

**THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF
KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA**

BOROUGH BREEDING BIRD SURVEY
2003

SURVEY REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

The survey period ran from the beginning of April until the end of August. The sites surveyed included all of the Sites of Metropolitan Importance, as defined by the Borough Ecological Survey 1993, as well as a single Site of Borough Importance Grade 1 (the Chelsea Physic Garden).

This year two new sites were included: Olympia Wood, (a small area of woodland sandwiched between railway lines and buildings in the South West of the Borough), and Labroke Square Garden, (a large private garden amongst housing in the centre of the Borough). The latter was surveyed during the original Borough Bird Survey of 1995/96.

Holland Park was the main focus of attention, because the Park contains a number of enclosures that are actively managed for wildlife, and the continued gathering of ornithological data aids conservation initiatives at the site.

In addition to the sites already mentioned, smaller ones, such as Meanwhile Wildlife Garden and Kensal Green Gas Works were also partly surveyed, and are analysed in the context of the larger sites which they border.

SURVEY TECHNIQUES

The major sites were visited on a regular basis throughout the breeding season, with efforts sometimes concentrated on locally uncommon species. All sites received at least one early morning visit in April or May, to note singing birds.

Birds were confirmed as breeding when nests were found, or when recently fledged juveniles were seen, and when adults were observed carrying nest material or food. In cases where only an adult male was singing regularly from suitable habitat, or when fully grown young were seen (which may have arrived from a different site), this is described as possible breeding. Therefore, for example, where a species is said to have 1-2 breeding pairs, this implies that 1 pair was confirmed as having bred with a second pair possibly having bred.

In a small number of cases it was not possible to obtain the exact numbers of birds at a site. In these instances the number of confirmed breeding birds is indicated followed by a plus sign, implying that there may have been more.

Bird ringing was carried out at Holland Park, with 99 birds ringed, (including 83 nestlings), and a range of nests was inspected at most sites. 8 birds were retrapped from previous years, including a female blue tit that was 6 years old (the average life span of this species would normally only be 1 or 2 years). All ringing activities were carried out under BTO/EN (British Trust for Ornithology/English Nature) Licence. The author is a BTO/EN A-Permit holder.

WEATHER DURING THE SURVEY PERIOD

Weather affects birds in several ways, for example: aiding or inhibiting breeding, affecting winter survival rates, and determining the arrival and departure dates of migrants.

The winter of 2002/03, immediately prior to the survey was, in contrast to recent winters, much colder. On two occasions snow lay on the ground and temperatures were low for lengthy periods. The spring was frequently interrupted by periods of inclement weather, particularly in May.

It was not until the second half of the summer that the weather calmed down, when a series of high pressures established themselves over the UK. By the beginning of August, temperatures rose higher than average, culminating in some of the hottest days ever recorded in the capital.

For some resident birds, particularly the Tits, who have a single nest in April/May, the wet spring spelt doom for their young. Other species, such as Blackbirds, fared better, and may even have benefited from the abundance of worms in the wet soil.

NON TECHNICAL SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The original Borough Bird Survey of 1995-96 described how, despite having the largest concentration of people in London and the least amount of green space, some of the sites within Kensington and Chelsea are remarkably rich in avifauna. The same can still be said and this year's survey found 52 wild bird species, with 29 breeding and another 6 species possibly breeding. These are very similar to last years figures.

Of special interest are the uncommon species for inner London, which include Tawny Owl (1 pair), Great Spotted Woodpecker (2 pairs), House Martin (5+ pairs), Grey Wagtail (1 pair), Blackcap (5+ pairs) and Long Tailed Tit (6+ pairs). Good numbers of common garden birds continue to exist at the larger sites, such as Holland Park, and common wildfowl can be found at the Borough's two riverine sites. On one day in August, a young Kingfisher visited Holland Park (a first record for the site).

In recent years, Sparrowhawks have featured as a breeding species, but no breeding could be confirmed this year. It is thought that the recent harder winter, coupled with the decrease in numbers of Blue Tits (a main prey species for the male Sparrowhawk) could be the causes. The breeding success of the all species of tits (excluding Long Tailed Tits) was hampered by poor weather in May.

House Sparrows have not bred since 2001 and other finches remain in low numbers throughout the Borough, with Greenfinch being the most common (5+ pairs), and small numbers of both Chaffinch (1-2 pairs) and Goldfinch (1+ pairs) present. A lack of weed rich feeding areas, particularly in winter, is believed to be the inhibiting factor.

For the second year running Grey Wagtails successfully nested and the colony of house martins reared good numbers of young. The shy and elusive Stock Dove is still present at several sites, and has probably bred.

An increase in sightings of Rose-Ringed Parakeets (also known as ringed-necked parakeets), seen flying over several sites, was noted, but they were never observed feeding or nesting. This feral bird is now well established in other parts of West London, and appears to be increasing in numbers. It may soon colonise the Borough.

| |
|---|
| <p align="center">LIST OF BIRDS OBSERVED IN THE BOROUGH</p> <p align="center">April - August 2003</p> |
|---|

