



# FRIENDS OF MARKSTAKES COMMON

9<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL REPORT 2017 - 18

# Ninth Annual Report

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**Chairman – Rupert Hall**

**Treasurer/Membership – William Coleman**

**Secretary – Jacqui Hutson**

**Lewes D.C. Ranger – Thyone Outram**

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## Chairman's Summary

It isn't always obvious when a significant anniversary should be marked but I do believe that 2008 was the year when The Friends of Markstakes Common really got going. We had conducted site surveys, agreed a management plan and started the practical work on Monday mornings.

A ten-year anniversary is a good time to take stock and I feel that we have achieved a lot. Significant areas have been cleared, ponds improved, and the habitats have responded in a very encouraging manner with heather well established, and increased numbers of plant and insect species being recorded.

The amenity value has also improved with more open spaces and the main paths no longer overgrown and as a result the site is being more widely enjoyed.

We have, over the years built up a deep understanding of the site with full mapping of the habitats, and surveys covering all the major classes of plants and animals. When we began our survey 10 years ago, we recorded 85 species of plant. The current tally of recorded species is 190.

This reflects a great effort on the part of volunteers. Last year the Monday morning volunteers put in 645 hours of habitat management. Volunteer recorders also put in their time to produce the bird, butterfly and reptile surveys.

The site has also benefited from the greater involvement of Lewes District Council. From a low base, where they were almost unaware of the site's existence, they have taken on regular monitoring of the site for tree safety, path clearance and inappropriate encroachments and have found funds for some of the more specialist survey work. We greatly appreciate their contribution to the ongoing maintenance of the site.

Although the changes have been positive they have presented challenges. The birch, bramble and bracken need constant control. The plant life on the ponds has responded so positively to the removal of overhanging branches that an annual effort is required to prevent the pond becoming choked up. And the dog walkers and their pets seem to be leaving rather more behind them than in previous years.

Maintaining the progress, we have achieved will require ongoing efforts so if anyone can spare some time on a Monday morning they would be most welcome.

So, in conclusion a heartfelt thanks to all those who have contributed over the last 10 years and who continue to do so.

Rupert Hall

## Treasurer's Summary

Our team of volunteer members has been doing a great job with the many tasks that we become involved with. There haven't been any new members joining us for a while, but work has been going on with excellent and inspiring results.

The very modest membership amount is still £2 and thank you if you send in a cheque or pay by bank transfer. Donations are always most useful so thank you if you have done this. Thank you to the Lewes DC for their support with the bigger items too.

The accounts are set out below and we have used a little of our funds to buy new things such as gloves which we find take a bashing as it were and wear out quite quickly. 2018 is more of the same to ensure our sensitive and careful clearing and maintenance of this lovely area continues. Thank you for your support.

<b><u>FRIENDS OF MARKSTAKES COMMON</u></b>			
<b><u>Year 01/03/17 to 28/02/18</u></b>			
<b><u>INCOME &amp; EXPENDITURE</u></b>			
<b><u>INCOME</u></b>		<b><u>EXPENDITURE</u></b>	
Subscriptions	34.00	TOOLS	72.73
Donations	8.00	PRINTING	0.00
Grants	0.00	POSTAGES	0.00
Other	0.00	Other	0.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>42.00</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>72.73</b>
		Income over Expenditure	<b>30.73</b>
<b><u>BANK RECONCILIATION</u></b>			
Opening Bank Balance 01.03.17	183.97	Income over Expenditure	-30.73
		Closing Balance 28.02.18	<b>153.24</b>
<b><u>BALANCE SHEET</u></b>			
<b><u>ASSETS</u></b>			
BANK BALANCES		153.24	
OTHER ASSETS			
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>		<b>153.24</b>	
<b><u>LIABILITIES</u></b>			
CREDITORS			
OTHER LIABILITIES			
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>		<b>0.00</b>	
<b>NET ASSETS(LIABILITIES)</b>		<b>153.24</b>	

William Coleman

## Ranger's Report

The 10-year anniversary of the group also means that some of the 'newly restored' glades at Markstakes Common are nearly 10 years old now and looking settled and embedded, especially the beautiful Heather Glade where the heather continues to spread each year thanks to the hard work and commitment of the Friends

This year we have increased the light to High Pond by taking down some of the birch and Brighton Conservation Volunteers have helped us once again with controlling some of the vegetation in this pond.

