

## **A look back at Herts Bird Club website data for 2021**

Now that we have closed our website to submissions from last year, what can we learn from the records submitted the Herts Bird Club in 2021? Graham Knight takes a first look at the data.

This article expands on a series of tweets that I sent in early 2022 looking back at some of the details of the records sent in via the bird club website submission page in 2021.

**The overall totals:**

### **Herts Bird Club website in 2021:**

**20375** records of **199** species\*

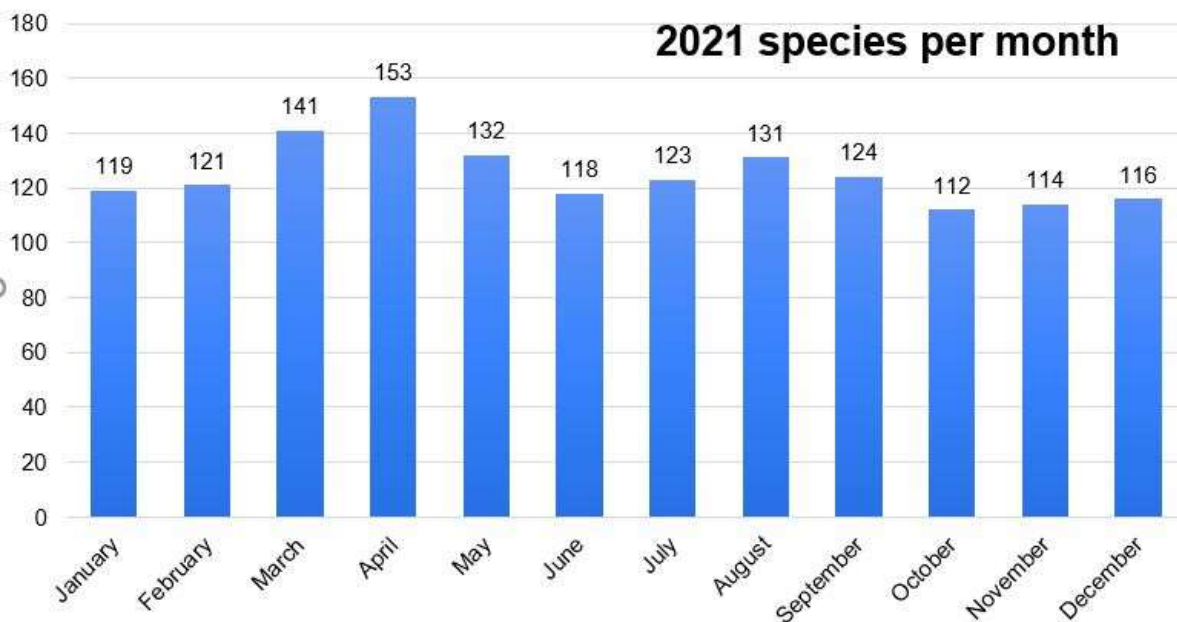
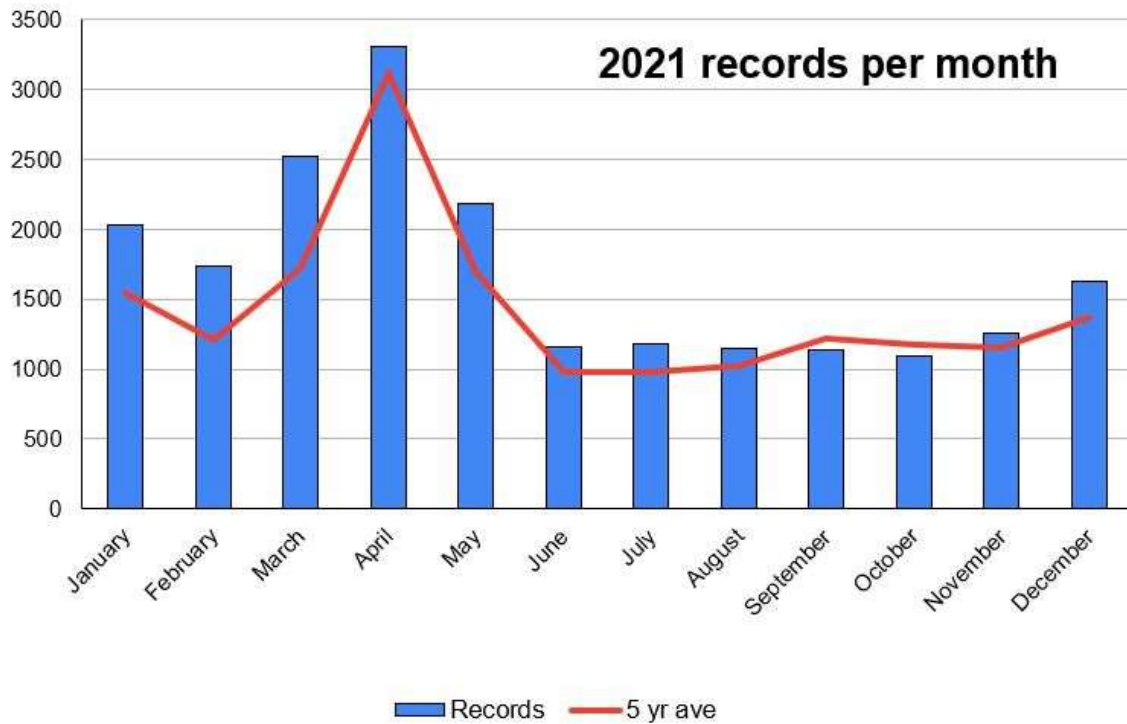
from **513** observers

spread over **571** sites

With over twenty thousand records, this was our second-best year for the website, beaten only by the extraordinary and highly unusual year that was 2020, when COVID lockdowns focused us on very local birding, and the April Garden challenge produced 6000 records in that month alone. Compared to the average over the five years 2016-2020 this was an excellent number of records.