| SPECIES | SCIENTIFIC NAME | BREEDING |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| STATUS | | |
| Gt CRESTED GREBE | <i>Podiceps cristatus</i> | non breeding |
| CORMORANT | <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i> | non breeding |
| GREY HERON | <i>Ardea cinerea</i> | non breeding |
| GREYLAG GOOSE | <i>Anser anser</i> (feral) | 1 pair bred |
| CANADA GOOSE | <i>Branta canadensis</i> (feral) | 5 pairs bred |
| MALLARD | <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i> | 1+ pair bred |
| TUFTED DUCK | <i>Aythya fuligula</i> | non breeding |
| SPARROWHAWK | <i>Accipiter nisus</i> | present - breeding not confirmed |
| KESTREL | <i>Falco tinnunculus</i> | 1 pair bred |
| MOORHEN | <i>Gallinula chloropus</i> | 9-10 pairs bred |
| COOT | <i>Fulica atra</i> | 11 pairs bred |
| BLACK HEADED GULL | <i>Larus ridibundus</i> | non breeding |
| LESSER BLACK BACKED GULL | <i>Larus fuscus</i> | bred nearby |
| GREATER BLACK BACKED GULL | <i>Larus marinus</i> | non breeding |
| HERRING GULL | <i>Larus argentatus</i> | bred nearby |
| COMMON TERN | <i>Sterna hirundo</i> | bred nearby |
| FERAL PIGEON | <i>Columba livia</i> (feral) | bred at all sites |
| STOCK DOVE | <i>Columba oenas</i> | 1+ pairs possibly breeding |
| WOODPIGEON | <i>Columba palumbus</i> | bred at most sites |
| TAWNY OWL | <i>Strix aluco</i> | 1 pair possibly bred |
| SWIFT | <i>Apus apus</i> | 1-3 pairs bred |
| KINGFISHER | <i>Alcedo atthis</i> | non breeding |
| ROSE-RINGED PARAKEET | <i>Psittacula krameri</i> (feral) | non breeding |
| GREEN WOODPECKER | <i>Picus viridis</i> | 1 pairs bred |
| Gt SPOTTED WOODPECKER | <i>Dendrocopus major</i> | 2 pairs bred |
| HOUSE MARTIN | <i>Delichon urbica</i> | 5-7 pairs bred |
| SWALLOW | <i>Hirundo rustica</i> | passage migrant |
| PIED WAGTAIL | <i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i> | 1 pair possibly bred |
| GREY WAGTAIL | <i>Motacilla cinerea</i> | 1 pair bred |
| WREN | <i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i> | bred at most sites |
| DUNNOCK | <i>Prunella modularis</i> | bred at most sites |
| ROBIN | <i>Erithicus rubecula</i> | bred at most sites |

| | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| <u>BLACKBIRD</u> | <i>Turdus merula</i> | bred at most sites |
| <u>SONG THRUSH</u> | <i>Turdus philomilos</i> | 4-5 pairs bred |
| <u>MISTLE THRUSH</u> | <i>Turdus viscivorus</i> | 1 pair possibly bred |
| <u>WHITETHROAT</u> | <i>Sylvia communis</i> | 1 pair bred |
| <u>BLACKCAP</u> | <i>Sylvia atricapilla</i> | 5-7 pairs bred |
| <u>CHIFFCHAFF</u> | <i>Phylloscopus collybita</i> | 1 pair possibly bred |
| <u>WILLOW WARBLER</u> | <i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i> | passage migrant |
| <u>GOLDCREST</u> | <i>Regulus regulus</i> | 2-4 pairs bred |
| <u>LONG TAILED TIT</u> | <i>Aegithalos caudatus</i> | 6-7 pairs bred |
| <u>COAL TIT</u> | <i>Parus ater</i> | 2-3 pairs bred |
| <u>BLUE TIT</u> | <i>Parus caeruleus</i> | bred at most sites |
| <u>GREAT TIT</u> | <i>Parus major</i> | bred at most sites |
| <u>SPOTTED FLYCATCHER</u> | <i>Muscicapa striata</i> | passage migrant |
| <u>JAY</u> | <i>Garrulus glandarius</i> | 2-4 pairs bred |
| <u>MAGPIE</u> | <i>Pica pica</i> | 3-5 pairs bred |
| <u>CARRION CROW</u> | <i>Corvus corone</i> | 4-6 pairs bred |
| <u>STARLING</u> | <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> | a few bred at most sites |
| <u>HOUSE SPARROW</u> | <i>Passer domesticus</i> | non breeding |
| <u>CHAFFINCH</u> | <i>Fringilla coelebs</i> | 1 pair bred |
| <u>GREENFINCH</u> | <i>Carduelis chloris</i> | 6-8 pairs bred |
| <u>GOLDFINCH</u> | <i>Carduelis carduelis</i> | 1+ pairs possibly bred |

TOTAL= 52 species (excluding feral pigeon)

NUMBER BREEDING= 29

NUMBER POSSIBLY BREEDING = 6

HOLLAND PARK

SITE OF METROPOLITAN IMPORTANCE

Grid Ref: TQ2479

Size: 16ha (40 acres)

Owner/manager: RBK&C

Number of visits: 12+

OBSERVATIONS (35 species recorded, including 20-25 breeding)

CORMORANT: individuals were seen flying over.

GREY HERON: 1 or 2 were irregular early morning visitors to the ponds.

MALLARD: Numbers present during the summer were down on previous years, and no successful breeding took place. It is probable that nests were predated by foxes or rats, but in previous years at least one female has appeared with ducklings.

SPARROWHAWK: At least one bird was present in the spring, but no signs of breeding activity were found. This is the first year since the surveys began that a pair has failed to breed in or around the Park. The cold winter and the reduction in the numbers of tits may have resulted in the demise of the resident pair (see blue tit on page 8/9).

MOORHEN: 3 pairs nested. As usual, the pair on Lord Holland's Pond lost their early clutches to predators, but succeeded in raising a small brood later in the summer. Both of the pairs in the Kyoto Garden and the wildlife reserve raised 2 broods, and one of the adults at Kyoto (ringed as an adult in 2000) was still present this year.

HERRING GULL: small numbers were seen flying over, these may be breeding birds from other areas in and around London.

LESSER BLACK BACKED GULL: small numbers were seen flying over, these may be breeding birds from other areas in and around London.

WOODPIGEON: At least 10 pairs bred.

STOCK DOVE: This species appeared in the Park for the first time in 2001, and although breeding has been suspected, it has never been confirmed. This year single adults were seen in the wildlife reserve and, on one occasion, on the sports field.

TAWNY OWL: 1 pair probably bred. Adults were heard, and one was seen hunting in the vicinity of Azalea Walk in the early morning of April 10th.

SWIFT: 1-2 pairs bred nearby. The maximum count was only 2, on several dates.

GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER: 1 pair bred. The resident pair were omnipresent and were observed feeding young in May.

GREEN WOODPECKER: as in recent years, a single male was occasionally present, but it is thought that this species only uses the Park to feed in, and nests elsewhere.

