



Prime Ring Ouzel breeding habitat. Photo by Fiona Freshney

DARTMOOR BIRD REPORT 2017

Compiled by *Peter Reay* (WeBS Local Organiser) peter.p.j.reay@btinternet.com and

Fiona Freshney (Dartmoor Moorland Bird Adviser, c/o RSPB)

Much of this report is based on records submitted to Devon Birds, and aims to highlight the most significant Dartmoor records for 2017. The only complete account of Dartmoor's birds remains *The Birds of Dartmoor* (Smaldon 2005), but annual reports provide additional information on recent trends and unusual events. *Dartmoor Bird Reports* were published by the (now defunct) Dartmoor Study Group (Smaldon 2010) between 1996 and 2014, and an unpublished report was produced for 2015 (available as a pdf from peter.p.j.reay@btinternet.com). There was no report for 2016, but hopefully this 2017 report will signal the return of an annual Dartmoor bird report.

The report reviews both **surveys and projects** and **species**. In the absence of a 2016 report, surveys carried out in that year, but not in 2017, are included in order to provide a more complete picture of current research. A brief summary of each is provided below, and the essential features summarised in Appendix 1. Instead of conventional species accounts, reviews of the different groups are provided, though all species recorded on Dartmoor in 2017 are at least mentioned. Counts of water birds are summarised in Tables 1–3, mostly, but not entirely, derived from WeBS counts. In Appendix 2, an attempt is made to summarise quantitative data on land birds from relevant surveys. *However, it should be noted that, because of differences in habitat, area and methodology between surveys, comparisons between their results (across rows) should be made cautiously*, though within each survey, a clear indication is given of the species recorded and their relative abundance.

No observer initials have been used in the species group accounts, but thanks are due to all those who submitted Dartmoor records to Devon Birds in 2017, and to the following for additional information and/or checking through drafts of the report: Jon Avon, Malcolm Burgess, Mark Darlaston, Chris Ellis, Richard Hibbert, Rob Macklin, David Price, David Rogers, Mike Sampson, Karen Sims, Roger Smaldon, Nik Ward and Barrie Whitehall. Grateful thanks also due to Neil Calbrade of the BTO for providing Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data for Dartmoor squares.

Dartmoor Bird Surveys 2016–17

See also Appendix 1.

NATIONAL SURVEYS

BTO Breeding Bird Survey

The BTO BBS is a partnership jointly funded by the BTO, RSPB and JNCC, with fieldwork largely conducted by volunteers. Only five 1-km squares were surveyed in 2017, but with errors detected in the data from one, and not yet rectified, it is only the data from four squares that have been used in Table 4. They included open moorland, woodland and enclosed farmland habitats and their positions are shown in Figure 1 along with those of the squares not surveyed. Data from only four squares are of limited value, but if at least 10 squares could be covered each year, it might provide a useful way of monitoring Dartmoor's birds. Volunteers could best sign up for squares on the BTO website <https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/bbs/taking-part>.

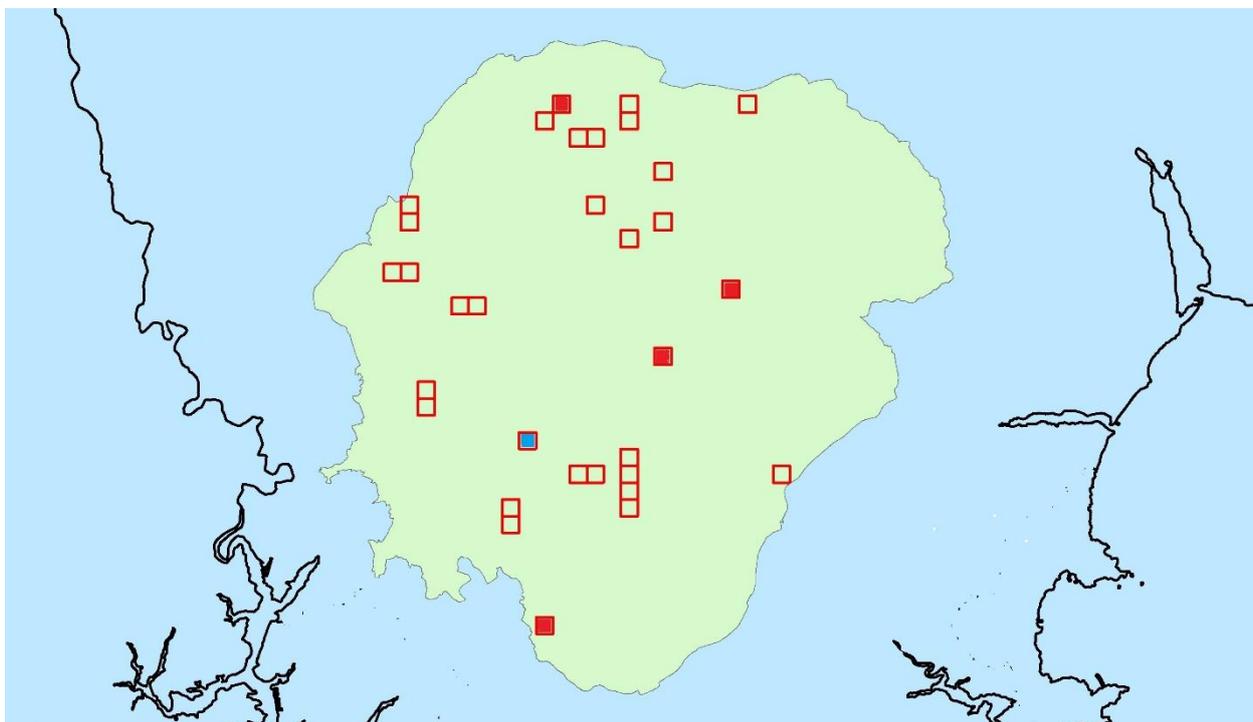


Figure 1. BTO BBS. Dartmoor squares. Solid red = surveyed and data used in Table 5. Open red = not surveyed. Blue = surveyed but corrected data unavailable. DNPA in green. Source: BTO

BTO Heronries Census

The BTO Heronries Census currently covers five small heronries within the DNP, of which two are on the high moor in conifer plantations. They range in size from one to five occupied nests, totalling 16 in both 2016 and 2017. These all refer to Grey Herons; so far, Little Egrets have not bred on Dartmoor, but the Heronries Census now does include this species. *David Rogers*

Wetland Bird Survey

WeBS is a partnership jointly funded by the BTO, RSPB and JNCC, with fieldwork largely conducted by volunteers. All eight Dartmoor reservoirs are well established WeBS sites, with Kennick, Tottiford and Trenchford grouped as 'Hennock'. The clay pits comprising the ECC Pit Complex and Portworthy Mica Dam are also WeBS sites and have traditionally been included within Dartmoor (Smaldon 2005) even though outside the DNPA boundary. A private lowland site, South Brent Lakes, was added in late 2017. WeBS sites provide most of the counts of water bird species on Dartmoor, though not necessarily from the monthly WeBS counts, and for some species such as Mandarin Duck, Golden Plover and Woodcock, current WeBS sites are of little or no relevance. *Peter Reay*

DEVON SURVEYS

Goosander Roost Counts

Synchronised roost counts on Dartmoor reservoirs date back to 1990, initially as dusk counts at Burrator, Fernworthy, Hennock and Venford. From 2009, all six Dartmoor reservoirs were covered and from December 2016 other sites were included in order to provide both Dartmoor and county totals. Recent counts have been undertaken at dawn, as these are likely to be more accurate than at dusk when some birds may be missed as a result of arriving after dark (Reay 2017). Of the three counts undertaken in 2017, the highest was on 16 December with a total of 159 roosting in Devon, of which 74 were on Dartmoor, where the highest count was 22 at Burrator. There is no evidence for an increase in Goosanders on Dartmoor since the early 1990s and indeed numbers appear to have decreased slightly, perhaps as a result of more birds now roosting at Meeth Quarry in mid-Devon. *Peter Reay*

Pied Flycatcher Project (PiedFly.Net)

PiedFly.Net co-ordinates the monitoring of nest box schemes with breeding populations of Pied Flycatchers across southwest England. Previously only a small number of these nest box schemes contributed data to national monitoring programs, but since 2011 the network has brought all this information together to share with national schemes and the scientific community. On Dartmoor in 2017, 1,128 boxes at 20 sites results in 250 clutches of Blue Tit and 193 of Pied Flycatcher. Of the latter, 139 were successful and resulted in 735 fledged young, most of which were ringed. In addition, 261 adults were trapped to monitor survival rates and site fidelity. Data downloaded from geolocator tags from recaptured adults have shown birds departing to wintering grounds in July and August, crossing the Sahara at the very end of August and reaching West Africa by September and October where they remain until March and April departure to the breeding areas. Further information is available on www.piedfly.net. *Malcolm Burgess*

Willow Tit Survey

In 2016 and 2017 a Devon-wide Willow Tit survey was undertaken by a partnership which included Devon Birds, Devon Wildlife Trust (DWT) and the Devon Biodiversity Records Centre (DBRC). The latter organisation coordinated the survey effort, working with a team of volunteers, many of whom were Devon Birds members. Each year several districts were the focus of survey effort, and Dartmoor was surveyed in 2016. The aim was to re-survey all tetrads where Willow Tits had been reported in the 1977–85 Devon Bird Atlas, but not found in the 2007–13 Atlas period, and this included tetrads around the Hennock reservoirs and near Buckland Beacon. By the end of the 2017 season it was possible to produce a map of Willow Tit distribution in Devon which also incorporated the results from the 2009–11 volunteer survey of Dartmoor's Willow Tit population which had been coordinated by the DNPA.

