

Bexley Bird Report

July – December 2015



Compiled by

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Key to some of most frequently mentioned sites – BP = Braeburn Park, BPW = Bexley Park Woods, CW = Chalk Wood, CX = Crossness, CM = Crayford Marshes, CMW – Corinthian Manorway Belvedere, DP = Danson Park, EWOS = East Wickham Open Space, FCM = Foots Cray Meadows, GL = The Glade/Lamorbey Park, HP – Hall Place, LAW = Lesnes Abbey Woods, MG = Martens Grove, SL = Southmere Lake, SP = Sidcup Place, TRW = Thames Road Wetland – Barnes Cray, UCF = Upper College Farm, YA = York Avenue.

This past six months seem to me to have been dominated by winds and latterly an extraordinarily mild autumn/winter with a significant amount of rain thrown in but no frosts. The mild weather has kept many of our common birds away from gardens and in seemingly lower numbers everywhere – clearly the thrushes/finches and other species that would normally evacuate continental Europe and take advantage of our milder weather haven't found the need to move in such huge numbers – this is reflected in the reports. It is also true of wildfowl with numbers of wigeon and gadwall lower than normal.

I have asked before for records of roosting sites for starling and house sparrow – more references in the report. I would like to add another species to that list – little egret, now often seen in Bexley albeit in very small numbers – up to three birds are occasionally seen flying together late afternoon – where are they roosting? Can anyone throw any light on this or other roost sites please? The pied wagtail roost in the Broadway seems to have moved.

Once again I am indebted to those sending records to me directly or reports to <http://londonbirders.wikia.com/wiki/LatestNews> . I would like to note special thanks to those who regularly contribute: John Archer, Steve Carter, Phil Cliffe, Stephen Gatley, Mike Robinson, Chris Rose, Ian Stewart, Karen Sutton (on behalf of Friends of Crossness) and John Turner plus a special welcome return to Kev Jarvis who is the eyes of Crayford Marshes. I've said before, the report is only as detailed and comprehensive as the records received allow – it is not exhaustive or intended to cover every species. I would encourage you to please either report to GiGL, BTO BirdTrack or directly to me via text 07947 855054 or email rbtodd@btinternet.com Any errors are completely my responsibility and my apologies if I have missed or incorrectly reported any records or not mentioned you by name. Thanks also to the photographers who have submitted images of their sightings.

Wildfowl and Wetland Birds

Little grebe were present on most suitable areas of open water across the Borough and possibly bred on many of them – adults with juveniles were only seen at DP from 21st July otherwise six at CX 23rd July, five FCM on 18th and four GL 21st December were highest recorded. **Great crested grebes** once again bred successfully at DP and SL, only other records were birds offshore from CX and CM.

Mute Swan bred at four locations, with a pair also present at GL, over 50 present SL most months with 71 21st October. **Egyptian geese** continue to range around the Borough - highest number at DP, 12 in September and six each GL/SL in winter. **Shelduck** were present along Thames each month except September, 53 CX 9th July the highest count. Six **wigeon** seen on 28th September CX were the first of autumn with five CM on 9th October – numbers never exceeded 41 (CX 23rd November). Single figure **gadwall** hung around usual places all summer into late autumn most at CX though up to four DP/FCM. Around 50 were occasionally recorded at CX with 70 on 6th December the peak. Inland eight at FCM 5th November and four DP 8th/14th October were highest recorded. All summer records for **teal** were from CX until a single at CM on 20th August, numbers began to increase at CX from 16th August (180), 453 7th and 724 15th September, highest count of period was 803 CX on 5th October. Inland a single juvenile was at DP from 5th September followed by a pair around the Bog Garden end of the lake from 19th October, from 3rd November only a male was present with two seen on 21st December. Peak **mallard** counts for inland sites were 100 DP 27th October, 53 FCM 27th July and 28 Hall Place 9th October and 32 GL 18th November/9th December.

Most **shoveler** records are from CX, peak 50 23rd November/23rd December – none from CM. Inland one eclipse bird present DP last two weeks September to 1st October then two from 3rd November-3rd December with eight on 25th November. Single male was seen on Thamesmead Ecological Study area – Templar Drive 29th December.

Recent reports state **Pochard** is a declining and threatened species – something we've been suggesting based on Bexley records for some time. Just 13 records from CX of up to seven birds, mostly in the Protected area. Twelve were recorded at SL on 10th December, now unfortunately an exceptional record – only one seen here on 25th November, none again at DP. SL is also a good place for **tufted duck** with 18 seen on 29th December and at least 10 present throughout the month. FCM and GL were other good sites with birds present at the former throughout, peaking at 18 on 31st December and at the latter all bar September with up to seven on 19th/21st December.