KINGFISHER: a very unusual sighting of a fully grown juvenile at the pond in the wildlife reserve on July 22nd. This is the first record ever in the Park, but sadly the bird was not seen again. It spent some time sat on the pond dipping platform, and made several unsuccessful dives. There are no fish in the pond, and so it must have been trying to catch invertebrates or young amphibians. This species does not breed in the Borough, but does regularly successfully nest in the Borough of Ealing (only 10km to the West). Young birds disperse and search for new territories, which I suspect is what this bird was doing.

ROSE-RINGED PARAKEET: on several dates small numbers of parakeets were seen flying over the Park.

WREN: 11-12 pairs bred. This is small reduction on last year. The cold winter will have affected the survival rates of this small species.

DUNNOCK: 2-3 pairs bred. The same number as last year.

ROBIN: 10 pairs bred, a similar number to last year. One pair raised a brood of 5, 3 metres up, amongst the spiky leaves of an ornamental palm tree.

BLACKBIRD: 20+ pairs bred. A similar number to last year.

SONG THRUSH: 2-3 pairs bred. Having stabilised at 5 pairs in 1997-98, the numbers of this species have dipped. If food is short, for example during cold winter spells, the larger blackbird can out compete the song thrush.

MISTLE THRUSH: 1-2 pairs bred. A pair was regularly present on the Sports Field, and on several occasions 3 adults were noted collecting food, suggesting that a second pair may have nested just outside the Park.

BLACKCAP: 4-5 pairs bred. The woodland in the Northern half of the Park probably holds the biggest concentration of breeding pairs of this summer migrant in central London. This species has also been recorded as a winter visitor to the Park.

CHIFFCHAFF: 1 pair possibly bred. A male was singing from the same area throughout April and May.

GOLDCREST: 1-2 pairs bred. 2 of the 3 usual territories were occupied.

LONG TAILED TIT: 3 pairs bred. A family flock of at least 9 was seen on May 9th. This species remains a common part of the avifauna of the Park, despite the fact that it is not usually thought of as a London bird.

COAL TIT: 1-2 pairs bred. Suitable habitat exists, but possibly competition for nesting territories with the larger Blue Tit may be the reason why Coal Tits do not increase in the park.

BLUE TIT: 36 pairs bred (34 in nest boxes), which was a slight decrease on last year's number. The cold winter will have reduced the adult population, and may also explain why the number of eggs laid this year was lower than average. During May, when the chicks had hatched and were in need of lots of caterpillars to feed on, several weeks of cold wet weather arrived and ruined the breeding season.

The average brood size was the lowest ever recorded. Last year a similar thing occurred, and therefore the population in the Park (and throughout the

UK) will have decreased, having a knock-on effect to those birds that prey on blue tits (i.e. sparrowhawks).

The table below shows the results of the nest box survey, undertaken on May 9th and 16th.

| |
|---|
| number of boxes checked = 50 number of boxes with broods = 34 number of boxes not used = 16 |
|---|

| |
|---|
| largest brood = 7 smallest brood = 2 <i>average* brood size = 5.1</i> |
|---|

**average taken from 13 broods checked.*

See page 30 for a comparative chart of brood sizes 1995-2003

GREAT TIT: 8 pairs bred (4 in nest boxes, and 1 pair nested in a bat box), which was a similar number to last year. 3 broods were ringed (brood sizes of 6, 4 and 3), the fourth nest failed when rain water entered the box.

JAY: 1-2 pairs bred. The same number as last year.

MAGPIE: 1 pair bred. A similar number to last year.

CARRION CROW: 1 pair probably bred, a similar number as last year. No accurate counts were made, but the numbers of Carrion Crows in the Park are much lower following the removal of some of the birds in 2001.

STARLING: 4-5 pairs bred. This was a slight increase compared with recent years. 14 adults were seen together April 10th, reflecting the fact that pairs nesting outside of the Park visit whilst looking for food.

CHAFFINCH: 1 pair bred. Since re-colonising the Park in 1998, a pair have been present around the Lavender Garden, but no fledglings have ever been seen. A male has been singing in this area throughout the summer. The nests of this species are susceptible to predation by Corvids and Squirrels, and a dislodged nest was found on the edge of the car park on May 9th (a similar thing happened last year). However 2 or 3 juveniles were seen by the Sports

Field in early September, which may have fledged from a later nest in the Park. Small numbers of Chaffinches are frequently seen feeding from the seed feeders, and it is thought that this has helped them to remain in the area.

GREENFINCH: 1-2 pairs bred. The number of sightings of Greenfinches remained low. Nesting birds are frequently disturbed by over zealous hedge trimming in and around the Park.

HOLLAND PARK RINGING TOTALS

| SPECIES | FULL GROWN | PULLI | TOTAL |
|--------------------|-------------------|--------------|------------------|
| ROBIN | | 5 | 5 |
| GREAT TIT | 3 | 13 | 16 |
| BLUE TIT | 13 | 65 | 78 |
| <i>GRAND TOTAL</i> | | | <i>99</i> |

8 breeding adult female Blue Tits were retrapped in May, their ringing details are given below, (all had been ringed in the Park).

BLUE TITS

| <u>RING No.</u> | <u>DATE AND AGE WHEN RINGED</u> | |
|------------------------|--|---------------------|
| P727799 | 10.05.02 | pullus |
| P727855 | 10.05.02 | pullus |
| P727746 | 10.05.02 | 2 or more years old |
| P727752 | 10.05.02 | pullus |
| N666245 | 09.05.00 | pullus |
| N666246 | 09.05.00 | pullus |
| K526027 | 10.05.97 | pullus |
| P064724 | 10.05.00 | 2 or more years old |

N666245 and N666246 were ringed as pulli in the same nest in 2000, and K526027 was ringed as a pullus in 1997, making it 6 years old.

COMMENTS AND COMPARISONS WITH PREVIOUS YEARS

The number of species remained similar to previous years, although the numbers of birds, such as blue tit, have decreased because of unfavourable climatic conditions. For the first time since the surveys began, sparrowhawks failed to breed, but all the other woodland species did. Amongst this list there are several species not normally associated with central London (tawny owl, great spotted woodpecker, blackcap, long tailed tit etc).

A rare sighting of a Kingfisher has added a new species to the list of birds recorded in the Park.