Across Devon, a total of 117 tetrads were visited with Willow Tit found in 21. The combined results show that North and West Devon, along with some parts of Dartmoor, are the key strongholds for Willow Tit in Devon. Although no additional tetrads were found to support the species within the DNP, with a nil return in the Hennock reservoirs area, birds were relocated in tetrads on the north-west fringe of Dartmoor. The Rhôs pasture systems along the Teignbridge/West Devon border remain of greatest importance for this species on Dartmoor, providing wet, rank grassland habitat overlain by open-structured young woodland, scattered willow and scrub. *Fiona Freshney*

DARTMOOR SURVEYS

Dartmoor Moorland Bird Project and the East Dartmoor Moorland Breeding Bird Survey

The Dartmoor Moorland Bird Project (DMB Project) was set up in response to the launch of the Devon Bird Atlas which highlighted the importance of Dartmoor in providing a refuge or stronghold for many species of conservation importance. The Duchy of Cornwall, RSPB, Devon Birds, DNPA, NE, Dartmoor Preservation Association, Dartmoor Commoners Council and farmers are working in collaboration to ensure that Dartmoor remains a special place for birds while acting to encourage the recovery of species that are under threat. A Moorland Bird Advisor (Fiona Freshney), hosted by the RSPB, was employed in June 2017 and represents this partnership, sharing species and habitat information and providing advice to Dartmoor farmers and land users through a fully integrated approach with existing agencies, researchers and initiatives working on Dartmoor.

The project aims to work within open moorland areas and newtakes to deliver benefits for priority species. The project is also part of the 'Moor than meets the eye' (MTMTE) Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) scheme operating in east Dartmoor until August 2019. MTMTE HLF funding paid for the RSPB organised East Dartmoor Moorland Breeding Bird Survey in 2016, providing data which is being used to support the DMB Project. See the RSPB web page for more detail which also gives the link to the 2016 MTMTE Moorland Bird Survey: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/our-work/conservation/projects/dartmoor-moorland-bird-project/>.
Fiona Freshney.

Dartmoor Wood Warbler Project

The project is RSPB-led, but also supported by BTO, NE and Devon Birds. In 2017, the number of territories found was the lowest since 2012, representing a 64% decline since that year, but fortunes varied between sites, with only one at Holne Chase, yet recorded at Hembury for the first time since 2014. Eight of the 97 colour-marked adults present at the end of 2016 were re-sighted in 2017, as well as six of the 99 young fledged in 2016. At the end of 2017, 175 colour-ringed birds were present, including all 121 young fledged from the 38 nests found, even though 32% of nests were predated. Of the 17 adult males tagged with geolocators in 2016, two returned to Dartmoor. One was caught, and its geolocator revealed that it had visited Italy (August), Burkina Faso (October) and then Liberia until the battery ran out in January 2017. *Malcolm Burgess and Joan Castelló (from an unpublished report Dartmoor Wood Warbler Project 2017 Report)*

Dunsford Wood Reserve: Breeding Bird Survey

Whilst 2014 was a good year for most breeding species, 2015 then eclipsed this with many species reaching their highest number since surveying began in 1980. It was, therefore, very encouraging (and a little surprising) that 2016 was even more successful and pushed the number of full and partial territories to an amazing record total of 400. This comprised 34 different species (plus five riverine species). In 2017 numbers were still at a high level, and though falling back to 350 full and partial territories, this total was still higher than in any other years except 2015 and 2016. So, in terms of numbers, the breeding bird population at Dunsford over the last four years has been flourishing, with populations at record levels. Despite the good total number of birds, the range of species (34) in both 2016 and 2017 was four fewer than in 2015. This was due to an absence of some of the more marginal species. Carrion Crow and Buzzard did not apparently breed on site, no Bullfinches were thought to have bred in 2016, and irregular breeders such as Greenfinch and Whitethroat were not recorded in either year. There were however some notable "good" and "bad" absences. In the former category there were no Pheasants apparently breeding at all in 2017 (after having been up at 17 pairs in 2012 when many thousands were released nearby for shooting). More worrying on the "bad" front, was the total absence in 2017 of Wood Warbler - the first time without any records at all in the last 37 years.

The record peak of 400 breeding pairs in 2016 was probably a result of several features, including: successive mild winters, reducing annual mortality, particularly for the smaller resident species; the upward trend of short distance migrant species such as Blackcap and Chiffchaff which mainly winter around the Mediterranean; and a good return rate for Pied Flycatcher. However, despite the numerous nesting pairs, 2016 developed into a relatively poor breeding season, with unfavourable periods of weather in early June in particular, (when nestlings were large or just fledged). Perhaps largely due to this the number of breeding birds in 2017 were somewhat reduced in number, though still at well above average levels. *David Price (from an unpublished report Dunsford Woods Reserve Breeding Bird Surveys 2016 & 2017 Summary for DWT)*

Fingle Woods Breeding Bird Survey

The Fingle Woods complex comprises Fingle Wood, Halls Cleave Wood and Cod Wood. One of the Woodland Trust's main objectives is to restore 212.5 ha of damaged ancient woodland to its former glory within the complex. The objective of this fourth breeding bird survey was to monitor any changes within the complex after the three years of work in the woodlands. As in earlier years the oakwoods, the river corridor and open scrubby areas continued to be important areas for the breeding bird population. As well as the clearfells in Halls Cleave Wood, the clearance at Wooston Fort in Fingle Woods has led to the colonisation of these open areas by Tree Pipits. Dense conifer plantations and beech woods were largely shunned by most species.

Another very interesting year at Fingle Woods with some species thriving while others fared less well. On the plus side two sub-Saharan migrants, Redstart and Spotted Flycatcher both recorded seven pairs, the highest total since the surveys began in 2014. Dippers bred successfully along the River Teign, Marsh Tits remained low but stable at just four pairs while there were big increases for Grey Wagtail, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Blackcap, Goldcrest, Jay and Bullfinch. Another UK decreasing species,

Willow Warbler recorded a slight and welcome increase to 35 territories. However, Wood Warblers failed to take up any permanent territories within the woodland complex with just two singing males recorded from sub-optimum habit and soon moving on. There were also slight decreases for Great Spotted Woodpecker, Pied Flycatcher, Coal Tit, Treecreeper and Siskin, and in spite of intensive searching, including a March visit, only one pair of Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers was found. *Rob Macklin (from an unpublished report Fingle Woods Bird Survey Report 2017 for Woodlands Trust)*

Off the Beaten Track

In 2017 the ‘Off the Beaten Track’ survey project aimed to locate breeding Ring Ouzel on Dartmoor in their traditional locations, as well as searching for birds and suitable habitat in other areas of the moor, particularly in remote, less accessible locations. Data on habitat extent and condition were collected by volunteers along with records of other priority moorland species. The project was supported by Devon Birds, DWT, a private donor and coordinated by the DBRC.

Disappointingly, Ring Ouzel pairs were located in only four sites. Initially there were four pairs in their usual stronghold, and individual pairs at two other sites, one of which was an attempt near Headland Warren that failed early season. Birds were also seen in the Haytor area early season so hopes were high of another breeding attempt as in 2016, but they did not remain. Survey coverage of one or two of the traditional sites was limited so it is possible (and is hoped) that a pair or two were missed. No other Ring Ouzels were located as a result of the survey of the additional locations, and only a couple of those sites was considered to merit further survey coverage in future years. Human disturbance, lack of dwarf shrub cover and possible altitude issues (too low) appeared to limit suitability.