Markstakes Common has light usage compared to other public sites so working on all the trees with rotten parts for safety reasons, is unnecessary on most parts of the common and we can leave the dead and dying trees as good habitat for woodpeckers, nesting birds, insects and reptiles. However, we have had contractors working on some of the trees at Markstakes Common performing safety works to trees in danger of falling on paths this year. Contractors also helped the Friends with their work in the mire this year.

Lewes District Council now shares services with Eastbourne Borough Council and the structure of the roles in the councils have changed. The Community Ranger and Assistant Community Ranger roles have been replaced with two Specialist Advisors posts who also have a remit to work on the nature areas in Eastbourne. Thyone Outram (main contact for Markstakes Common) and Kim Dawson fill the roles. Kim is new to the Council this year but already knows and loves the Common having been involved here in both reptile surveying and bat surveying as a volunteer in the past. Jasmine Owen, the previous Assistant Ranger now works for the South Downs National Park.

Lewes District Council thanks go to all the Friends for 10 years hard work and commitment with high hopes for the next 10 years.

Thyone Outram  
Lewes District Council  
Community Ranger

## Survey Reports and Results

### Butterflies

# Butterfly Transect at Markstakes Common: 2017 Summary

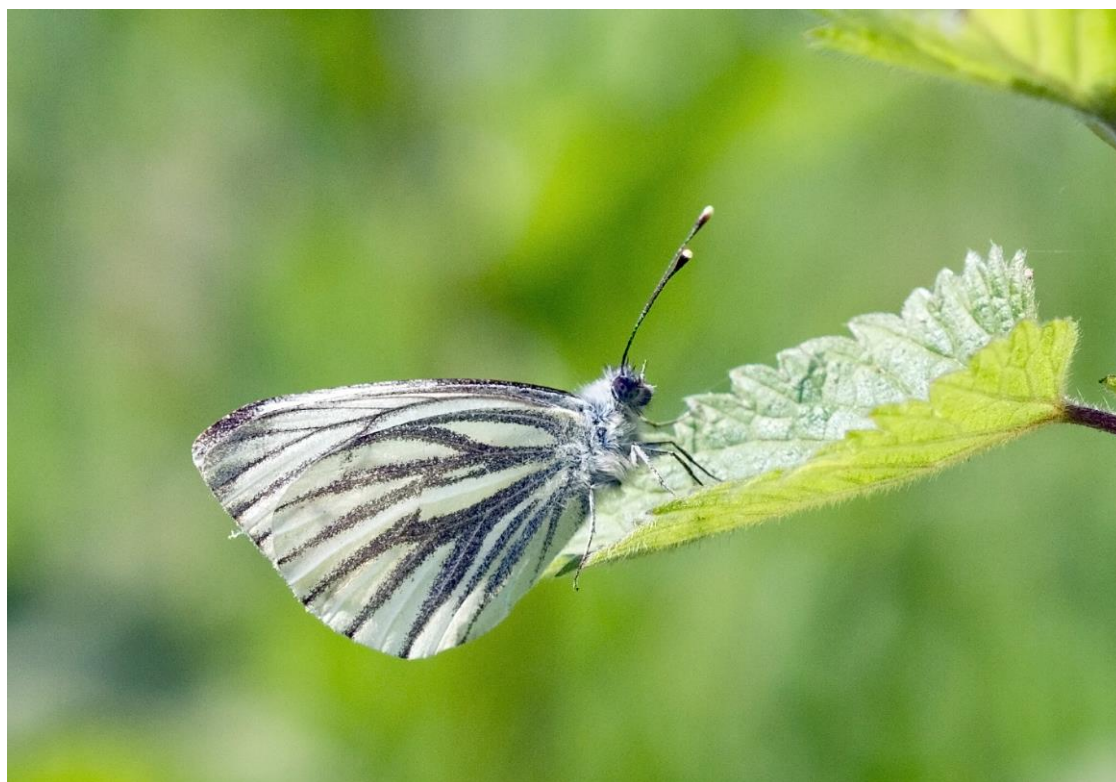


Photo: Green-veined White, Markstakes Common, 3rd June 2017, by Ian Seccombe

### Introduction

This is the sixth consecutive year of recording butterflies at Markstakes using the United Kingdom Butterfly Monitoring Scheme (UKBMS) transect method. The Markstakes transect was walked on 25 of the 26 weeks specified by the UKBMS between the beginning of April and the end of September 2017. The recorders were Rupert Hall, Ian Seccombe and Ian Woolsey.