More information and analysis from the site can be found on pages 29 and 30.

GRAND UNION CANAL (PADDINGTON BRANCH)

Also including Kensington Gas Works, Meanwhile Wildlife Garden and part of the railway embankment.

SITE OF METROPOLITAN IMPORTANCE

Grid Ref: TQ2382

Length: 1.2km (0.75 miles) in RBK&C

Owner/manager: British Waterways

Number of visits: 3

LIST OF SPECIES OBSERVED

B = breeding (with number of pairs in brackets)

PB = possible breeding

M = passage migrant

CORMORANT

GREY HERON

CANADA GOOSE - B(5)

MALLARD - B(1+)

TUFTED DUCK

KESTREL B(1) nearby

COOT - B(11)

MOORHEN - B(6-7)

BLACK HEADED GULL

HERRING GULL

LESSER BLACK BACKED GULL

COMMON TERN

WOODPIGEON -B (4+)

SWIFT - PB nearby

GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER - B nearby

GREEN WOOPECKER - B nearby

ROSE RINGED PARAKEET - flying over

GREY WAGTAIL

WREN - B(1-2)

DUNNOCK - B(1-2)

ROBIN - B(1-2)
BLACKBIRD - B(3+).
SONG THRUSH - PB nearby
WHITETHROAT - M & B nearby
BLACKCAP - B nearby
CHIFFCHAFF - M
WILLOW WARBLER - M
LONG TAILED TIT - B nearby
BLUE TIT - B nearby
GREAT TIT - B nearby
JAY - B nearby
MAGPIE - B(1)
CARRION CROW -B nearby
STARLING - B(2-3)
HOUSE SPARROW - B nearby?
GREENFINCH - B(1)
GOLDFINCH - PB nearby

COMMENTS AND COMPARISON WITH PREVIOUS YEARS

Waterfowl continue to do well, with coot and moorhen a common sight. Only one brood of mallard (6 pulli) was seen, despite at least 20 adults being regularly present (but the same thing happened last year). There was a slight decrease in the number of nesting Canadian geese and the maximum count of 35 birds, made on July 23rd, was much lower than last years count of 51 birds.

Tufted duck were again seen on the Canal, but are not thought to have bred this year. Small numbers of common terns fished in the Canal, and adult lesser black backed gulls were often seen flying over.

Several common species of warbler were observed on migration, with only blackcap and whitethroat staying to breed. Small numbers of greenfinches and goldfinches were seen. There were two sightings of house sparrows, one near Meanwhile Wildlife Garden and the other flying across the canal in the mid section. There is a population present on the North of the Canal

(outside of the Borough), and the sightings probably relate to birds from this population.

Grey wagtails have been recorded at the site in previous years, and last year a pair set up a territory and successfully nested. A pair was present in the same area during April, but were not seen after this.

The former Kensal Green Gas Works is being redeveloped, and the area surrounding the gas towers, which used to be overgrown and offer good scrub habitat to birds, has been levelled in preparation for building work. However, 3 fully fledged juvenile kestrels were seen around the towers in July.

The Eastern end of the site, which is the more built up, suffers from the dumping of litter and mindless vandalism, and sadly it seems the area will never be allowed to live up to its potential. The ornamental pond, together with Meanwhile Gardens was sympathetically planted and landscaped in 2000. However, many of the plants have been disturbed and some areas completely wrecked.

More information and analysis from the site can be found on page 28.

THE RIVER THAMES AND CHELSEA CREEK

SITE OF METROPOLITAN IMPORTANCE

Gride Ref: TQ2777

Length: 2.7km (1.7 miles) in RBK&C

Owner/manager: Port of London Authority & Environment Agency.

RBK&C own Chelsea Creek.

Number of visits: 4

LIST OF SPECIES OBSERVED

B = breeding (with number of pairs in brackets)

PB = possibly breeding

M = passage migrant

GREAT CRESTED GREBE

CORMORANT

GREY HERON - B nearby

GREYLAG GOOSE - B(1)

CANADA GOOSE - PB nearby

MALLARD

KESTREL

MOORHEN - PB(1)

COOT

BLACK HEADED GULL

HERRING GULL - PB nearby

LESSER BLACK BACKED GULL - PB nearby

GREATER BLACK BACKED GULL

COMMON TERN - M

WOODPIGEON - PB nearby

SWIFT - B nearby (3+)

PIED WAGTAIL

GREY WAGTAIL-- B(1)

HOUSE MARTIN - B(5-7)

WREN - B(1)

DUNNOCK - PB(1)

ROBIN - PB(1)
BLACKBIRD - PB
BLUE TIT – PB nearby
COAL TIT
CHIFFCHAFF - M
MAGPIE - PB nearby
CARRION CROW - PB nearby
STARLING
GREENFINCH - B(1-2)
GOLDFINCH

COMMENTS AND COMPARISONS WITH PREVIOUS YEARS

Cormorants, Grey Herons, Greylag Geese and Mallard remained common along this stretch of the Thames, although no mallard ducklings were seen. A pair of Greylag Geese nested on one of the barges, but only a single chick hatched. 2 adult Great Crested Grebes were fishing at the mouth of Chelsea Creek in May. This species has been recorded before at the site, although always as a non breeder.

Pied and Grey Wagtails were seen, and a pair of Grey Wagtails nested, fledging at least 2 juveniles. The colony of House Martins, based around the streets just North of Chelsea Wharf, arrived late in the season but 5-7 pairs successfully bred.

CHELSEA CREEK

A pair of Moorhens probably nested in what is not ideal habitat (they are normally a freshwater species). Single pairs of Blackbird, Robin, Dunnock, Wren, Greenfinch and Goldfinch were present and probably nested in the scrub around the Eastern end of the Creek. This scrub has become quite thick in recent years, providing good nesting habitat. Single Kestrels were seen flying over the site.