Dartmoor’s Ring Ouzel population has been monitored annually since 2010, but with a reduced level of formal survey effort in the latter years. To an extent this is counterbalanced by our improved knowledge of the usage of traditional breeding sites and the assistance provided by experienced volunteers. In 2017 only six pairs were confirmed, but if a couple of pairs were missed, at best that means a population of about 8 pairs. The population trend is down with c.10 to 12 pairs through 2010 to 2012, down to six to eight pairs in 2017. The trend is shown in Figure 2 below.

The RSPB continues to monitor the development of dwarf shrub habitat within three exclosures erected on the north moor to see how feasible it is to improve habitat cover for nesting Ring Ouzel. *Fiona Freshney*

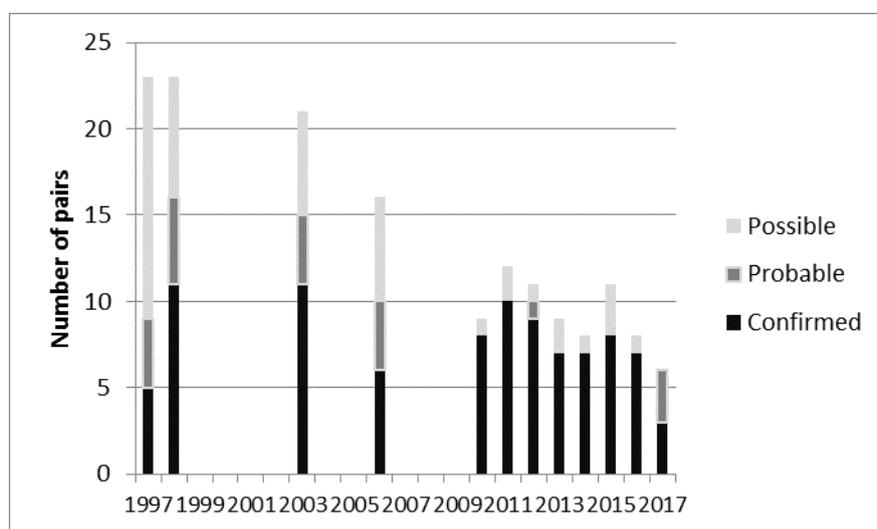


Figure 2. Ring Ouzel. The number of possible, probable and confirmed breeding pairs on Dartmoor 1997–2017.

South Brent Moorland BBS 2016

Building on the main South Brent Parish Bird Survey, this survey involved recording the number and distribution of breeding territories within each of the 22 moorland 1-km squares in the parish for six iconic moorland species, Stonechat, Whinchat, Wheatear, Tree Pipit, Yellowhammer and Reed Bunting. Territories were mapped on the basis of adult behaviour observed on multiple visits and did not rely on finding nests, although this was done for an additional species, Carrion Crow.

Territories of at least one of the selected species in each of the moorland squares, but only one square held all seven species. In total, 172 territories were located in 2015, and 159 in 2016. The most numerous species in both years was Stonechat, and the least numerous was Tree Pipit. For Stonechat there were more territories in 2016 than 2015 (85 compared to 60), for Carrion Crow there were equal numbers, but for all other species there were fewer than in 2015: Whinchat (16 v 20); Wheatear (21 v 24); Tree Pipit (7 v 14); Reed Bunting (17 v 19) and Yellowhammer (13 v 35). *Barrie Whitehall (from Brent Birders 2018)*

South Brent Parish Bird Survey

Following the baseline phase of this parish survey, which during 2014–16 covered all 52 1-km squares every month for three years, 2017 marked the first year of the monitoring phase which again involved visiting all squares, but now just in two months, January and May.

In January, a total of 29 observers produced 1,931 records from 159 square visits. The total of 72 species included Barn Owl, Firecrest, Lapwing, Linnets and Short-eared Owl, not recorded in January in 2014–16, and the Lapwing (two flying over on 26 Jan) were the first since 2010. The only species recorded in January 2014–16, but not this one, were Cormorant and Lesser Black-backed Gull. Only three species, Marsh Tit, Nuthatch and Peregrine, were recorded in substantially fewer squares, but 11 were found in more: Chaffinch, Chiffchaff, Collared Dove, Dunnock, Fieldfare, Goldcrest, Goldfinch, Grey Wagtail, Jay, Reed Bunting and Stock Dove.

In May only 18 observers contributed, and the totals of 2,319 records and 165 square visits were lower than those in May during the previous survey years in May, but the total of 87 species recorded was higher than the 2014–16 mean of 81. It included Barn Owl (in the village) and Short-eared Owl (on Dockwell Ridge on 17th) not recorded during May in 2014–16. Most of the nine species recorded in at least one previous May, but not in 2017, were occasional visitors to the parish and unlikely to occur every year (very unlikely in the case of the 2016 Lammergeier!), but the absence of Grasshopper Warbler, recorded in each of the previous three years at a probable breeding site is of more concern. Fifteen species were recorded in more squares in May 2017 than in 2014–16, most notably Reed Bunting, Spotted Flycatcher, Swift, Whitethroat, Willow Warbler and Yellowhammer. In contrast, 19 species were recorded in fewer squares. The main decreases were for Coal Tit, Cuckoo, Greenfinch, Grey Wagtail, Hobby, Jay, Sparrowhawk and Wheatear. Also down, though not by much, were Marsh Tit, Nuthatch and Peregrine, all also flagged in January as occurring in fewer squares than in previous years. *Peter Reay, for Brent Birders*

Venford Project

The Venford Project has brought together amateur ringers with Exeter University investigating Cuckoos parasitizing Meadow Pipit. In 2017, only one Cuckoo chick was found out of 113 nests, compared to three in 107 nests in 2016. Although Cuckoos are very active at Venford, it seems that the number of chicks being found is declining, but more monitoring is needed to confirm this, and if true, what factors may be responsible. In 2017, there were fewer Whinchat nests than in 2016 (13 v 18), but more Stonechats (70 v 63). A range of other moorland species were monitored and the chicks ringed including Yellowhammer, Willow warbler, Skylark, Lesser Redpoll and Reed Bunting. Results were to BTO to be included in their Nest Record Scheme project which aims to determine where significant changes in the life cycle of birds may be occurring. *Nik Ward (from the DBR 2017 Ringing Report)*

Species group accounts

WILDFOWL

Table 1. Dartmoor 2017. Wildfowl species. Maximum counts for each WeBS site and elsewhere, with overall maximum for each species in bold.

	Avon Dam Res	Burrator Res	ECC Pit Complex	Fernworthy Res	Hennock Res	Meldon Res	Portworthy	South Brent Lakes	Venford Res	Elsewhere
Mute Swan	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	1	-	-
Canada Goose	13	53	43	22	-	2	157	25	-	6
Shelduck	-	-	-	-	-	-	12	-	-	-
Mandarin Duck	-	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	34
Wigeon	-	2	1	-	-	-	13	119	-	-
Gadwall	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
Teal	61	15	21	5	4	-	137	-	-	3
Mallard	27	118	25	8	37	-	56	10	8	5
Pintail	6	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
Shoveler	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-
Red-crested Pochard	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
Pochard	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
Tufted Duck	-	23	21	7	26	-	12	-	4	2
Goosander	20	23	-	11	24	6	1	-	19	5

Confirmed breeding occurred, as usual in **Canada Goose**, **Mandarin Duck**, **Mallard** and **Goosander**, with **Teal** also recorded during May – Jul (at Avon Dam, Portworthy and Swincombe). More unusual were breeding records of **Tufted Duck** on Horsham Pond at Manaton and at Hennock, and **Shelduck** at Portworthy. Not even non-breeding **Tufted Duck** have been recorded at Manaton in at least the last 20 years, and summering (four pairs in 2017) at Hennock only started in 2013; previous Dartmoor breeding records have all been at Portworthy and other clay pits and at Hennock. A pair of **Shelduck** fledged 10 young at Portworthy, the first confirmed breeding there, and indeed on Dartmoor. **Mandarin Duck** bred on the Dart and at Yarner. For **Goosander**, breeding was confirmed on the West Dart (at least two pairs, at Dunnabridge and Huccaby) and Plym (Cadover), but birds were also present in May – Jul on the Teign (Dunsford and Fingle Bridge) and the lower Dart (Hembury Wood).