Sightings of butterflies occurred on 24 of the transect walks. In the weeks when recordings were made 686 butterflies were recorded. The week when the transect was not walked was right in the middle of the peak season. The UKBMS algorithm provides estimates for the missing week which gives a total *estimated* abundance of 780. Compared with 2016, when only 344 butterflies were recorded, 2017 was a very

good year. The recorded number was almost double. In fact, 2017 turned out to be the best year since these surveys started in 2012, exceeding the previous best (2014) recorded total by 14%.

Perhaps the most notable feature this year, apart from the increase in overall number, was the independent sighting (IS and IW) in consecutive weeks of a Purple Hairstreak, a new species for this transect. This took the total number of species recorded at Markstakes to 26. Another highlight in 2017 was the discovery of Brown Hairstreak eggs in Markstakes Lane, not far from the start of the transect and one of the most easterly recordings of Brown hairstreak eggs for Sussex.

Having surveyed Markstakes using a consistent methodology for six years we can now begin to identify several broad trends:

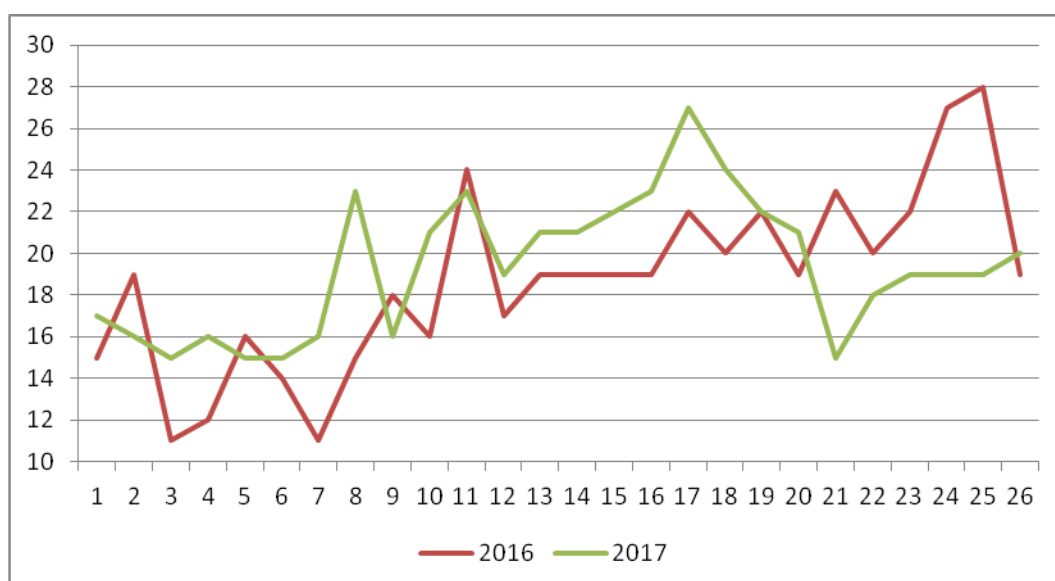
- despite an overall increase in 2017, many species are found in very small numbers, these numbers fluctuate year to year but are generally falling
- year on year we are seeing fewer spring butterflies at Markstakes
- sightings are increasingly dominated by a few, mainly grassland, species notably Meadow Brown and Gatekeeper
- the distribution of butterflies is becoming concentrated in fewer areas of Markstakes

### **Weather conditions**

Chart 1 compares the temperature record for Markstakes in 2016 and 2017, illustrating that there was a warmer spring and mid-summer but a cooler late summer. As we will see later a warm spring does not necessarily mean more butterflies.

**Chart 1 Temperature profile for Markstakes, 2016 and 2017\***

\* Values for missing weeks are interpolated



## **Trends**

With a few notable exceptions most species were present in increased numbers compared with 2016. Numerically the largest increases were amongst Meadow Browns (+215), Gatekeepers (+67), Common Blue (+25), Silver washed fritillary and Ringlet (both +15).