KENSINGTON GARDENS AND KENSINGTON PALACE GROUNDS

SITE OF METROPOLITAN IMPORTANCE

Grid Ref: TQ2588

Size: 13.5ha (24 acres)

Owner/manager: Royal Parks Agency

Number of visits: 4

LIST OF SPECIES OBSERVED

B = breeding (with number of pairs in brackets)

PB = possibly breeding

M = passage migrant

CORMORANT - flying over

GREY HERON

MALLARD - PB nearby

MOORHEN - B(1)

WOODPIGEON - B(3+)

SWIFT

ROSE-RINGED PARAKEET

GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER - PB nearby

GREEN WOODPECKER - PB nearby

WREN - B(2+)

DUNNOCK - B(1+)

ROBIN - B(3+)

BLACKBIRD - B(6+)

SONG THRUSH - PB(1)

MISTLE THRUSH - B(1+)

BLACKCAP - PB(1)

CHIFFCHAFF - M

GOLDCREST - PB(2)

LONG TAILED TIT - B(3)

COAL TIT

BLUE TIT - B(3+)

GREAT TIT - B(1+)
SPOTTED FLYCATCHER - M
JAY - PB nearby
MAGPIE - B(1)
CARRION CROW - N(1)
STARLING - B nearby
HOUSE SPARROW
GREENFINCH - B(1+)

COMMENTS AND COMPARISONS WITH PREVIOUS YEARS

As in previous years, I am much indebted to Paul Clark for relaying his sightings from inside the Palace Grounds.

After being disturbed early in the season by restoration work, a pair of Moorhens successfully nested on the ornamental pond, where Grey Herons were also sometimes seen fishing. Migrant Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs were heard singing in the spring, but whereas in most years these birds quickly move on, a male Blackcap continued to sing for most of the summer, suggesting that a pair may have bred. A Spotted Flycatcher was seen on one day in early May.

Some of the shrubbeies, created near to the new children's play area, have matured and now present good nesting habitats for species such as Blackbird and Long Tailed Tit. Some of the formal hedging in the Palace grounds was left untrimmed (at the suggestion of Paul Clark), and therefore Blackbirds and Robins nested undisturbed.

Several Song Thrushes were present but no young were seen. Predation of nests by Corvids has been a problem around the Palace Gardens in previous years, and so single nests of Magpies and Carrion Crows were controlled. There were no sightings of Sparrowhawks this year.

House Sparrows last nested at the site in 2001, and were thought to be extinct, but a single male appeared in July. *For a full explanation on the House Sparrow population decline see page 31.* There were several sightings of a flock of 7 Rose-Ringed Parakeets early in the spring.

KENSAL GREEN CEMETERY

SITE OF METROPOLITAN IMPORTANCE

Grid Ref: TQ2382

Size: 17.8ha (44.5 acres) in RBK&C

Owner/manager: The General Cemetery Company

Number of visits: 3

LIST OF SPECIES OBSERVED

B = breeding (with number of pairs in brackets)

PB = possibly breeding

M = passage migrant

CORMORANT - flying over

GREY HERON - flying over

MALLARD

KESTREL - PB(1) nearby

STOCK DOVE - PB(1+)

WOODPIGEON - B(15+)

GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER - B(1)

GREEN WOODPECKER - PB(1)

ROSE-RINGED PARAKEET - flying over

SWALLOW - M

WREN - B(9)

DUNNOCK - B(1+)

ROBIN - B(7+)

BLACKBIRD - B(8+)

SONG THRUSH - B(2)

BLACKCAP - M and B(1)

WHITETHROAT - M and B(1)

CHIFFCHAFF - M

WILLOW WARBLER - M

GOLDCREST - PB(1)

LONG TAILED TIT - B(1)

COAL TIT

BLUE TIT - B(5+)

GREAT TIT - B(3+)

JAY - B(1)
MAGPIE - B(1)
CARRION CROW - B(3)
STARLING - B(4)
GREENFINCH - B(2-3)
GOLDFINCH - B(1)

COMMENTS AND COMPARISONS WITH PREVIOUS YEARS

A maximum count of 4 adult Stock Doves was made on July 23rd, when one of the males was displaying, and it seems likely that breeding took place. Juvenile Great Spotted Woodpeckers were seen, but although a pair of Green Woodpeckers were resident, no young were found. This year no Sparrowhawks were recorded, but there was a pair of Kestrels that bred nearby.

In April migrant Warblers and Swallows passed through the area. This year a pair of Blackcaps stayed to nest, as well as a pair of Whitethroats, who benefited from large areas of scrub left uncut from last year. In the last 2 years there does not seem to have been as much cutting back of ivy and woodland as in recent years, which will have helped nesting birds.

CHELSEA PHYSIC GARDEN

SITE OF BOROUGH IMPORTANCE: GRADE 1

Grid Ref: TQ2777

Size: 2ha (5 acres)

Owner/manager: Cadogan Estate, run by CPG Management Council

Number of visits: 2

LIST OF SPECIES OBSERVED

B = breeding (with number of pairs in brackets)

PB = possible breeding

M = passage migrant

CORMORANT - flying over

GREY HERON

MUTE SWAN - flying over

MALLARD

HERRING GULL - flying over

LESSER BLACK BACKED GULL - flying over

WOODPIGEON - B nearby(2+)

WREN - B(1-2)

DUNNOCK - B(1+)

ROBIN - B(1-2)

BLACKBIRD - B(2+)

LONG TAILED TIT - B(1)

COAL TIT

BLUE TIT - B(1)

GREAT TIT

JAY

MAGPIE - B nearby

CARRION CROW - B nearby

STARLING - B nearby

GREENFINCH - PB(1)

RINGED-NECKED PARAKEET- flying over

COMMENTS AND COMPARISON WITH PREVIOUS YEARS

There has been a slight reduction in the numbers of birds visiting the site, for example, neither Song Thrush or Mistle Thrush were seen there this summer. Only a few years ago Great Tit, Blue Tit and Coal Tit nested, but this year only a single pair of Blue Tits bred.

The reasons for the decline in nesting tits can be explained by the fact that many of the old nest boxes in the Garden are falling apart, and new ones that were put up last year, were poorly positioned.

The pair of Blue Tits nested in a specially constructed nest box, which had a video link to a monitor in the classroom. The female laid 8 eggs, but all the young died during poor weather.