A drake **common scoter** was seen off Thamesmead Golf centre on 12th September. **Goosander** was a bonus bird this autumn with a male DP on 25th/27th November followed by a longer staying female from 16th – 25th December – probably the same bird seen at SL on 27th December as boating disturbance at weekends seemed to have moved the bird away from DP. 14 **cormorants** seen DP on 15th September and up to 20 during December were the peak inland numbers.

At least nine **little egrets** seen CM on 3rd September - evidence of the increased number of this elegant bird that is now ever present around the Borough – interestingly there are rarely more than three at CX though 7 there on 24th July was a very good count. Also of interest, rarely seen at DP (none this period – perhaps too much activity) but seen regularly along the River Shuttle, two GL 13th October and 2 regularly FCM. There were reports of possible roosts with two or three birds often seen flying together at dusk – can anyone confirm where they might be going? Fourteen **grey heron** at DP on 14th December was exceptionally high number – three or four being the norm for this site.

Water rails have been thin on the ground with four at CX 23rd November and three FCM 15th October being highest counts with one or two being the norm – one, possibly two heard at TRW 23rd September and one at DP on four dates between 20th October-16th December. Highest **moorhen** count came from DP with 29 on 21st December; the 127 **coot** here on 25th August was surpassed by 300+ at SL on 26th December.



Wigeon Crossness

Photo Mike Robinson



Goosander Danson Park

Photo Ralph Todd

Raptors, Owls and Gamebirds

A single **quail** was seen at CX on 9th July.

Just one record for **red kite** – over FCM 8th November, by contrast **marsh harrier** is now being seen regularly – so regular they might even stick around to breed one day. A female was around CM during August/early September with 11 sightings during December of an immature male/female and also an adult male on four dates. One also present on four dates in December CX. **Common buzzard** was recorded each month; one, sometimes two birds seen flying over by observers from their gardens though more often around CM and CX where two were seen regularly during December. **Sparrowhawk** continued to be seen daily and is a growing success. **Kestrel** has been doing less well in recent years but in 2015 some breeding success at CX, CM and FCM and possibly HP - all sites where they are seen. **Hobby** not so numerous this year with occasional sightings of single birds over residential areas though one was seen with prey over YA on 1st September. The last was seen, again over YA on 1st October. **Peregrine falcon** seen regularly over the marshes, particularly CX where a pair often perched on one of the chimneys, another pair bred inland and were often perched on telegraph pylons in Albany Park/Sidcup.

Barn owl bred again at CX where one/ two birds were regularly seen until mid-November – interestingly two birds were seen at CM landfill during November. The usual **little owl** at CM became more elusive amongst the fallen willows but was seen on at least 3 occasions in August/September. **Tawny owl** heard calling

around YA/Lansdowne Rd and Harland Ave, Sidcup on five dates between 13th August-20th October. One of my highlights of the period was watching two **short-eared owls** (a first for me in the Borough) at CM on 29th December – at least one bird seen there since 25th November.



Short-eared owl Crayford Marsh



Photographs Janet Chittock

Waders

Oystercatcher numbers never exceeded four, CM 23rd July, CX 23rd September which, surprisingly, was also last date any were recorded. **Avocet** (always a lovely sight) but only two recorded, one each at CM 1st October and the foreshore off Corinthian Manorway (CMW) 22nd November. Whilst **little ringed plover** bred just outside the Borough boundary, success was not confirmed at the usual Borough site and only one record during this review CX 20th July. **Ringed plover** recorded each month with 27 CM 2nd September and 20 off CMW on 14th December being the most regular sites. 90 **golden plover** at CM 20th November best count from the only site where this wader is usually recorded. **Lapwing** present CM/CX each month with numbers picking up from the 10's to the 100's+ from 30th October peaking at c650 CM 24th and 130 CX 31st December. **Dunlin** also present each month with flocks building up from the 40-60's into early November and by December 400-500 seen at both CX and CM with c750 CM 15th and c1000 CX 21st December. Three records of **snipe** from CM with three on 1st October - otherwise CX remains the best place to find this skulking wader with 17 on 25th October. **Black-tailed godwit** whilst present every month, just a few records of single figure birds at CM though 32 12th and 52 24th December exceptional, numbers peaked at CX in October with 240 on 30th, the best place to find higher numbers is between both these site at Erith near CMW where up to 400 were present during late November and c250 during December. Just two records of **bar-tailed godwit**, two birds both CM 16th September, 1st October.