Despite the overall increase several species recorded a decline. Numbers of Small Skipper, Brimstone, Orange Tip, Peacock and Marbled White were all down on the previous year. For the full list of species recorded, and their abundance, over the six years see Annex.

As in previous years, a few species account for the majority of all the sightings. Meadow Brown continues to be the most abundant butterfly in Markstakes, accounting for 46% of the total. This year two species - Meadow Brown and Gatekeeper - account for more than 62% of the total. In 2012 they represented just 42%.

## **Distribution**

The records show a very uneven distribution of butterflies across Markstakes. Section G (the Mire) had 18 of the 24 species present in 2017 and 28% (194) of all recordings. Section E (which includes the butterfly glades) had 19 species and 16% of recordings. In contrast sections A and C had one and two species respectively and five or fewer records each.

Table 1 shows the number of species and butterflies in each section of the transect in 2017. In the past we have noted an increasing concentration of records with two thirds of all butterflies seen in just three sections (E, F and G) in 2016. In 2017 that trend is reversed somewhat, these three sections accounting for 53% of the total.

**Table 1 Number and distribution of species by transect section, 2017**

<b>Section</b>	<b>No. of species</b>	<b>No. of butterflies</b>	<b>% total</b>
A	1	4	0.6
B	12	47	6.9
C	2	5	0.7
D	12	86	12.5
E	19	106	15.5
F	10	61	8.9
G	18	194	28.3
H	15	113	16.5
I	5	10	1.5
J	6	12	1.7
K	8	24	3.5
L	8	24	3.5



Meadow Brown was the only species recorded in all 12 sections. Other species with a widespread distribution included Silver-washed fritillary, which was present in 9 sections, while Large White and Peacock were both recorded in eight sections.

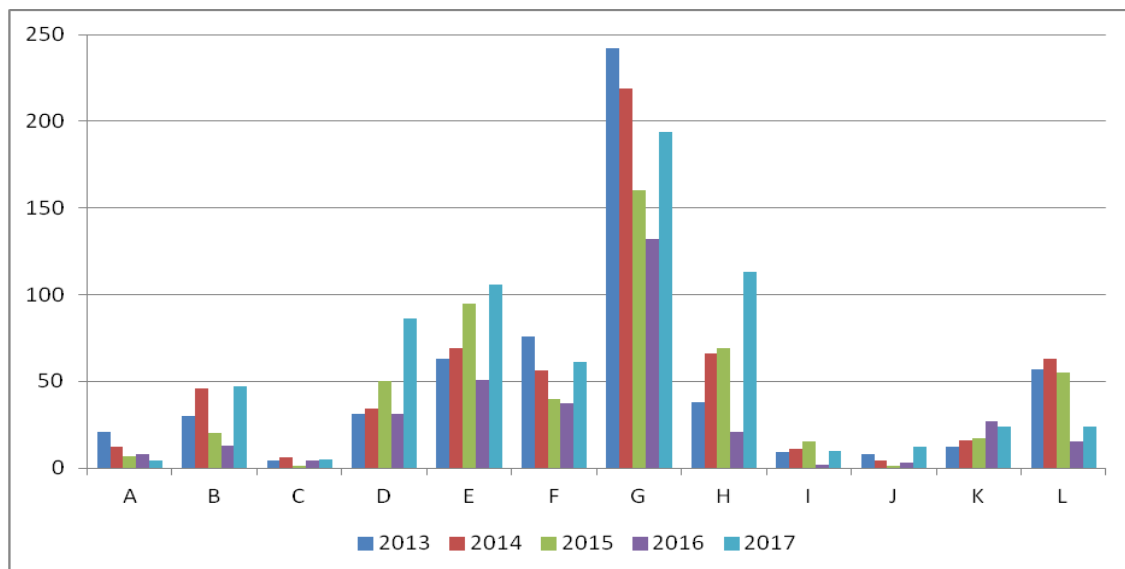
Table 2 shows the changing percentage distribution of butterflies by section over time. The main trends are the declining share of sections F, G (the mire) and L, and the increase in section H. Section L, which runs along the northern edge of the bracken field consistently accounted for about 10% of records each year up to and including 2015. In 2016 its share slumped to less than five percent and in 2017 was only 3.5%. Total number of butterflies in section L in 2017 was 24 compared with between 55 and 63 in the three years 2013 to 2015.