OLYMPIA WOOD

(Not classified under the Borough Ecological Survey 1993)

Grid Ref: TQ2479

Size: approx 50m x 150m

Owner: RBK&C

Number of visits: 3

DESCRIPTION: This is the first year that this site has been included in the annual Borough Bird Survey. Therefore it is worth describing its position and the habitat to be found there.

The wood is sandwiched between the railway line and a row of houses, and one can only gain access from what is currently a large car park. The woodland is made up of a mixture of tall lime and sycamore trees, mixed with shrubs such as buddleia and elder, with areas of thick bramble and Japanese knotweed. There are also a few cherry trees, which add colour when they come into blossom in the spring. Some of the older trees have ivy clad trunks, but none are old enough or of the right species to support natural nest holes.

In the middle of the wood there is a small man-made pond, and evidence that some of the house-holders may well be using the wood as extensions to their gardens. Otherwise the area remains undisturbed, and is linked to other small private gardens on the Western side by a row of trees. There are some isolated trees on the Eastern side of the railway line, which act as a link to the large green space of Holland Park (only half a kilometre away).

LIST OF SPECIES OBSERVED

B = breeding

PB = possible breeding

WOODPIGEON - B

WREN - B

ROBIN - PB

BLACKBIRD - PB

BLUE TIT

JAY
MAGPIE
CARRION CROW

COMMENTS: although the wood is surrounded by urban structures, it does attract small numbers of common bird species, some of which have nested. The position of the wood beside the railway track and its embankments, together with a line of small gardens, means that the site has the potential to be linked to larger green spaces by these wildlife corridors. However, due to the small size, the wood is never likely to support large numbers of birds.

If the Borough is interested in improving the site for wildlife, then there are a few simple measures that could be undertaken. For example, the woodland closest to the railway track (on the Eastern side) could be coppiced, to allow more light into the wood and to encourage the understory to thicken. This might lead to the growth of thicker hedge-like shrubs, which would provide better nesting habitats for species such as robin and blackbird. If any planting were to be considered, the wood might benefit from a thicket of holly bushes, to provide nesting and winter roosting, as well as winter food in the form of berries for species such as Blackbirds and insects for species such as Goldcrests. The site could also support one or two pairs of Blue Tits if nest boxes were provided.

LADBROKE SQUARE GARDEN

SITE OF BOROUGH IMPORTANCE: Grade 2

Grid Ref: TQ2480

Size: 5ha (12.5 acres)

Owner/manager: communal association

Number of visits: 8

This site was covered in the original Borough Bird Survey 1995/96, as part of the Ladbroke Garden Square Complex, but has not been surveyed in the intervening years.

LIST OF SPECIES OBSERVED

B = breeding (with number of pairs in brackets)

PB = possibly breeding

M = migrant

WOODPIGEON - B(2+)

HOUSE MARTIN - flying over

WREN - B(2)

ROBIN - B(2)

BLACKBIRD - B(4+)

SONG THRUSH - B(1)

LONG TAILED TIT - B(1)

COAL TIT - PB(1)

BLUE TIT - B(1-3)

GREAT TIT - PB(1)

GOLDCREST

JAY

MAGPIE

CARRION CROW - B(1)

STARLING

COMMENTS: in recent years Great Spotted Woodpecker and Blackcap have bred at the site and Swifts used to be seen flying over. However, none

of these species were recorded this year. Despite this a fair range of common garden species were found at the site.

There exists at the Garden a good number of mature trees, including species beneficial to birds (oak, silver birch, hawthorn, holly etc), and areas of hedging exist around the perimeter. There are also shrubs situated in clumps, but despite this a lot of the birds which feed in the Garden, were nesting in the private gardens that border the site on the Northern edge. The reason being that the hedging and shrubs in the Garden are not generally thick enough to safely hide nests from predators.

There are some tit nest boxes, but the majority were unused. Possibly the garden is only big enough to support a few pairs, but it could also be that the boxes need cleaning out and repositioning. A bird feeder, near to the Gardener's house, attracted a small number of birds. The provision of sunflower seeds as well as peanuts may help to increase the numbers and range of species.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

In general, it could be said that considering the lack of green space within the Borough, there are a good number of wild birds. Those that are in decline, such as the House Sparrow, are also in decline elsewhere in London and throughout the UK. This year weather conditions caused large losses in the usually high populations of Blue Tits, and this may have had a knock-on effect in the breeding success of Sparrowhawks.

During the last couple of summers, hedges have been left untrimmed in the formal gardens of Kensington Palace, at the suggestion of Paul Clark (bird watcher and gardener) and as a result nests were left undisturbed. Could this policy not be replicated throughout the Borough?

The provision of seed feeders in Holland Park, Kensington Palace and Chelsea Physic Garden attracted good numbers of Great Tit, Blue Tit, Coal Tit and Greenfinch. The finch species benefit especially, as their natural food of weed seeds does not exist in great quantities in formal parks and gardens. It is recommended that the feeders are maintained and kept topped up throughout the year.

OVERALL COMPARISONS WITH PREVIOUS YEARS

The following 2 tables show the breeding species at 2 different sites in the Borough, Holland Park and The Grand Union Canal. The Park represents the largest area of woodland within the Borough, some of which is managed for wildlife. The Canal represents the only large area of freshwater habitat with continuous areas of bankside vegetation.

KEY: a whole number represents the number of pairs confirmed breeding. Where, for example, 1-2 pairs are indicated, this means that 1 pair was confirmed as breeding and a second was suspected of also breeding. In some cases a + sign appears after the number, this indicates that the exact number of pairs was not fully established. PB means possibly bred. Please note that no breeding survey was done in 1996.

GRAND UNION CANAL

| SPECIES | 1995 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 |
|--------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Canada Goose | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 5 |
| Mallard | 2 | 2+ | 2+ | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| Tufted Duck | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Pochard | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Coot | 9 | 5 | 5 | 8-9 | 8-9 | 10 | 11 | 11 |
| Moorhen | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4-5 | 6-7 | 4-6 | 5-6 | 6-7 |

COMMENTS: Coot and Moorhen continue to breed in good numbers, but the numbers of Canada Geese have fallen slightly. The biggest surprise is in the lack of breeding success of Mallard, which, despite being very common on the Canal, at Holland Park and the River Thames, only hatched one brood of ducklings. Perhaps this is a coincidence, but their breeding success has been going down, possibly affected by increased predation.