The highest count of any wildfowl species was the 157 **Canada Geese** at Portworthy in Oct but counts of 100+ were also recorded for three other species, with maxima as follows, all in Dec: **Mallard** (115 at Burrator), **Teal** (137 at Portworthy) and **Wigeon** (119 at South Brent Lakes). Although **Wigeon** have been known to winter at the latter site (a small private site with limited access and viewing) since at least 2012, this was the highest count recorded so far and was obtained from a photo taken of the flock in flight. Double-figure counts of **Mandarin Duck** occurred on the Dart (max 15 at Buckfastleigh in Feb) and Yarner Wood (max 34 in Dec), and counts of >20 **Tufted Duck** occurred at three sites. **Canada Goose** and **Mallard** are not restricted to the main water bodies, particularly when breeding, as shown by their occurrence in May in eight and 17 monads respectively in South Brent parish.

Among scarcer species most of the records came from Portworthy where 13 of the 14 wildfowl species recorded on Dartmoor in 2017 occurred. These comprised **Gadwall** (singles in Jul, Aug and Dec), **Pintail** (one in Apr), **Shoveler** (up to four, Feb to Mar and Aug to Oct), **Red-crested Pochard** (Oct to Dec) and **Pochard** (one in Feb). At the Avon Dam Res there were six **Pintail** in Jan, and two in Feb, and a male **Red-crested Pochard** in Feb.

The only species where an attempt was made to count total numbers was **Goosander**. Synchronised dawn roost counts at Dartmoor reservoirs produced totals of 38 on 14 Jan, 36 on 4 Mar and 74 on 10 Dec. All six reservoirs were used for roosting, with counts of around 20 occurring at Avon Dam, Burrator, Hennock and Venford, but there was no sign of roosting at Portworthy or other clay pits. Monthly WeBS counts are rarely synchronised across all sites, but assuming accuracy unaffected by movements of birds between sites, maximum summed counts of 231 **Mallard** in Dec and 54 **Tufted Duck** in Nov, were well above the max site counts in Table 1.

WADERS & GULLS

Table 2. Dartmoor 2017. Wader and gull species. Maximum counts for each WeBS site and elsewhere, with overall maximum for each species in bold.

	Avon Dam Res	Burrator Res	ECC Pit Complex	Fernworthy Res	Hennock Res	Meldon Res	Portworthy	Venford Res	Elsewhere
Golden Plover	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	500
Dotterel	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Little Ringed Plover	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	-	-
Lapwing	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	2
Curlew	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Knot	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
Dunlin	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	2
Common Sandpiper	1	2	-	-	1	-	1	1	5
Green Sandpiper	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	3
Greenshank	-	-	-	-	-	1	2	-	-
Jack Snipe	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Woodcock	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	3
Snipe	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	3
Black-headed Gull	-	46	-	130	-	-	55	-	40
Common Gull	-	-	-	-	-	-	42	-	-
Lesser Black-backed Gull	2	5	-	110	2	-	56	-	200
Herring Gull	12	26	-	350	-	-	1200	6	600
Yellow-legged Gull	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
Great Black-backed Gull	3	1	-	40	1	-	8	1	4

Among the 13 species of wader and six gulls recorded, breeding was only confirmed in the two species which have suffered the most serious declines on Dartmoor and in Devon, **Curlew** and **Lapwing**, though none fledged. Breeding was probable in **Common Sandpiper**, **Dunlin**, **Little Ringed Plover** and **Snipe**, the latter assumed to be the most widespread and abundant breeding wader on Dartmoor, but only reported from 10 sites in the breeding season. Among the other species, no more than one-two pairs are likely to have bred, apart perhaps from **Dunlin**, where one to two birds were found at 14 sites during the breeding season, with six 'showing signs of breeding'. A **Common Sandpiper** was singing in one area in Jun, and two adults and two juvenile **Little Ringed Plover** were present at one site on 20 Jul.

It is possible that there are more **Snipe** on Dartmoor in the winter than **Golden Plover**, but the latter are more obviously abundant, with flocks of over 200 reported from nine sites and from five of the winter months, including a peak count of 500 at Haytor on 31 Oct. The last were on 19 Apr, the first on 6 Oct. The maximum counts for all other species were <10, and for several species the only records and/or peak counts occurred away from WeBS sites. These included two **Dotterel** between Yes Tor and High Wilhays on 16 Apr, five **Common Sandpiper** in the Cadover area on 18 Apr, three **Green Sandpiper** flushed from a pool at Bagga Tor hut on 14 Aug, single **Jack Snipe** from Venton Farm in Jan and from Emsworthy in Dec and almost all the **Woodcock** records, comprising one – three from 24 sites up to 28 Mar and from 9 Oct.

Among the WeBS sites, Portworthy secured the only records of **Knot** (29 Aug) and non-breeding **Dunlin** (27 Jul) and almost the only records of **Lapwing** (one on 28 Oct), **Greenshank** (two on 10 Oct) and **Green Sandpiper** (records in Mar, Aug and Sep). Elsewhere, two **Lapwing** over South Brent on 26 Jan and one at Burrator on 23 Feb, and a **Greenshank** at Meldon on 23 Jul were noteworthy.

Most of the high gull counts came from roosts at Fernworthy and Portworthy or heading to roost (such as 150 **Lesser Black-backed** and 40 **Black-headed Gulls** flying south over Yardworthy on 17 Nov). Large flocks taking advantage of silage cutting and other feeding opportunities included 600 **Herring Gulls** at Dockwell, South Brent on 18 Jun, 100 **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** at Metherall on 20 Jun and at least 200 at Green Combe on 24 May. Otherwise, gulls were mainly present, or reached peak numbers, during the winter months. Unusual records included a **Black-headed Gull** at Burrator on 18 Jul (unseasonal) and a juv **Yellow-legged Gull** at Portworthy on 14 Aug. There were no records of breeding gulls but adult **Herring Gulls** were present in South Brent village throughout the year, and were recorded in at least 26 South Brent parish monads in both Jan and May (*cf.* a max of five in May for **Great Black-backed Gull**).

OTHER WATER BIRDS

Table 3. Dartmoor 2017. Other waterbird species. Maximum counts for each WeBS site and elsewhere, with overall maximum for each species in bold.

	Avon Dam Res	Burrator Res	ECC Pit Complex	Fernworthy Res	Hennock Res	Meldon Res	Portworthy	South Brent Lakes	Venford Res	Elsewhere
Cormorant	4	14	1	3	14	2	-	-	2	-
Little Egret	-	1	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-
Grey Heron	1	2	1	1	1	1	-	1	2	5
Little Grebe	1	4	20	2	2	-	4	1	5	2
Great Crested Grebe	2	3	-	1	3	1	-	-	2	-
Moorhen	-	-	3	-	1	-	13	4	-	1
Water Rail	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
Coot	-	-	3	-	5	-	25	-	-	-

Of the species in Table 3, **Grey Heron**, **Little Grebe**, **Moorhen** and **Coot** bred on Dartmoor in 2017, but non-breeding **Cormorants** were present in all months, peaking in the autumn with counts of 14, and **Great Crested Grebe** in all but Jan, Feb and Dec, but with a maximum count of only three. The BTO Heronries Census indicated 16 **Grey Heron** nests at five colonies (Beardown, Buckfast, Hoo Meavy, Venford and Wanford Wood); although not breeding in South Brent parish, they occurred in at least eight monads in Jan and May. The highest count of **Little Grebe** (max 20 in Jul) came from ECC Pit Complex, one of three confirmed breeding sites, the others being South Brent Lakes and Venford Res. **Moorhen** bred at Dockwell, South Brent and Portworthy and probably at many other sites, but the only record of **Coot** breeding was at Lee Mill, although unsuccessful as the nest was predated. Away from breeding sites, single **Moorhens** were noted at Huccaby in Sep and Nov ('first for years') and in a South Brent garden away from water in Feb. **Coot** were most consistently recorded at Portworthy, where present throughout the year with a max of 25 in Jan. Winter records of **Little Grebe** came from a pond near Soussons in Jan and Feb, and in summer, presumed Venford birds appeared at the Avon Dam in Jul and (unusually) on the Dart at Huccaby in Aug. Among the scarcer species **Little Egret** was recorded at both Burrator (16 Jul to 4 Aug) and Portworthy (16 Jan, and two on 16 Oct) and the only **Water Rails** were at Portworthy on 8 and 28 Oct.

Dipper bred at eight sites including three – four pairs on the Teign at Dunsford Woods, and another three pairs (two confirmed) at Fingle Woods, but there were no breeding records for **Kingfisher**, apart from a probable nest site on the Dart at Buckfast, and other records from that area in Apr, May and Jul. Records also came from the Meavy and Tavistock Canal in Apr and from Cadover and Huccaby in Jul. A newt-feeding male was seen in the Christow area in December, and records came from four other sites outside the breeding season.