The species total excludes obvious escapes and subspecies and is only ever a rough indication of the number recorded in the county. The process of collecting and assessing rarity records usually reduces the final total by at least five or six, although several species were believed to be recorded in 2021 but not submitted via the website, including Scaup, Knot and Rose-coloured Starling. What does this mean for a final year total? The ten-year average is 196, but I would be surprised if 2021 managed higher than about 192.

**When do we get the records?**



There was an obvious trend of records being received in the first half of the year, undoubtedly spurred on by new year birding and the arrival of spring migrants, as well as the country still being in lockdown until the end of March. From June onwards the records were fairly constant at a little over a thousand per month, and then in December the Christmas Bird Count provided a late boost.

The species totals per month graph also shows that March and April are the most productive months to go birding in the county, but how to explain the Autumn? It may not have been as bad as it appears - in several months some common species were not submitted (the likes of Grey Heron, Carrion Crow, Feral Pigeon etc) and this was particularly so in the autumn, with the result that the actual numbers per month will be higher. Even so, were we enjoying our freedom a bit more and spending more time birding on the coast?

### Where do we watch the birds?

2021 top 10 sites by records		2021 top 10 sites by species	
Tring Reservoirs	1709	Tyttenhanger GP's	129
Stanborough GP	1563	Tring Reservoirs	128
Tyttenhanger GPs	1339	Amwell NR	106
Stocker's Lake / Farm	960	Stanborough GP	102
St Albans	680	Fairlands Valley Park	98
Fairlands Valley Park	644	Stocker's Lake / Farm	83
East Hyde	488	St Albans	82
Amwell NR	480	Ellenbrook Fields	73
Heartwood Forest	402	Hertford	69
Ellenbrook Fields	394	Heartwood Forest	66

It will come as no real surprise that Tring Reservoirs and Tyttenhanger Gravel Pits feature at the top of these tables, but perhaps most interesting are the placings of Stanborough Gravel Pit, showing the importance and popularity of this developing site, particularly in the spring of 2021 when it attracted a number of scarce waders. Fairlands Valley Park with a best ever site total of 98 species is also worthy of note.

These tables do also beg the question of exactly what constitutes a site. Some editorial decisions had to be taken when producing these tables, for example lumping together the various split sites in the bird club database such as at Tyttenhanger, Amwell and Heartwood Forest. Could Tring Reservoirs be regarded as two separate sites, Wilstone and the other reservoirs? There is also the oddity of St Albans and Hertford appearing in the top 10's, when they don't really constitute "sites". The St Albans totals, for example, do not include Verulamium Park, which would have certainly pushed up the species total for the town. So why include them? They each have plenty of active birders, and so their positions reflect this in the tables

### Which species are most submitted?

<b>Herts top 15 species by no. records 2021</b>		<b>Herts top 15 species by 1km squares 2021</b>	
Red Kite	868	Red Kite	238
Little Egret	606	Rook	237
Redwing	548	Redwing	143
Blackcap	468	Chiffchaff	138
Chiffchaff	463	Swift	135
Yellowhammer	431	Ring-necked Parakeet	133
Siskin	410	Yellowhammer	133
Yellow Wagtail	404	Fieldfare	129
Grey Wagtail	394	Raven	128
Swift	388	Swallow	116
Swallow	387	Grey Wagtail	115
Ring-necked Parakeet	384	Blackcap	109
Rook	384	Siskin	104
Peregrine Falcon	372	Linnet	101
Linnet	367	Yellow Wagtail	96

Our most submitted species are obviously those more common species that are popular, and regularly published on our website. Red Kite is unsurprisingly top given the ease at which it can be seen in the county - ten or fifteen years ago might it have been Buzzard in the top spot? Little Egret is the second most submitted but the only waterbird to feature, whilst Blackcap undoubtedly does well as a result of winter garden records. Ring-necked Parakeet is probably on the up and could go higher as another really obvious and increasing species, whilst Rook features thanks to the 2021 Rookery survey

The second table is produced using records submitted with grid references attached. Just over two-thirds of the 2021 records come with this extra detail, allowing us to start to map the spread of species. The table shows to an extent how widely species are reported, and of most interest perhaps is Raven being reported from 128 different 1km squares. It is also pleasing to note that farmland species including Yellowhammer, Linnet and Swallow feature in both tables

The website records are however only a part of our overall database. In the next few months we will add larger numbers of records from other sources including Birdtrack, eBird, BTO surveys and our own Garden Bird Counts for a fuller picture of Hertfordshire Birding in 2021. An update to this article will follow later in the year to reflect these extra records

Thank you again to everyone who has submitted records and please keep them coming in 2022