The bankside vegetation at the Western end of the Canal has become thicker and less frequently disturbed, which has created safer nesting sites. Although Tufted Duck are common on the Canal in winter, the site does not

provide ideal breeding habitat for them, nor for the Pochard. The number of Canada Goose, Coot and Moorhen have probably now reached saturation point.

HOLLAND PARK

| SPECIES | 1995 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 |
|-------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| Mallard | 3 | 3 | 4 | 2+ | 1+ | 1+ | 3 | 0 |
| Sparrowhawk | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Moorhen | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Woodpigeon | 15+ | 15+ | 15+ | 15+ | 15+ | 15+ | 15+ | 15+ |
| Stock Dove | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 PB | 1 PB | 1 PB |
| Tawny Owl | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 PB | 1 PB | 1 PB |
| Gt Spt Woodpecker | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 PB | 1 | 1. |
| Wren | 7 | 10 | 9-10 | 10 | 15 | 12 | 13 | 11-12 |
| Dunnock | 6+ | 5+ | 3+ | 3+ | 3+ | 2-3 | 2-3 | 2-3 |
| Robin | 13 | 13 | 10+ | 9 | 10 | 11 | 10 | 10 |
| Blackbird | 30+ | 26 | 20+ | 22+ | 22+ | 21+ | 20+ | 20+ |
| Song Thrush | 3 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 3+ | 2 | 3-4 | 2-3 |
| Mistle Thrush | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1+ | 1 | 0 | 1-2 |
| Blackcap | 4 | 6 | 5 | 5 | 5+ | 4 | 4-5 | 4-5 |
| Chiffchaff | 1 | 1 | 1 PB | 1 PB | 1 PB | 1 PB | 1 PB | 1 PB |
| Goldcrest | 1 PB | 0 | 1-2 | 1 | 1-2 | 2-3 | 2-3 | 1-2 |
| Long Tailed Tit | 2 | 3-4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Coal Tit | 1-2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1-2 | 1-2 |
| Blue Tit | 20 | 30 | 21+ | 31 | 37 | 32 | 38 | 36 |
| Great Tit | 5 | 4 | 5+ | 7 | 9 | 7 | 8 | 8 |
| Jay | 1-2 | 1 | 1-2 | 1-2 | 1-2 | 1-2 | 1-2 | 1-2 |
| Magpie | 2 | 3 | 2 | 1-2 | 1-2 | 1-2 | 1 | 1 |
| Carrion Crow | 2 | 3 | 3 | 1+ | 1-2 | 1 | 1 PB | 1 PB |
| Starling | 3+ | 4-8 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 4-5 |
| House Sparrow | 30+ | 4-5 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Chaffinch | 0 | 0 | 1-3 | 1 | 1 PB | 1 PB | 1 | 1 |
| Greenfinch | 3 | 1 | 1+ | 1+ | 1 | 1-3 | 1-2 | 1-2 |

Each year in Holland Park, the average brood size of the nesting Blue Tits has been calculated from the many broods that have been ringed in nest boxes, and the results are shown below:

HOLLAND PARK BLUE TIT AVERAGE BROOD SIZE

| 1995 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 9.0 | 8.7 | 9.4 | 8.7 | 8.0 | 8.3 | 6.6 | 5.1 |

COMMENTS: many of the smaller birds (i.e. Wren, Goldcrest, Long Tailed Tit and Blue Tit) have increased since 1995. There has been a run of mild winters, aiding the winter survival rates, and, in the case of Blue Tit, the provision of seed feeders and extra nest boxes has helped them. These birds have increased in numbers, despite the regular presence of a pair of Sparrowhawks. However the recent winter of 2002/03 was colder, and may account for a slight drop in the number of susceptible species such as wren and Goldcrest.

The average brood size of nesting Blue Tits (see table above) reflects the condition that the females were in prior to nesting. If the weather in the early spring is wet or cold, they will not be in peak condition to lay lots of eggs. Therefore, although we have had mild winters, the last few springs have been poor, resulting in a succession of lower than average brood sizes. On average the brood sizes of Blue Tits nesting in the Park compare favourably with those breeding in rural settings.

The 3 resident Thrushes have suffered mixed fortunes. The Song Thrush has been radically declining nationally for some years, and numbers were low in the Park at the beginning of the survey period. However, they seem to be stable, albeit in low numbers. The Blackbird, although still a common garden and woodland bird, has been slowly declining nationally and in the Borough. The reasons for these problems are not fully understood. There are still plenty to be found in the Park.

The fortunes of the Mistle Thrush, which has only ever been present in small numbers, suffered in 1998-99 after the disturbance of tree felling and the drying out of their favoured feeding area (the Sports Field). That area is now in better condition and the birds have returned.

The decline and rapid extinction of the House Sparrow from the Park and the rest of the Borough is part of a national problem. The reasons can best be explained by the following combination of factors.:

1. It seems that ever since the replacement of horse drawn vehicles in the capital, the Sparrow has suffered losses in feeding and nesting sites.
2. Recent analysis suggests that traffic pollution may be killing off certain insects that are a vital food source for the chicks.
3. The return of the Sparrowhawk, which re-established itself in London after a long absence, led to many Sparrows being predated. The 1995/96 survey identified 80% of prey items brought by a male Sparrowhawk to a nest near Kensington Palace as being House Sparrows.
4. Then, in recent years, the disease *Trichomoniasis* has been present in the feral pigeon population, and could have been transferred to the Sparrows, (as they often used to feed together).
5. House Sparrows are very social birds, needing to exist in reasonably large flocks, and once the Borough's colonies were reduced to only a few individuals, they were easily picked off by predators or moved elsewhere in search of other colonies.