GAME BIRDS

There were only nine submitted records of **Red Grouse**, four of them in the form of droppings, the others being of one to two birds and the only site outside the Okehampton Range was Lyd Head; however, two were also recorded during the BTO BBS survey at Hameldown on 8 Apr. Although **Pheasant** is presumably the most numerous and widespread gamebird on Dartmoor, as shown by its occurrence in 26 South Brent parish monads in May, there were only eight counts >10 (and none bred in

Dunsford Woods, following a decline from 16 territories in 2012). Only single **Red-legged Partridge** were recorded from four sites, and among the exotics only the resident male **Lady Amherst's Pheasant** on Brent Hill was reported.

RAPTORS (including owls)

Breeding was probable or confirmed in the following: **Goshawk**; **Sparrowhawk**; **Buzzard**; **Kestrel** (carrying food at Buckfastleigh, and possible at Holwell Tor); **Hobby** (pair displaying in May at one site and attempted to breed at another though nest failed); and **Peregrine**. **Goshawk** appeared to have a good breeding year with sites rearing a mean 3.1 young. Each of these species was recorded in all months, apart from **Hobby** (only between 14 Apr and 4 Sep).

Buzzard, the most widespread species, and the one seen in the largest groups, such as 20+ soaring Buckfastleigh in Apr, was recorded in 35 South Brent parish monads in Jan and 31 in May, *cf.* only five and three for **Sparrowhawk** and 12 and nine for **Kestrel**. Of the two winter visitors, **Merlins** were present until 12 April and from 26 Sep, but records, all singles, came from only 11 sites. **Hen Harriers** were recorded at eight sites, mostly up to 27 Mar and from 15 Oct, although there was a female at Bellever on 10 May and a male near the Meavy on 28 Sep. Communal roosting occurred during all six winter months, the maximum being seven (four males) on 28 Dec.

Unusual feeding observations included a **Merlin** chasing a **Snipe** at Muddilake in Jan and, after a long chase, a **Hobby** catching a bumblebee at Warren House in July. A male **Peregrine** was found dead only 1 km from a nest site in Nov

Passing through in spring, as usual, were a few **Red Kites** with six records in Apr, 18 in May, including three at Yelverton on 26th, and six in Jun, the last on 24th. Before the rush there were singles at Holne Chase on 8 Feb and at Postbridge on 27 Mar. Less regular passage birds were a female **Marsh Harrier** at Houndtor on 21 May, and an **Osprey** flying north from Burrator on 24 Apr.

Two pairs of **Tawny Owl** probably bred at Dunsford Woods and up to four were heard in Hembury Woods. There was no indication that **Barn Owl** bred, though three of the four records were in Apr, the other in Dec, and the only sites were Dean Prior, Lettaford and South Brent. **Little Owls** were heard at South Brent in May and single **Short-eared Owls** were in the Petre's Pit/Knattabarrow area on 23 Jan, and on the more unusual dates of 17 May on Dockwell Ridge and 30 Aug on Rippon Tor.

DOVES, CUCKOO, NIGHTJAR, SWIFT, WOODPECKERS and SHRIKES

Although widespread and resident species on Dartmoor, there were no records of **Collared Dove** in Feb, Jul, Aug or Oct, or of **Stock Dove** in Sep or Nov, and the maximum counts of both species were only 11 and 10 respectively. In contrast, migratory **Woodpigeon** flocks >1,000 occurred in late Oct and early Nov, which peaked with a 'massive movement' of an estimated 180,000 over Buckfastleigh on 27 Oct (1,500 per minute).

Three iconic summer visitors all presumably bred. The first **Cuckoo** was early, on 25 Mar, but there were no records after 21 Jun. Five were seen together at Cadover. **Nightjar** records, between 19 May and 17 Jul, included eight churring males at Bellever on 7 Jul, and records from Haytor Down and Trendlebeare in May, Brimpts Plantation (first record?) and Ramshorn Down in Jun and Hembury Woods in Jun/Jul. **Swifts** were present from 28 Apr to 22 Aug, and bred at Manaton, Okehampton and South Brent, the highest counts being 30+ at Buckfastleigh and 15 at Okehampton in early Jul.

All three woodpeckers bred at Dunsford Woods: **Green Woodpecker** (one pair regularly recorded, only present in last three years); **Great Spotted Woodpecker** (at least two pairs, after five in 2016), with breeding also at Fingle Woods (13 pairs), Hembury, Yarner and Venford; and **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** (at least two pairs) with indications of breeding at four other sites, including Yarner Wood. Travelling woodpeckers included a single **Wryneck** at Roborough Common on 22 Apr, and a **Great Spotted Woodpecker** found dead in Newton Abbot in May having been ringed 18 km away in Bridford in 2013.

It is not every year that three shrike species are recorded on Dartmoor. The most regular, **Great Grey Shrike** was present in the Soussons area from early Jan to 28 May. One on Saddle Tor on 2 Apr is the most likely contender for a second bird, as the Soussons bird was present on at least 1 and 7 Apr. A female **Woodchat** graced Cuckoo Ball 11–19 May, followed by two **Red-backed Shrikes** in Jun, a female at South Brent on 6th and a male at Warren House on 22nd.

CROWS, CRESTS and TITS

All six resident Devon corvids are common on Dartmoor, but under-reported in spite of the importance of at least one species on the breeding success of other birds, particularly waders. **Carrion Crow** was recorded from at least 46 South Brent parish monads in Jan and May, as usual the most widespread species in the survey. The largest flock was 50+ at the Dewerstone in Jan. Of interest were nests at Cadover and Princetown, both predated after hatching, presumably by another corvid. **Rooks** are more of a flocking species, but no flocks were reported, and the only rookeries were apparently at South Brent and Smokey Cross.

Jackdaws mostly breed on man-made structures, including many of the houses lived in by Devon Birds members, but the only sites mentioned were Beckaford, Meldon Viaduct and Okehampton Castle, and no flocks >50 were reported even though larger flocks were regular in at least one area. Gatherings of **Ravens** are more unusual, so do tend to get reported. The largest were 30 at Standon Hill on 14 Aug, 25 in the Cadover area on 18 Oct and 16 at Merrivale in Oct, but the only breeding records was from Fingle Woods (four pairs) and Yarner. The highest count of **Magpie** was a pre-roost gathering of 35 at Clearbrook in Feb. Not a single flock, but 13 **Jays** were counted in the Portworthy to Wotter area on 8 Oct, and the only breeding record for this species was of seven pairs in Fingle Woods. An interesting observation at one site was of low numbers of **Jays** in **Goshawk** breeding areas.

Goldcrest were recorded in all months, with a peak count of 10 at Buckfastleigh STW in early Jan. Seven pairs at Dunsford Wood (as in 2016) was above the post-1990 mean of 4.4, and an impressive 150 breeding territories were counted in the largely coniferous Fingle Woods, a large increase from the 81 in 2016. **Firecrest** was recorded in five months: Mar (one at North Bovey on 3rd); Sep (one below Brent Hill on 2nd); and Oct–Dec (records from 12 sites from 14 Oct on.).

Nest box data for **Blue** and **Great Tits** are given in the main species accounts. About six times as many **Blue Tits** as **Great Tits** bred in both Dunsford and Fingle Woods. At Dunsford Woods there were 36 pairs of **Blue Tits** (in between the high of 47 in 2016 and the post-1990 mean of 28) and six pairs of **Great Tit** (lower than usual and linked to poor fledging success of recent years). In contrast, **Coal Tit** numbers were above average at Dunsford, with eight pairs, and there were 54 in the larger, more coniferous Fingle Woods, but this reflects a decrease in recent years perhaps associated with clear-felling.

The declining **Marsh Tit** was recorded at 25 sites and in all months. Breeding occurred at Fingle Bridge (four pairs), Shaugh Prior, Yarner, Hembury and Dunsford (one pair, perhaps another). There were only two records from a Buckfastleigh garden, singles on feeder in Jan and Dec, which prompted the comment 'now a rare sight - used to see two-three regularly'. In South Brent parish they were only recorded in three monads in Jan and May but were regular visitors to a Pennaton garden throughout the year. **Willow Tits** at North Bovey on 3 Mar and at Belstone 23-25 Apr (pair) were the only records of this species.

Three pairs of **Long-tailed Tits** bred in Dunsford Woods, the number varying between one and eight in recent years., and there were five pairs in Fingle Woods.