**Table 2 Distribution (%) of butterflies by transect sub-section, 2013-17**

Section	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
A	3.6	2.0	1.3	2.3	0.6
B	5.1	7.6	3.8	3.8	6.9
C	0.7	1.0	0.2	1.2	0.7
D	5.2	5.6	9.4	9.0	12.5
E	10.7	11.5	17.9	14.8	15.5
F	12.9	9.3	7.5	10.8	8.9
G	40.9	36.4	30.2	38.4	28.3
H	6.4	11.0	13.0	6.1	16.5
I	1.5	1.8	2.8	0.6	1.5
J	1.4	0.7	0.2	0.9	1.7
K	2.0	2.7	3.2	7.8	3.5
L	9.6	10.5	10.4	4.4	3.5

Chart 2 below shows how the number of butterflies recorded in each section has varied from year to year over the past five years.

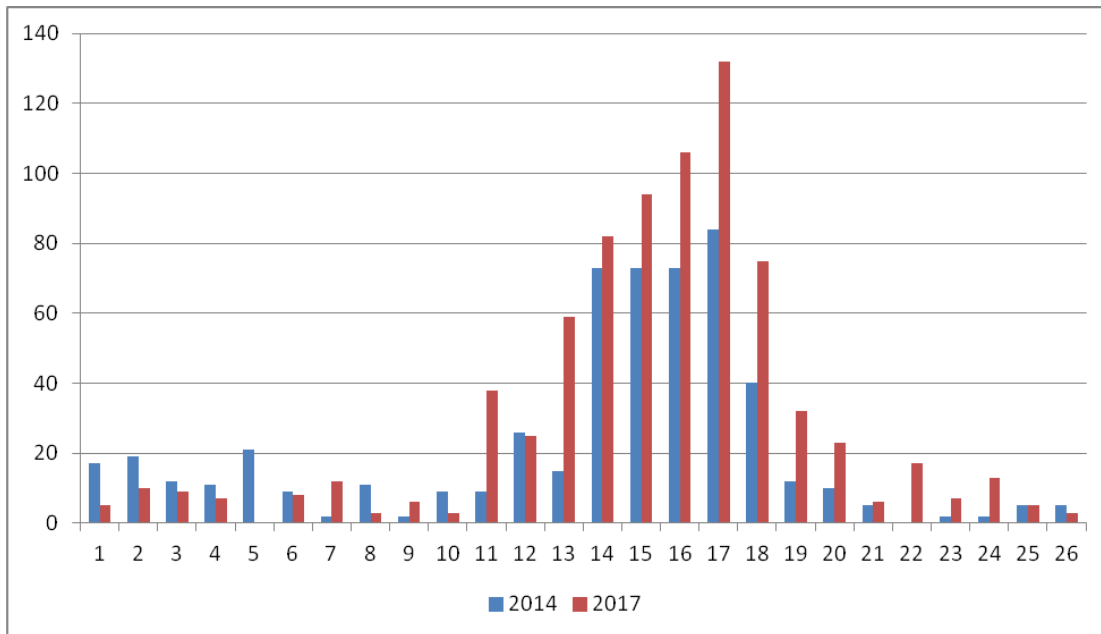
**Chart 2 Abundance by transect section, 2013-2017**