All 14 **whimbrel** records were from CM, five on 23rd July, two on 10th September last ones seen. Single **curlew** seen CM between 25th July – 2nd September, then occasionally one/two along Thames foreshore October-December with at least 10 CM on 31st December being the highest count of the year.

There was a good passage of **common sandpiper** from mid-July with 23 CM on 23rd July, 11 CX 28th August and 13 CM 4th September being the peaks, from then on through to year end just one/two at both sites. **Green sandpiper** seen at CX from 30th July (one bird) peaking at seven on 8th August, very few records from CM though five on 23rd August was the best. The annual return of the **spotted redshank** at CM was anxiously awaited and it was first sighted on 1st October and remained to the end of the year. No other records. **Greenshank**, (another traditional passage migrant that has been known to over winter) first recorded 22nd July – four at CM, rising to 10 on 6th August the last record was of four on 9th October – none at CX where last year a bird did stay throughout. **Redshank** ever present in small numbers (mainly a winter visitor) numbers didn't get into double figures until 1st September (10 CX) 100+ CM 9th October and 200+ CX 30th October – that number regularly seen during November/December CX/CMW.

Only inland record for waders was three **whimbrel** flying over YA 6th August. No grey plover, knot, little stint, sanderling, curlew sandpiper, ruff, woodcock, wood sandpiper or turnstone recorded.

Skuas, Gulls, Terns and Auks

No skuas recorded. Gulls are an under recorded/counted family – especially away from the Thames marshes. Of course many gulls favour sports pitches/amenity grassland in the autumn/winter and it is some of these

sites that seem under threat from Council proposals for sell off – more information about importance for birdlife generally and gulls in particular would be most welcome.

Black-headed gull by the far the most common/numerous – c1600 at CX 23rd September, c300 FCM 1st, c1000 CM 10th, c300 Hall Place 23rd October and c250 DP 9th/18th November suggested autumn/early winter peak. No little gulls. Only three records for **Mediterranean gull**, one CM 25th July and DP where a different bird was seen on 17th November and 3rd December. One/two **common gulls** seen during July-September mostly CM/DP, 15 seen DP 20th October peaking at 62 on 7th December - otherwise upto six along the Thames foreshore (seven CM 17th December), two Sidcup Place 2nd September and four Hall Place 3rd November – there were almost certainly more around on sport pitches/open spaces.

Crayfordness (CM) was the stronghold for autumn **yellow-legged gulls** with peak of 41 on 13th August with up to 10 still present in December (15th) though DP was also frequented on 16 dates by different birds from 14th July – 21st December. **Lesser-black backed gulls** rarely get above single figures, mostly along the Thames foreshore/DP so a peak of 20 CM 22nd July, and an exceptional c150 CX on 30th September are noteworthy. Similar story for **herring gull**, five quite regular at DP, seven FCM, 16 HP 9th October, 17 DP 17th and c60 CM 22nd July were of interest. **Great black-backed gull** were recorded even less – with mostly singles along the foreshore, 25 on 17th October CX being exceptional. It is quite likely that all these gulls could be more widely distributed and in higher numbers if records were made.

Sandwich terns were an uncommon visitor/migrant so four records from CX (2 birds on 8th and 9th August) and one of a single bird at CM on 10th September represented the autumn passage. The last **common tern** seen at CX 30th August and four at CM 16th September the last there, otherwise between 9th and 11th August was the best time for numbers passing by CX with 50 on the 9th the peak. Only four records for **Arctic tern**, six at CM on August 6th the peak and one CX on 14th was the last seen.



Wryneck – Crayford Marsh
Photo Ralph Todd



Green Woodpecker Hall Place
Photo Donna Zimmer

Doves – Wagtails

Whenever **stock doves** are shown to members on a local walk they are surprised at what an attractive dove it is – it is probably overlooked and even assumed to be a woodpigeon by some. They are never in high numbers – eight DP 28th July being highest count. FCM/CX/GL/CM were other favoured haunts but rarely seen in numbers above four. By contrast 96 **wood pigeons** was the highest count anywhere – DP 15th September. No turtle doves recorded anywhere.

The **ring-necked parakeet** roost at DP was estimated at 2360 on 19th December.

Sadly no confirmed records of **swifts** breeding though birds were present all summer with last single birds being recorded from CX 4th and Thamesmead golf course 11th September. Most records of **kingfisher** from across the Borough were of single birds with occasionally two – FCM/CX and DP.