LARKS and HIRUNDINES

Skylarks were recorded in all months apart from Aug, but there were only single records in Jan, Nov and Dec, including one at Manga on 28 Dec 'flushed from snowy ground, the only one seen on all day walk and in recent weeks'. In contrast, birds were widespread on the moor during the breeding season. On Taw Marsh on 18 May, they were described as 'abundant on the moor', and at Ringmoor Down 40+ were counted on 2 Apr. Nine nests were found at Venford. No flocks >10 were reported, but at Laughter Tor on 25 Oct 20 migrants flew SW in singles and small groups in a 20-minute period.

Sand Martins were recorded between 3 Apr and 29 Aug, most records coming from the claypits with a max of 30+ on 27 May at Cadover where breeding in the riverbank was confirmed. Away from this area, records comprised 10 at Buckfastleigh on 9 Apr, one at Clearbrook on 18 Apr and seven at Burrator on 4 Aug, and at Portworthy, the max was 10 on 29 Aug. **Swallows** of course were widely reported, the extreme dates being 5 Apr and 2 Oct, with the highest counts of 50 – 100 coming from various sites between 24 Aug and 12 Sep. The first **House Martin** was on 16 Apr, the last on 2 Oct, the only counts of 50 or more were at Willey Farm, Okehampton, Dartmoor's largest colony with at least 90 nests, Owley with 50 migrants on 27 Aug and Fernworthy with 100 on 12 Sep.

WARBLERS

Dartmoor's resident warbler, **Dartford Warbler**, with numbers reduced by hard weather in recent years, was recorded from two sites, Laughter Tor in Nov and Roborough Down, where there was a welcome return to confirmed breeding and a peak count of five on 28 Oct, and records in all months except Dec. There were also records of the two other warbler species likely to occur in winter. **Blackcap** was recorded at sites in South Brent in both Jan and Dec, and from near Yelverton in Dec, and **Chiffchaff** was at both Buckfastleigh and South Brent STW in Jan and Dec, and at Burrator in Jan.

Phylloscopus warblers had mixed fortunes at Dunsford Woods. Remaining at a high level were **Chiffchaff** (14 pairs *cf.* 16 in 2016) and **Willow Warbler** (six pairs as in 2016, a recovery probably linked to the regeneration of scrub following scrub clearance carried out in the name of butterfly conservation!), but for **Wood Warbler** there were no pairs for the second year running (*cf.* three in 2015 and 10–12 in the late 1980s) and at Fingle Woods there was no evidence of breeding, although two males sang; overall on Dartmoor, 48 singing males at 10 sites and 38 nests produced 121 fledged young. The fledging rate at 3.18 per

breeding attempt was quite high, but the number of territories the lowest since 2012 when the Dartmoor Wood Warbler Survey began. First and last dates were 10 Mar and 26 Oct for **Chiffchaff**, 2 Apr and 21 Sep for **Willow Warbler** and 14 Apr and 12 Jul for **Wood Warbler**. The only **Yellow-browed Warbler** reported was at Buckfastleigh on 4–5 October.

Among *Sylvia* warblers, 18 pairs of **Blackcap** at Dunsford Woods, maintained the high population level of recent years, in contrast to one of **Garden Warbler** cf. three on 2015, but there were five singing males of the latter in Hembury Woods, where breeding was confirmed. In Fingle Woods, the contrast between the two species was even more extreme, with 133 **Blackcaps** (the highest number yet recorded) and four **Garden Warbler** territories. Summer visiting **Blackcaps** were recorded from 28 Mar to 10 Oct, but there were only five records after Jul. For **Garden Warbler**, there were no records after 25 Jun, almost certainly a reflection of the singing periods of these two species. **Whitethroats** occurred from 18 Apr to 30 Aug, but at only 15 sites and with no records of confirmed breeding.

Reeling **Grasshopper Warblers** were heard between 24 Apr and 9 Jul at Burrator, Cadover, High House Waste, Lydford, Soussons and Statt's Bridge, but were not heard by the Avon below Huntingdon Cross, a regular site in previous years. A **Sedge Warbler** sang at Cadover in Jun, but the only other records were of autumn migrants 5–12 Aug at Dockwell, Ryder's Hill and Smallbrook.

WAXWING, NUTHATCH, TREECREEPER, WREN and STARLING

The only record of **Waxwing** involved at least 30 birds in a cherry tree at Peter Tavy on 18 Jan.

At Dunsford Woods there were three, perhaps four, pairs of **Nuthatch** and one of **Treecreeper**, the former above the post 1990 mean of two, the latter associated with fewer sightings than usual. At Fingle Woods, there were five pairs of each. Among several breeding records including boxes, a more interesting **Nuthatch** nest at Druid Wood was in a hole at least six metres above ground in stonework of an old mine chimney. **Treecreeper** breeding was confirmed at Meldon Woods, but of note in this resident species was the absence of any records in Aug, Sep and Dec and only one in Feb.

One of the most abundant species in Dunsford Woods was **Wren**, although 29 pairs was down on the 2016 peak of 36 perhaps because of low productivity in that year, and there were 251 breeding territories in Fingle Woods. This must be one of the most widespread species on Dartmoor as illustrated by its presence in 46 monads in South Brent parish in May and by two records over 450 m asl: at Little Mis Tor, and 1 km away from trees/bushes on 26 Sep, and in the Amicombe Valley on 1 Dec 'this is one of remotest yet'.

Even though a widespread and often abundant winter visitor and resident on Dartmoor, there were only 25 records of **Starling**, with none in May or July, only one each in Aug and Sep and only one breeding record (probable, at Haytor Vale). There were no flocks >100, but about 100 were reported at Downstow (South Brent) in Jan, Emsworthy in Mar, Huccaby Tor in Sep, Challacombe in Nov and South Brent in Dec. The latter record was of birds leaving a bamboo roost at dawn in the village. In South Brent parish, **Starlings** occurred in 25 monads in Jan and 11 in May.

THRUSHES and FLYCATCHERS

The three large resident thrushes all did well in Dunsford Woods, with 25 pairs of **Blackbird** only just below the record 27 in 2016, eight pairs of **Song Thrush** the highest ever total and three pairs of **Mistle Thrush** also high. In Fingle Woods there were 133, 74 and 19 pairs of these species respectively, all higher than in other recent years. Among other records were singing **Blackbirds** up the East Dart Valley to at least 380 m, and a late singing **Mistle Thrush** on 27 Jun near the O Brook. Early autumn flocks of **Mistle Thrushes** included the highest count of 29 at Hembury Woods on 3 Sep.

Ring Ouzels were recorded between 14 Apr (Oke Tor) and 21 Nov (Avon Dam). Six pairs were confirmed or probable breeders but with less comprehensive survey coverage than previous years it is possible that one or two were missed. There were only four spring migrants but more, as usual, in autumn, the first on 9 Oct (over two months after the last seen on a breeding site), most between 26 Oct and 11 Nov and a maximum count of five at both Trowlesworthy on 18 Oct and Emsworthy on 8 Nov.

The last **Redwing** was on 19 Apr (Badworthy) and **Fieldfare** on 22 Apr (Glaze Valley), and the first returns for both species were on 9 Oct at Harford Moor and Pile's Copse. For **Redwing**, the largest flocks in the first winter period were about 50 at Owley and Huccaby in Jan, but larger numbers in autumn included an estimated 2,000 flying SW over Buckfastleigh on 27 Oct. Flocks of no more than 70 **Fieldfare** were recorded from Jan to Apr, but there were counts >200 from five sites between Oct and Dec, including 500 at Challacombe on 10 Nov.

Forty-three pairs of **Robin** at Dunsford Woods was down from the record 55 in 2016, but above the post-1990 mean of 31, and there were 311 in Fingle Woods, but this represented a decline since 371 in 2015. At both sites it was the most abundant

breeding species. Five pairs of **Redstart** was the highest so far recorded at Dunsford Woods, where they only started breeding regularly in 2008. However, none had bred in 2016, and a report of 'well below usual numbers' at Burrator in 2017 reflect variability in this species. Other breeding records came from Challacombe, Emsworthy and Fingle Bridge (seven pairs), the first arrival was on 3 Apr (Haytor Down) and a trickle of autumn migrants started with one on Brent Hill on 11 Aug and ended on 12 Sep with one at Fernworthy. There were no records of wintering **Black Redstarts**, and all six records were of scattered singles at: Shaugh Prior on 29 Mar, Meldon Woods quarry on 25 Apr; Avon Dam on 21 Jul (unusual date, but follows one in Aug there in 2016); Brent Fore Hill on 27 Oct; Buckfastleigh on 4 Nov; and Princetown on 25 Nov.