Although thought of as a 'London bird', House Sparrows probably only moved into the capital when it became a trading centre for cattle and other agricultural produce. At that time, several centuries ago, the city would have been surrounded by farmland, and even within the city there would have been allotments and stables which provided good habitat. The city has now changed, and where as the House Sparrow has lost its habitat, within Holland Park there exists good woodland habitat that supports uncommon London birds such as Sparrowhawk, Tawny Owl, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Blackcap and Long Tailed Tit.

The House Sparrow is unlikely to return, and I would suggest that conservation efforts be put into viable schemes such as providing better habitat for other finches. The Greenfinch is now the most common finch, with a few Chaffinches also present in the Park. Seed feeders have helped both species to maintain their foothold, but there is little natural food available, and the regular trimming of hedges and shrubs in the formal gardens presents the constant danger of nest disturbance.

BOROUGH BIRD BREEDING INDICATOR

It is recommended that the 15 species listed below be used as a guide to the fortunes of the birds within the Borough. The selection of species covers waterfowl, birds of prey, common garden songbirds, migrant warblers, corvids and finches. The table lists the total numbers breeding at 6 main sites in the Borough that have been repeatedly surveyed.

| SPECIES | 1995 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | SUMMARY |
|----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------|
| Sparrowhawk | 4 | 2-3 | 2-3 | 2-3 | 3 | 1-2 | 1-2 | 0 | decrease |
| Moorhen | 8 | 7 | 7 | 9-10 | 10-13 | 9-11 | 9-10 | 10-12 | stable |
| G'S'Woodp' | 1-2 | 2-3 | 2-3 | 1-3 | 1-3 | 1-3 | 2-3 | 2-3 | stable |
| Wren | 25+ | 26+ | 23+ | 29+ | 32+ | 28+ | 28+ | 25+ | stable |
| Dunnock | 20+ | 14+ | 10+ | 9+ | 11+ | 9+ | 7+ | 7+ | decrease |
| Robin | 20+ | 18+ | 24+ | 21+ | 23+ | 24+ | 24+ | 24+ | stable |
| Blackbird | 70+ | 59+ | 49+ | 46+ | 47+ | 44+ | 40+ | 40+ | stable |
| Song Thrush | 9+ | 7-10 | 7-10 | 6-9 | 4-6 | 3-4 | 5-6 | 2-4 | decrease |
| Blackcap | 4+ | 7-8 | 6-8 | 8-9 | 6-7 | 5-6 | 5-7 | 5-7 | stable |
| Blue Tit | 35+ | 41 | 30 | 38 | 48 | 41 | 45+ | 45+ | stable |
| Magpie | 5+ | 5 | 5 | 4+ | 3-5 | 3-5 | 3-5 | 4-5 | stable |
| Carrion Crow | 8+ | 8 | 8 | 4+ | 4-6 | 4-6 | 3-5 | 4-5 | stable |
| Starling | 15+ | 14+ | 13+ | 12 | 8-9 | 10-11 | 10-11 | 10-12 | stable |
| House Spar' | 70+ | 35+ | 35+ | 10+ | 6-10 | 2-4 | 0 | 0 | marked decrease |
| Greenfinch | 10+ | 6+ | 6+ | 3-4 | 1-3 | 2-5 | 3-5 | 6-8 | slight increase |

CONCLUSIONS

SPARROWHAWK. Prior to 1995 this species was almost completely absent from inner London. Then followed a period of re-colonisation, which peaked as the Borough surveys began in 1995, when 4 pairs nested. Only 1 pair was confirmed as nesting last year, a lower number, possibly because of diseases caught from eating feral pigeons. Although single birds were seen in Holland Park this year, no breeding could be confirmed. The harder recent winter, coupled with a decrease in the population of blue tits may have harmed the resident pair.

MOORHEN. The making of the wildlife pond in Holland Park, just prior to the original survey, together with better nesting habitat that now exists on

the Canal have helped this species increase and remain a common sight at several sites in the Borough.

GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER. Being tied to areas with sufficient woodland, this species is unlikely to expand its range. It remains locally common at sites such as Holland Park and Kensal Green Cemetery.

WREN. A run of mild winters helped this small bird survive and increase in numbers, but the last winter was much colder, and so there was a slight drop in the number of breeding pairs.

DUNNOCK. The population has halved since 1995, which is similar to national statistics. The reasons are unclear.

ROBIN. The population remains high at all of the larger sites.

BLACKBIRD. A reduction of about 20% has occurred since 1995, which is not quite as bad as national statistics, but it is a worrying trend. The reasons for the decline are unclear. However, the species remains common at most sites.

SONG THRUSH. Small populations appear stable in the Borough, although in Holland Park their numbers went down this year (possibly due to the cold winter). The Song Thrush has been staging something of a come back nationally, after suffering a severe decline in numbers.

BLACKCAP. Nationally this is one of the commonest species of warbler, which has been on the increase. Numbers peaked in 1999 in the Borough, but although they have dropped slightly recently, the numbers present still remain impressive for inner London.

BLUE TIT. In the last few years the population steadily increased, because of a run of mild winters and the provision of extra nest boxes. However, last year and this, we experienced cold and wet weather during May, when this species nests, which has caused a drop in the population. This year saw the lowest ever average brood size in Holland Park.

MAGPIE. Numbers have remained fairly stable. Lack of nesting habitat and competition with Carrion Crows prevent them from increasing. The species was controlled at Kensington Palace.

CARRION CROW. Numbers have decreased following some controls on numbers at Kensington Palace and Holland Park.

STARLING. Numbers have stabilised at a low number, which is similar to national statistics. It is possible that like the House Sparrows, they have been catching diseases off the feral pigeons, with whom they often feed (see page 30). The number of breeding pairs has been stable for several years, and plenty of juveniles were evident in the second half of the summer.

HOUSE SPARROW. A severe decline has been witnessed nationally, especially in London (see page 31). This finch is now extinct from most of the sites in the Borough where only a few years ago it used to be prolific. The only records (all thought to be non breeding) came from Kensington Palace, the Canal and amongst houses near Blenheim Crescent (near Portobello Road).

GREENFINCH. Formerly more common, this species has suffered losses to Sparrowhawk predation and loss of habitat in Holland Park and Kensal Green Cemetery. Nevertheless new seed feeders in the Park seem to be encouraging them to return.

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