The other highlight was another first for the Borough for me in the form of **wryneck** – found on 2nd September by Ian Stewart (as was the short-eared owl) near the Erith Yacht Club reedbed CM – also present on the 3rd but not seen again.

Both **green** and **great spotted woodpeckers** did well and widely distributed and seen in the key open spaces (DP/HP/FCM/GL) with **green woodpecker** also being seen regularly at both CX/CM.

A single **woodlark** recorded UCF 29th October. **Skylark** is currently threatened by two planning applications on the marshes, two of only three sites where this bird has been recorded. Up to five birds seen/heard CM

(22nd July) and one on three dates on the Cory/Borax fields CX. Only other record of one bird at UCF on 23rd October.

Most records of **sand martin** came from the marshes with 40 CM on 22nd August being highest count. Inland, eight FCM on 14th August and five DP 14th September were best counts with last bird seen CX 19th September. **Swallows** were a constant feature of the summer but again most records were from the marshes where a post breeding roost was established in the Erith Yacht club reedbed – c500 on 22nd and c300 on 27th August. Autumn migration was in full swing by mid-September with c450 over FCM on 13th, followed by a movement on the 18th – c400 over Horsham Road between 10/10.15am, c200 over the Broadway, 120 over FCM, 640 over Veroan Road between 8.30-1pm – an amazing sight. Last record was of 3 over YA on 22nd October. Despite requests for knowledge of breeding **house martins**, not a single record was notified although one possible successful nest was found on the edge of Crayford. Most records of birds came from CM or FCM with other occasional sightings. As with the swallow, sizeable movements of **house martins** were seen on the 18th September – 80 FCM, 210 Veroan Road, 100 YA; 250 CX on 19th, 162 Horsham Road 21st and 150 CX and CM 23rd. Last record was of 40 over CX on 17th October.

Tree pipit recorded on migration at FCM 19th/20th September. **Meadow pipit** was generally confined to the marshes and apart from fly over records only inland sightings were from FCM, single birds 15th /29th September, UCF 31st October and most unusual HP 6th September. The first **rock pipit** of winter was at Belvedere foreshore on 20th October with up to 2 being present there throughout – others were mostly from CM/CX with five at CM on 15th December being the peak. Only two records of **water pipit** both on 25th November with one each at CX/CM.

All seven records of **yellow wagtail** were between 25th August (two over FCM)-12th September (one off Thamesmead golf course), all other records from CM. **Grey wagtails** were present along the rivers Shuttle/Cray and on the marshes. The **piebald wagtail** roost in Market Square seems to have moved so 22 FCM 5th October and c50 CX 27th December are the best counts available.



Ring-necked parakeet roost Danson Park
Photo Ralph Todd



Rock pipit – Thames foreshore Corinthian Manorway
Photo Mike Robinson

Waxwing – Treecreepers

A **black redstart** was found around the foreshore near CMW on 25th November and remained until year end. A single **common redstart** was at SP on 1st September. First **whinchats** (three) of the autumn seen CM (landfill) on 22nd August, four on 27th and two CX on 30th. There were five further records from the marshes on 2nd/3rd September and singles FCM 11th and UCF 24th were the last seen. Two/three **stonechats** regularly reported from CX/CM throughout, otherwise single from UCF on 24th September/31st October were only inland records. Autumn **wheatear** records always seem less than in Spring – just nine sightings of single birds between 19th August (CX) and 24th October (CX) – one sighting CM 1st September.

First autumn thrushes were noted on visible migration (viz mig) on 14th October – 70 **fieldfare** over YA, after that 20 other observations with 22 CM 12th and again 18th December being the largest flocks. **Redwing** were also in short supply – single at FCM on 29th September was the first – followed by c250 over YA on the 14th October (viz mig) and 20 FCM 15th were the best flocks – never more than six after that.

As was witnessed on a recent group walk, **song thrush** seemed to be doing a bit better and records for the period came from a variety of locations including –BW/CM/CX/DP/FCM/GL/YA. Five at HP on 15th December was a good count. Open grassland is the best place to look for **mistle thrush** and six at HP on 23rd October was the best count.

I was told by a BTO “ringer” at CX that he had ringed 20 new **Cetti’s warblers** at CX during 2015 – an amazing figure and indicative of the increase in this species. At least one, possibly 3 birds, calling at TRW in July was encouraging of a new territory. 10 at CX 7th September and nine at CM on 9th October gave an idea of their presence. Seven were heard around Thamesmead Golf Club on 28th December but the highlight was of a single bird present at FCM between 11th September and 19th October.