There were no breeding surveys of chats in 2017, but the numbers of monads occupied in May in South Brent parish were 15 for **Stonechat** and seven each for **Whinchat** and **Wheatear**, the latter being only half the 2014–16 mean, but close to the mean in the other two species. **Wheatear** nests were reported at Cadover and Yellowmeade, the first arrived on 13 Mar at Gisperdown, the last on 26 Oct at Prewley Moor, and a Greenland race male was reported at Soussons on 21 Apr. The first **Whinchat** was on 17 Apr at Mountsland Common, the only confirmed breeding was at Warren House, 12 males were counted in the Challacombe area on 17 Jun and the last bird, at Shipley on 13 Sep, was the only record for that month. Among many records of **Stonechat**, in all months, were eight pairs at Clearbrook on 18 May, five at Wigford Down on 27 Apr and four at Western Beacon on 11 May, with nests found at Clearbrook, Warren House and Yellowmeade. Off the moor, there was one on farmland near Brent Hill on 15 October, and several records from Brent Hill itself, including a family party in Jun.

Both flycatcher species bred at Dunsford Woods, but the two pairs of **Spotted Flycatcher** were eclipsed by 26 pairs of **Pied Flycatcher** just two below the 2016 peak and resulting in 134 fledged young. Breeding **Pied Flycatchers** were recorded at 21 Dartmoor sites in total, involving 196 pairs (almost all in nest boxes) of which 139 were successful and produced 735 fledged young. Confirmed and probable breeding records for **Spotted Flycatcher** came from Dunnabridge, Fingle Woods (six pairs), Huccaby, Hembury Woods (at least three pairs), Sigford and Yarner. The first **Spotted Flycatcher** appeared on 19 Apr at Yarner and the last was on 27 Aug at South Brent, with records of other August migrants from Dartmeet, Emsworthy and Wigford. The first **Pied Flycatcher** was on 3 Apr at Yarner and no more were reported after 9 Jul, and the only obvious migrant was a male below the Avon Dam on 22 Apr.

DUNNOCK, HOUSE SPARROW, WAGTAILS and PIPITS

Dunnock are widespread, occurring, for example, in 33 South Brent parish monads in both Jan and May, and surprisingly abundant as shown by the 25 adults and 63 juveniles ringed at a 0.5 ha site at Bridford during the year. At nearby Dunsford Woods, three pairs was down on the five of 2015, but up on the one-two pairs typical of other recent years, and there were six at Fingle Woods.

The maximum count of **House Sparrow** was 50 at Buckfastleigh in Jul, and although obviously widespread (recorded from at least 24 South Brent parish monads in both Jan and May), the only unusual record was of a dome nest built in a honeysuckle and hazel garden hedge in South Brent, a departure from the usual sites on buildings.

According to submitted records, **Grey Wagtail** bred at 10 sites. Including 13 pairs on the R Teign at Fingle Woods (up from 10 in 2016 and six in 2015), and **Pied Wagtail** at only four. The highest counts of **Pied Wagtails** were: 75+ on 11 Feb at the A30 service station nr Okehampton; 35 to roost on 2 Nov at Laughter Tor; and 30 at Buckfastleigh WTW on 13 Feb. None roosted by the railway at South Brent, as they have done for the previous four autumns, coinciding with Network Rail's clearance of the roosting bushes earlier in the year. Records of **White Wagtail** comprised singles at Buckfastleigh WTW on 13 Feb, Higher White Tor 20 Apr, Portworthy on 2 Sep and Fernworthy on 12 Sep. The only records of **Yellow Wagtail** were at South Brent, below Brent Hill, during 28–31 Aug with a maximum of 17 on 28th.

Although there were no submitted records of confirmed breeding for **Meadow Pipit**, the Venford team located 113 nests on Holne Moor, far more than any other species. Flocks received more attention and those ≥ 50 comprised: 70 at Dartmeet on 27 Apr, 50 at Great Mis Tor on 26 Sep and 50 into roost at Laughter Tor on 30 Oct. For **Tree Pipit**, song flights were recorded from 18 sites, including four singing males at Hembury, two pairs at Dunsford Woods and five pairs at Fingle Woods, where they first colonised the clear-fell areas in 2016. At Soussons they were considered 'well down on numbers'. The first arrival was on 1 Apr at Hembury, the last on 9 Sep at Hexworthy, and this was the first reported since 9 Jul.

FINCHES and BUNTINGS

Two species of finch breed in Dunsford Woods. In 2017, 17 pairs of **Chaffinch** was close to the post-1990 mean, whereas seven pairs of **Siskin**, which only started breeding there in 2010, was a return to peak numbers after three pairs in 2016. This was one more than the number of pairs in the much larger Fingle Woods, which held 103 pairs of **Chaffinches**. **Siskins** have declined at

Fingle Woods from 12 pairs in 2015, as more conifers have been clear-felled. Elsewhere, it was just large flocks that attracted attention. For **Chaffinch** those of 100–150 were reported from Cator Court, Chagford and Hembury Wood in Nov and Dec, though the highest count was of 500 SW over Buckfastleigh on 27 Oct. There was only one record of **Brambling** in the first winter-period, a female at Whitley Cross on 19 Feb, but more occurred later in the year. The first were two over Buckfastleigh on 28 Oct, followed by up to 30 at both Cator Court and Soussons in Nov, with singles at four other sites in both Nov and Dec.

There were no double-figure counts of **Greenfinch**, and only four records in the last five months of the year. Considered to be increasingly rare at Huccaby, it occurred in only nine South Brent parish monads in May (*cf.* the 2014–16 mean of 16). In contrast, **Goldfinch** occurred in 17 and 31 South Brent parish monads in Jan and May respectively (*cf.* 2014–16 means of 12 and 25) and there were maximum counts of 80 at Huccaby on 5 Sep and 50 on Brent Hill on 3 Jul. **Linnets** are considered resident, but they largely move off the moor in winter, and in 2017 there was just one Jan record and none in either Feb or Dec. Breeding was confirmed at Clearbrook, Belstone Higher Tor and Venford (five nests found), and there were five flocks >40, mostly in Aug and Sep, with a maximum of 100 at Swincombe on 9 Sep. In contrast, there were no records at all of **Lesser Redpoll** in Aug and Sep, but a nest was found at Venford, and double-figure flocks occurred at five sites including Hembury Woods, with a maximum of 50 on 2 Jan, and in the Portworthy/Wotter area where up to 90 were counted in Oct. One was on a garden feeder at Huccaby on 6 Apr, and another, showing features of Common Redpoll, was reported from a Manaton garden in Feb. There were 10 records of **Siskin** flocks >20, and these included 60+ in the Portworthy area in Oct, a maximum of 40 at Hembury in Aug and 30 at Soussons in Jan. Recently fledged young were reported from Burrator, Whitchurch and Yarner, and birds were first noted in gardens after an absence of several months at Huccaby on 10 Feb and South Brent on 6 Mar.

In contrast to some of the apparently more common species, there were records of **Crossbill** in every month except Aug, but with a very restricted distribution, as in most years, the only double-figure counts came from Soussons, where the highest was 40+ in Jan. For **Bullfinch**, although widely reported, there were no records of confirmed breeding or flocks of more than five. However, the presence of 14 pairs in Fingle Woods and records from 19 South Brent parish monads in Jan and 20 in May indicates that this is now one of the more common finches. The national invasion of **Hawfinches** in the autumn resulted in five records on Dartmoor: three at Huccaby on 25 Oct; one-two at Emsworthy on 3 and 19 Nov; eight at Widecombe on 6 Nov; and two in the Cadover/Brisworthy area on 23 Nov. Even rarer than **Hawfinch** (25 Dartmoor records up to 2002), was the adult male **Serin** at Shaugh Prior on 12 May – a new species for Dartmoor.

Most **Reed Bunting** records were from Apr to Jul, including confirmed/probable breeding at Cadover, Warren House, West Dart Valley and Venford (eight nests found), but there hardly any in the last five months of the year, and in the last two months only one, of three at Sittaford Tor on 28 Dec. No garden records were reported. Maximum counts were eight at Soussons and six above the Avon Dam in Jan, and six singing males Warren House/Vitifer area in Jul. Apparent scarcity in autumn and winter also applied to **Yellowhammer**, with only four records after Jul. The largest flocks were 10 at Dartmeet on 29 April, and eight at South Brent on 5 Feb. Also, near South Brent there were at least four in a garden near Aish Ridge in Jan and Dec and in the parish as a whole, occurrence in 18 monads in May contrasted with only three in Jan (equivalent figures for **Reed Bunting** were 10 and four). Four **Yellowhammer** nests were found at Venford. Rare buntings comprised two male **Snow Buntings** at Trowlesworthy on 18 Oct and a **Lapland Bunting** calling as it flew SW along the edge of the moor at Buckfastleigh on 27 Oct.

