2000-01. It was seen fairly regularly in only four of the gardens and not at all in the majority.

**Raven** The raven, like the buzzard, was once widespread across the country but its population was greatly reduced by gamekeepers concerned about its predation of young game birds. It is currently extending its range again from the upland and coastal areas of the west into the lowland areas of southern and eastern England. Hence the occasional sightings over Henley and reports of nesting in the surrounding Chiltern countryside.

**Red kite** In the recent survey, the red kite was the fourth most commonly sighted bird in or over Henley gardens, a situation that it would have been impossible to envisage 25 years ago. However after being re-introduced to the Chilterns in 1989, the red kite slowly became a regular feature of the sky over Henley, and in the survey of 2000-01 was 17th in rank order of sighting score. Since then it has become even more numerous and widespread.

**Ring-necked parakeet** Like the Egyptian goose, the ring-necked parakeet is new to Henley since the previous survey. And like the Egyptian goose, its origin as a 'wild' bird in the UK was as an escapee, or possibly a deliberate release, from captivity. The population of ring-necked parakeets is expanding from its centre in the west London area, one direction being along the Thames valley. There has been a small colony based in tall trees by the river at Aston during the past few years and several parakeets have also been seen on a number of occasions in trees by the river near Shiplake. Small numbers (1-4) were seen in five Henley gardens during the spring of 2011, in at least one instance eating voraciously from feeders holding nuts and seeds. With an increasing population nationally, the parakeet has the potential to cause substantial damage to native wildlife and to crops.

**Spotted flycatcher** The spotted flycatcher, like the willow warbler, is a species that has shown a marked decline nationally. In the report on the previous survey it was noted that at least two pairs were present in Henley in early July 2001, one (or two) in the Church Street/Norman Avenue area and the other near the river in Mill Lane. However, none were seen in the summers of 2002 and 2003. And none have been reported in the town since, indicating that its disappearance from Henley is a long-term loss. This may reflect unfavourable conditions on the migration route through southern Europe and Africa rather than in Henley. However a pair were reported to be nesting at Fawley in 2011.

**Swift** Although Henley's population of swifts appears to have shown little change during the past 10 years, several observers have confirmed that it declined substantially during the period between about 30 years ago and 10 years ago. Certainly there was a loss of previously long-term nesting sites during this period, due to various roof renovations.

**Waxwing** Waxwings arrive in UK in substantial numbers in certain winters, of which 2010-11 was one. A flock of about 65 was seen in the Waitrose car-park in Henley in January 2011 and smaller groups were seen in the town at various times during a period of a few weeks in January/February. Henley's previous visitation by waxwings was in February-March 2005 when similar numbers were seen, though more consistently and over a rather longer period. The arrival of waxwings in this country is thought to be related to a poor supply of food, particularly berries, in Scandinavia.

**Willow warbler** The willow warbler has undergone a major decline in southern Britain. This may be related to the fact that it migrates to sub-Saharan Africa in winter, in contrast to the chiffchaff which migrates to areas around the Mediterranean and whose population has been more stable.

**Yellow wagtail** Rather surprisingly, a yellow wagtail was reported from a garden in Henley, about 250 metres away from the river, a sighting that repeated previous autumn visits by this species, and similar occasional visits from a grey wagtail. It is thought that these birds were attracted, while flying over, by the sight of running water in the garden.

## **APPENDIX: Methodology of the Garden Bird Survey**

In the recent survey, as in the survey of 2000-01, the householders of about 27 gardens contributed and 24 completed the full year (23 in 2000-01). Most of the gardens were of medium size, none being of more than 1/3 acre, and a few were less than 1/20 acre. The majority were in the south and west parts of the town. The participants were asked to allocate the various bird species seen during each week to one of three categories: (i) seen once, (ii) seen 2-5 times or (iii) seen 6 times or more. Results were collected on a quarterly basis from May 2010 but were assessed on the basis of the quarters January-March, April-June, July-September and October-December, in order to be consistent with the earlier survey. An assessment was then made of how commonly each species was seen by calculating a 'sighting score' for the quarter, on the following basis: category (i) = 1 point, category (ii) = 3 points, and category (iii) = 6 points. The sighting scores for each of the 24 gardens for each quarter were then divided by the number of weeks in which observations were carried out (in order to allow for absences on holiday etc.) thus producing an average weekly score for each species. The average weekly scores were then totalled for all 24 gardens. Finally, the species scores for each quarter were totalled and expressed as a percentage of the maximum possible score (viz 576, which would occur if the particular species were seen at least six times per week in every garden:  $6 \times 24 \times 4$ ).

It should be appreciated that the score for any species represents birds actually seen and noted, and does not provide a measure of the population of a particular species in Henley. It is inevitable that large birds, such as the wood pigeon, are seen more readily than smaller birds such as the wren, and that easily identifiable birds, such as the robin, are noted more reliably than, say, siskin. Also, some birds such as red kites and swifts regularly fly over a wide area, and so one individual may be noted over several gardens. Finches and tits also search widely for food over areas that may include many gardens plus parts of the surrounding countryside, whereas other species, such as the robin and dunnock, are much more sedentary. The results of the survey are also influenced, inevitably, by the amount of time the observers spent looking out for birds, and this varied widely amongst the households. Another point to consider is that almost all householders participating in the survey attracted birds to their gardens by providing food, and often water, and so would undoubtedly see more birds than the average for Henley. However, similar comments apply also to other garden bird surveys, including the BTO Garden Birdwatch.

Report compiled by David C Whitehead, September 2011.

Photographs, all taken locally, by Ashley Stow.

Page setting by Chris Ash.

## A selection of river birds

Egyptian goose: new to Henley during the past 10 years but now well established.



Moorhen: usually present somewhere on the river or river-bank



Tufted duck: often seen, especially in winter, on the Thames but away from the busiest section near Henley Bridge.



Cormorant: often to be seen perched on stumps or dead branches on the islands towards Marsh Lock.



Black-headed gull: in autumn/winter plumage, without its black head.