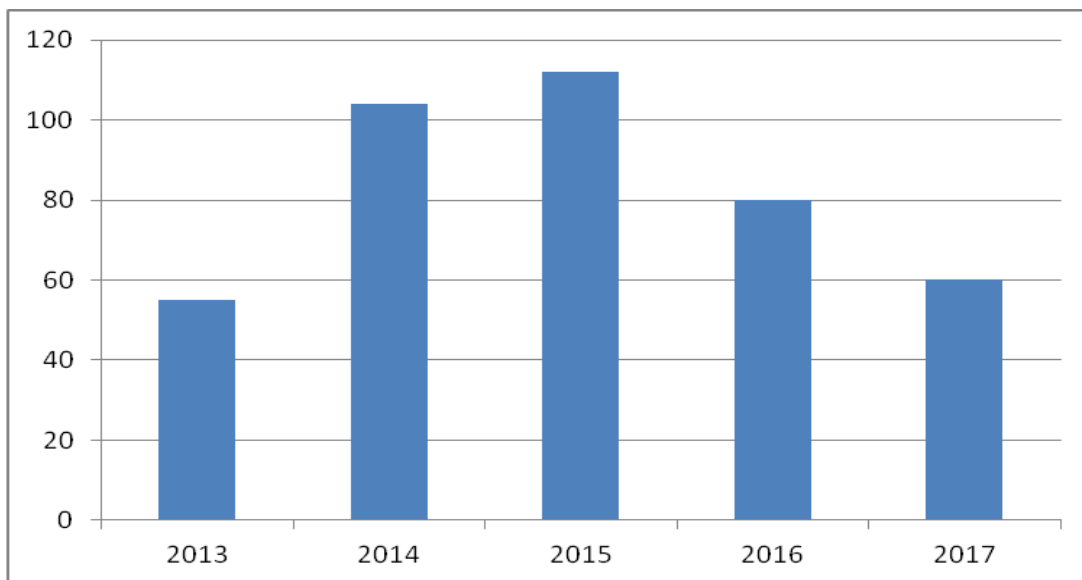
## Flight Times

Chart 3 below compares the number of butterflies recorded each week in 2014 (the previous best year) and 2017. It shows that the early season was poorer than in 2014, with only 60 butterflies recorded in April and May compared with 104 in the same months of 2014. In fact, spring 2017 was even worse than spring 2016 when we recorded 80 butterflies in an otherwise very poor year. Year on year the number of butterflies recorded in spring seems to be falling (Chart 4).

**Chart 3 Number of butterflies by week, 2014 and 2017**



**Chart 4 Number of butterflies recorded in April and May 2013 to 2017**



The overall increase in numbers is mainly due to a few weeks in mid-summer. In July 2017 we recorded 489 butterflies (that's more than we recorded in the whole of 2016) compared with 343 in July 2014. Numbers dropped off rapidly from mid-August. and only 28 butterflies were recorded in September.

### Annex: Number of butterflies recorded by species, 2012-2017

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Small Skipper	2	6	57	34	11	7
Large Skipper	4	4	5	5	1	4
Brimstone	8	29	32	41	23	15
Large White	22	73	33	24	23	30
Small White	3	4	12	2		2
Green veined white	6	16	2	3		6
Orange Tip	10	5	5	12	3	1
Clouded Yellow		2	1			
Small Copper	1	8	4	2	5	7
Holly Blue	1	1	3	2	4	4
Common Blue		15	33	14		25
White Admiral	9	10	6	2	4	5
Red Admiral	5	3	13	4	5	12
Peacock	8	20	51	42	48	25
Comma	4	10	6	10	7	8
Silver Washed Fritillary	14	35	28	15	12	27
Small Tortoiseshell		3	11	3	1	
Painted Lady		1		1	1	
Marbled White		6	7	14	16	14
Purple Emperor			1	1	1	2
Purple Hairstreak						1
Speckled Wood	54	55	29	21	32	43
Gatekeeper	36	44	63	77	45	112
Meadow brown	83	225	197	178	102	317
Small Heath	7	12	3	12	1	2
Ringlet		3		11	1	16

## Birds

Our survey for 2017 showed some 43 species which was 1 up on the 42 seen on the last survey in 2016. This year I carried out a similar number of surveys, 11 in total, starting in February and ending in December.

Species	Common Name	Distribution	2015	2016	2017
<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Mallard	Seen on high pond	P	P	P
<i>Milvus milvus</i>	Red Kite	One seen this year	NS	NS	P
<i>Buteo buteo</i>	Buzzard	Regularly seen overhead	O(4)	O(3)	O(3)
<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	Sparrow hawk	Not seen this year	NS	NS	NS
<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Kestrel	1 male seen several times hunting	P	P	P
<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	Pheasant	Occasional birds seen in woods	P	P	P
<i>Scolopax Rusticola</i>	Woodcock	Not seen	NS	P	NS