References

- Booker, H. and Rylands, K. (2017). *East Dartmoor Moorland Breeding Bird Survey 2016*. RSPB SW Regional Office
- Brent Birders (2018). *The Birds of South Brent Parish, before, during and after the 2014–16 survey*. Brent Birders, South Brent
- Reay, P (2017). Burrator nil, Meeth 54 – results from the 2016/17 Goosander roost counts. *Devon Birds* 70 (2): 27–34.
- Smaldon, R. (2005). *The Birds of Dartmoor*. Isabelline Books, Falmouth.
- Smaldon, R. (2010). The Dartmoor Study Group. *Devon Birds* 63 (1): 15–16.

Appendix 1. Dartmoor bird surveys and projects in 2016 and 2017 (BBS = Breeding Bird Survey; one monad = 1 km²)

Survey name	From	Species	Areas/sites	Methodology	Organisations (and contact)	Output
BTO BBS	1993	All	Randomly selected monads (four in 2017)	Two visits in breeding season; two transects per square	BTO/RSPB/JNCC (SDBn)	National report on BTO website
BTO Heronries Census	1928	Grey Heron	All known heronries	Occupied nests counted during breeding season	BTO (DaR)	DBR species account
Dartmoor Wood Warbler Project	2012	Wood Warbler	All known Dartmoor woodland sites	Nest-recording, ringing and geolocator studies	RSPB; DB; BTO; Natural England (MDB)	Unpublished report and DBR Ringing Report
Dunsford Woods BBS	1980	Woodland breeders	57 ha of woodland and heath	Counting and mapping breeding territories/pairs from repeated visits	DWT (DJP)	DBR species accounts and unpublished report
East Dartmoor Moorland BBS	2016 (not in 2017)	Selected open moorland breeders (22 species)	East Dartmoor moorland (174 monads)	As BTO BBS, but four transects per square	RSPB, part of More than Meets the Eye HLF scheme (HB and KRy)	Booker and Rylands (2017)
Fingle Woods BBS	2014	Woodland breeders	339 ha of mainly conifer wood, now partly clear-felled	Counting and mapping breeding territories/pairs from six visits April–June	Woodland Trust (RNM)	Unpublished reports submitted to Woodland Trust and Devon Birds
Goosander Roost Surveys	1991	Goosander	Dartmoor reservoirs	Synchronised monthly winter counts at dawn	None (PJR)	DBR species account, unpublished reports and Reay (2017)
Off the Beaten Track	2017	Ring Ouzel and other open moorland breeders	Scattered sites, including remote and less studied ones	Visits to traditional and new potential sites to scope habitat suitability	DBRC/DWT/DB (FF)	DBR species account
PiedFly.Net	2011	Pied Flycatcher	Nest-box schemes at scattered sites	Nest-recording, ringing and geolocator studies	BTO; DB; University of Exeter (MDB)	DBR species account and Ringing Report and unpublished report
South Brent Moorland BBS	2015 (not in 2017)	Seven species of open moorland breeder	Open moorland in South Brent parish (22 monads)	Mapping and counting breeding territories	None (BW)	Included in Brent Birders (2018) and unpublished reports
South Brent Parish Bird Survey	2014	All	South Brent Parish (52 monads)	Recording presence in each monad, now just in January and May	None (Brent Birders, pPJR)	Brent Birders (2018), and unpublished reports
Venford Project	2013	Cuckoo and other moorland species	Holne Moor (four monads)	Searching for nests and recording nest data	Exeter University (AML)	Nest record cards sent to BTO
Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS)	1948	Water birds	All Dartmoor reservoirs and one private lake	Monthly total counts	BTO/RSPB/JNCC (PJR)	DBR species accounts, and unpublished annual Devon WeBS report
Willow Tit Survey	2016	Willow Tit	Devon, including Dartmoor (no Dartmoor sites in 2017)	Searching suitable habitat and sites where previously recorded	DBRC; DWT; DB (MDB, FF and Emily Stallworthy for DWT)	DBR species account

Appendix 2. Dartmoor 2016 and 2017. Land birds. Summary of survey abundance data. For further details of each survey see Appendix 1. Note that because of differences in area, habitat and methodology, caution is needed in making comparisons

SURVEY	BTO BBS	East Dartmoor Moorland Breeding Bird Survey (MTMTE)	Dunsford Woods BBS	Fingle Woods BBS	Venford BBS	South Brent Moorland BBS	South Brent Parish Survey- January	South Brent Parish Survey – May
SURVEY AREA (km ²)	4	174	0.57	3.39	4	22	52	52
RAW MEASUREMENT	total of max counts	total of max counts	total pairs/territories	total pairs/territories	total nests	territories/nests	presence/absence	presence/absence
ABUNDANCE MEASURE	number per monad						number of squares	
Red Grouse	0.5	*<0.1						
Pheasant	7.8						12	26
Sparrowhawk	0.3						5	3
Buzzard	1.3			1.2			35	31
Stock Dove							12	15
Woodpigeon	2.3				0.8		30	37
Collared Dove	1.3						18	17
Cuckoo	0.8	0.5			**0.3			12
Tawny Owl			3.6				6	6
Green Woodpecker	0.3		1.8				7	13
Great Spotted Woodpecker	0.5		3.6	3.8			16	15
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker			3.6	0.3				
Kestrel		0.1					12	9
Magpie	0.3						38	37
Jay			1.8				24	11
Jackdaw	0.8						31	32
Rook							15	15
Carrion Crow	2.3	1.5			0.8	0.6	47	46
Raven	0.8						19	22
Goldcrest			12.6	44.2			19	9
Firecrest							1	
Blue Tit	1.5		64.8	21.2			36	30
Great Tit	1.3		10.8	3.2			34	34
Coal Tit	0.3		14.4	15.9			17	9
Marsh Tit	0.3		1.8	1.2			3	3
Skylark	11.3	8.9			2.3		6	37
Swallow	6.3							43
House Martin								19
Long-tailed Tit	0.3		5.4	1.5			14	10
Wood Warbler				0.6				
Chiffchaff	2.0		25.2	24.8			3	34
Willow Warbler	0.3	2.9	10.8	10.3	1.3			27
Blackcap	1.3		32.4	39.2			4	32

CONTINUED/

Appendix 2 /CONTINUED

SURVEY							South Brent Parish Survey - January		South Brent Parish Survey - May	
	BTO BBS	East Dartmoor Moorland Breeding Bird Survey (MTMTE)	Dunsford Woods BBS	Fingle Woods BBS	Venford BBS	South Brent Moorland BBS	number of squares		number of squares	
ABUNDANCE MEASURE	number per monad						number of squares		number of squares	
Garden Warbler			1.8	1.2						10
Whitethroat				0.9						18
Dartford Warbler										
Grasshopper Warbler		0.4								
Nuthatch	0.3		5.4				13	10		
Treecreeper							6	2		
Wren	5.5		52.2	74.0			35	46		
Starling							25	11		
Dipper			7.2	0.9			6	5		
Blackbird	11.5		45	39.2	1.0		39	43		
Fieldfare							17			
Song Thrush	3.8		14.4	21.8	0.8		16	32		
Redwing							29			
Mistle Thrush		0.5	5.4	5.6			19	13		
Spotted Flycatcher			3.6	1.8				3		
Robin	6.3		77.4	91.7			40	43		
Pied Flycatcher			46.8	4.7						
Redstart		0.4	9	2.1				5		
Whinchat	0.5	1.0			3.3	0.7		7		
Stonechat	2.5	6.1			10.3	3.9	4	15		
Wheatear	3.5	1.1				1.0		7		
Duncock	2.3		5.4	1.8			33	33		
House Sparrow	4.8						25	24		
Grey Wagtail	0.3	0.2	3.6	3.8			12	8		
Pied Wagtail							19	23		
Tree Pipit		0.6	3.6	1.5		0.3		6		
Meadow Pipit	14.0	15.4			28.3		13	23		
Chaffinch	6.3		30.6				34	42		
Bullfinch			1.8				19	20		
Greenfinch	0.8						10	9		
Linnet	2.5	2.8	3.6		1.3		1	21		
Lesser Redpoll		1.4			0.3			2		
Goldfinch	2.5				0.3		17	31		
Siskin	0.3		12.6				3	6		
Yellowhammer	0.5	1.3	5.4		1.0	0.6	3	18		
Reed Bunting	1.0	0.7			2.0	0.8	4	10		

* Represents three birds in whole study area

** Represents one juvenile Cuckoo in whole study area