Like Cetti’s, **grasshopper warbler** is more often heard than seen – one was present FCM 17th August and another at CM 7th-10th September. **Sedge warbler** is either very uncommon or under recorded – just eight records, all except two (CX) from CM where four were noted on 10th September, the last recorded there on 25th. By contrast **reed warbler** did much better – 32 CM on 22nd July and minimum 10 CX during July/August – last one seen CM 25th September. Best count for **blackcap** was 15 FCM 1st September; a bird was still present 26th November (YA). **Garden warblers** are difficult to find when singing but when quiet almost impossible so singles at DP 5th July and SP 1st September were good records. **Lesser whitethroat**, another skulking species was recorded only from CX/CM with last on 7th September. **Common whitethroat** by contrast more visible and common – 20 CM 22nd July being best count, away from the marshes FCM was only other site to record this species with four on 1st September best count – last one seen 10th September CM. A **wood warbler** was a great find and seen at DP on 16th August. 20-30 **chiffchaffs** were regularly recorded at FCM. **Chiffchaff** is by far the most numerous/widespread and common warbler in the Borough and clearly over wintering in a number of locations. By contrast **willow warbler** is quite rare, only singles usually seen so three at FCM on 30th August was a good count, of migrating birds, there were no breeding records. **Goldcrest** is seemingly doing well – widely distributed in suitable habitats – 10+ regularly seen FCM, six-ten DP, c30 GL 21st October.

Once a breeding bird in the Borough, **spotted flycatcher** now only a passage migrant – singles seen DP 16th and CX 30th August, GL 3rd, CM 10th and FCM 19th/20th September. Woodlands Farm straddles Greenwich/Bexley Borough and as such usually doesn’t feature in this report though a **spotted flycatcher** in the paddock end of Dryden Road on 1st September and a **pieb flycatcher** within the farm are worthy of note. Two **bearded tits** seemed to take up residency in the Cray reedbed adjacent CM landfill since 10th December – though elusive.

Nuthatch regularly seen DP, FCM, HP and GL with occasional sightings BPW. **Treecreeper** however remained very elusive with just two records from FCM – one on 24th and 3 25th August.



Black redstart Thames foreshore Corinthian Manorway
Photo Mike Robinson



Goldfinch Hall Place
Photo Donna Zimmer

Jay – Corn Bunting

There doesn’t appear to have been any great influx of **jays** this autumn though five FCM 15th September and GL 23rd November represent the best counts. 24 **magpies** (17 in one tree) at GL also 23rd November.

70 **jackdaws** over The Drive Bexley 26th October was an unusual record away from the usual sites (FCM/DP/GL/CM). Just three records of **rook** – all from CM between 3rd-25th September – two seen on 7th. Similarly with **raven**, three records of single birds CM 25th November, 15th December and YA 19th.

Always on the lookout for roosts with **starling** probably the most familiar but whilst c1000 seen CM 20th August, and between 150-800 recorded CX – still not sure where these birds might be roosting. Same with **house sparrows** – we are gaining a slightly better picture of some small roosts of up to 40 birds (Erith School), 79 Northumberland Heath Recreation Ground and 13 Colyers Lane Barnehurst – a better understanding of these roosts and others would be most welcome.

Just one winter **brambling** record of one on Coldblow Field – Joydens Wood 12th November. **Greenfinch** continued to struggle with a couple in DP until 20th October, up to five HP, one FCM and up to 12 on the marshes. **Goldfinch** however went in the opposite direction, widely distributed and in increasing numbers – upwards of 100 at CM (c200 on 20th August), 30-50 CX, c35 FCM. Single **siskin** seen FCM 15th-24th August – small flocks then being seen from 12th September (11 Thamesmead golf course), 30 FCM 19th September then 60 Baldwyns Park Road – regularly seen FCM/DP to end of year. **Linnets** were generally found only along the marshes though a flock of six FCM 13th September, 22 Kelsey’s Farm (North Cray Road) 22nd November, 50 Coldblow Field were the only inland sightings. **Lesser redpoll** records were scarce – just seven this period. Five from FCM with a maximum of four birds, three DP 20th October and nine CX 25th. **Bullfinch**, another scare bird – five records from FCM with peak of five birds on 1st September and two records from SP - four birds on 1st September. No inland records for **reed bunting** – seven CM 9th/10th September and four CX 23rd November highest counts. Only three **corn bunting** records between 1 and 3 birds 22nd-25th July.

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