<i>Larus Canus</i>	Common Gull	Group seen overflying	O(6)	O(3)	O(5)
<i>Larus argentatus</i>	Herring Gull	Group seen overflying	O(3)	NS	O(5)
<i>Columba Oenas</i>	Stock Dove	Male heard calling several times	P	P	P
<i>Columba palumbus</i>	Wood Pigeon	At least 7 breeding territories	6	6	7
<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	Cuckoo	Not heard this year	P	NS	NS
<i>Strix Aluco</i>	Tawny Owl	Not seen or heard this year	P	P	NS
<i>Alcedo Atthis</i>	Kingfisher	Not seen	NS	NS	NS
<i>Apus apus</i>	Swift	Not seen this year	NS	NS	NS
<i>Picus Viridis</i>	Green Woodpecker	Occasionally seen or heard	P	P	P
<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	Greater Spotted Woodpecker	2 confirmed breeding territories	2	2	2
<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Swallow	Seen overflying	O(7)	O(4)	O(5)
<i>Delichon urbica</i>	House Martin	Occasionally seen overhead	O(2)	O(5)	O(18)
<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	Grey Wagtail	One seen on the Deep Pond	P	NS	P
<i>Motacilla alba</i>	Pied Wagtail	Seen this year several times	P	P	P
<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	Wren	At least 9 breeding territories	8	7	9
<i>Prunella modularis</i>	Dunnock	At least 1 breeding territories	1	1	1
<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Robin	At least 9 breeding territories	8	7	9
<i>Turdus merula</i>	Blackbird	At least 10 breeding territories	10	9	10
<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	Fieldfare	Not seen this year	O(7)	O(5)	NS
<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	Song Thrush	At least 3 breeding territories	4	3	4
<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	Redwing	Migrant group seen feeding	O(14)	O(20)	O(5)
<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	Mistle Thrush	Seen several times	P	P	P
<i>Sylvia communis</i>	Whitethroat	1 possible breeding territory	2	2	1
<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	Blackcap	At least 4 breeding territories	3	2	4
<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	Chiffchaff	At least 8 breeding territories	7	7	8
<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	Willow Warbler	Several migrants seen this year	NS	NS	P
<i>Regulus regulus</i>	Goldcrest	3 possible breeding pairs	2	2	3
<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	Long tailed Tit	At least 3 family parties seen	3	2	3
<i>Parus ater</i>	Coal Tit	Occasional sightings of 2 pairs	2	2	2
<i>Parus caeruleus</i>	Blue Tit	At least 23 breeding territories	25	23	23
<i>Parus major</i>	Great Tit	At least 7 breeding territories	8	8	7
<i>Sitta europaea</i>	Nuthatch	At least 3 breeding territories	3	3	3
<i>Certhia familiaris</i>	Treecreeper	At least 2 breeding territories	2	2	2
<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	Jay	At least 1 breeding territories	1	1	1
<i>Pica pica</i>	Magpie	1 possible breeding territory	P	1	1
<i>Corvus monedula</i>	Jackdaw	At least 2 breeding territories	2	2	2
<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	Rook	Seen overflying	O(7)	O(6)	O(5)
<i>Corvus corone</i>	Carrion Crow	At least 2 breeding territories	2	2	2
<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Starling	Small flocks seen during year	O(14)	O(7)	O(7)
<i>Passer Domesticus</i>	House Sparrow	Small group near stables	P	P	P
<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Chaffinch	At least 3 breeding territories	3	3	3
<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	Greenfinch	Not seen	NS	NS	NS
<i>Carduelis Carduelis</i>	Goldfinch	Seen feeding on grasses in mire	O(2)	O(3)	O(5)
<i>Carduelis Cannabina</i>	Linnet	Small group seen	O(3)	NS	P
<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	Bullfinch	Only 1 pair seen several times	1	1	1
<b>Totals =</b>			43	42	43
<b>Recorders</b>			IW	IW	IW
<b>Number = breeding pairs; P = Present; O = Overflying (no.); NS = Not seen</b>					

Recorders were Rupert Hall and Ian Woolsey in 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and Ian Woolsey in 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017.

Amongst the more notable breeding successes this year were the **Blue Tits** with at least twenty-three breeding territories, **Blackbirds** with 10, **Great Tits** with 7, **Robins** and

**Wrens** with at least 9 breeding territories each, Chiffchaffs had at least eight territories, but **Chaffinches** were only three. Again, several pairs of **Greater Spotted Woodpeckers, Nuthatches** and **Tree Creepers** appeared to have been successful. Again, because of the extended survey period, we were again able to pick up winter migrants and the sighting of **Redwings** helped to increase the number of species seen.

Note: -

Total species seen over last 9 surveys: -

2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
35	45	46	47	46	45	43	42	43