

The Birds of East Hyde During 2009

In line with other bird publications I too have adopted the new and revised BOU recommended order of species, as listed below. However with the Archive chapter I have maintained the old order of merit, as this is held on database, constantly updated and would prove just too much of a headache to change!

Mute Swan: *Cygnus olor*

The resident pair again nested bankside just downriver from Thrales End Lane where the female incubated between 14/3 – 5/4. Sadly four days later she was found dead a few metres from an empty nest. She had been ringed (Z10334) as a 1st year bird on 6th September 1995 at East Hyde.

The resident Batford pair fledged 2 young this year from near Westfield Road and frequently visited the mill area, but on 26/9 one of these youngsters was also found dead partially eaten in hedgerow near the mill.

Throughout December up to 7 birds resided around the meadow. (MR)

Canada Goose: *Branta canadensis*

Monthly maximum counts included;

<i>Jan</i>	<i>Feb</i>	<i>Mar</i>	<i>Apr</i>	<i>May</i>	<i>Jun</i>	<i>Jul</i>	<i>Aug</i>	<i>Sep</i>	<i>Oct</i>	<i>Nov</i>	<i>Dec</i>
32	31	18	18	22	22	48	88	42	112	35	35

Eleven pair over-summered this year with four pair breeding and fledging 21 young. Two of the four nests were located in nettle beds at the mill (from which broods of 10 and 8 young were fledged), one was in long grass just downriver from Thrales End Lane (that fledged 3 young), and the other was a predated nest (fox?) in long grass on the island at the scrape.

Egyptian Goose: *Alopochen aegyptiacus*

Three birds lingered around the meadow between 6/9 – 8/11 when 1 departed leaving a pair there from 12/11 – 31/12. This was only the third occasion this pretty goose has visited the area and the first long stayers following a pair on 1/3/03 and 8/11/08. (MR, DA, PW, RPe, PU, DS, AC, JT, CS, BP)

[Canada x Greylag:] *Branta sp.*

The resident hybrid was again present all year continuing to enjoy her role as ‘resident nanny’ to the Canada Geese families.

Wigeon: *Anas penelope*

The only records received during the year were of 2 male and a female frequenting the river by the mill on 3/1, and a pair together on 7/2. (MR)

Gadwall: *Anas strepera*

Monthly maximum counts included:

<i>Jan</i>	<i>Feb</i>	<i>Mar</i>	<i>Apr</i>	<i>May</i>	<i>Jun</i>	<i>Jul</i>	<i>Aug</i>	<i>Sep</i>	<i>Oct</i>	<i>Nov</i>	<i>Dec</i>
14	12	4	4	2	3	2	2	2	2	16	16

A pair summered around the meadow and attempted to breed at the wader scrape. On 4/4 the male was watched displaying vigorously to the female in front of the hide where copulation was noted on several occasions. By 2/5 the nest had been built and lined with the female incubating but sadly a week later the nest had been destroyed.

Teal: *Anas crecca*

Up to 16 birds spent January on the river by the mill. Between 14/3 – 28/3 a pair frequented the scrape in front of the hide when the male was noted displaying on a number of occasions. The only other record was of a male who favoured the stream from 26/12 until the years' end.

Mallard: *Anas platyrhynchos*

Monthly maximum counts included:

<i>Jan</i>	<i>Feb</i>	<i>Mar</i>	<i>Apr</i>	<i>May</i>	<i>Jun</i>	<i>Jul</i>	<i>Aug</i>	<i>Sep</i>	<i>Oct</i>	<i>Nov</i>	<i>Dec</i>
10	12	10	6	6	6	10	12	17	17	17	12

Numbers continued to decline as the case over previous years. This year just one pair bred raising 6 young during June and July.

Tufted Duck: *Aythya fuligula*

Up to 6 pair wintered along the river by the mill during January to March but strangely none were recorded during the second winter period. One pair summered around the meadow but breeding was not noted.

Red-legged Partridge: *Alectoris rufa*

Coveys averaging 14 birds were seen around the area during the year primarily on the arable farmland lining both valley sides.

Grey Partridge: *Perdix perdix*

A good year for this species with 3 records received involving 28 birds. These included 8 birds on 12/9, 14 birds on 3/10 and 6 on 17/10. As in previous years their favoured haunts were the arable fields just to the north of Thrales End Lane. (RPe, MR)

Pheasant: *Phasianus colchicus*

Birds were present throughout the year with numbers escalating around the scrape during late October and November when the big estate shoots occurred. During one such shoot on 3/10, ten cock birds with 4 hens covered around the hide!

[Peafowl:] *Pavo cristatus*

Two birds were heard calling around the East Hyde Estate throughout April.

Little Grebe: *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Two territories were again held this year. The pair at the scrape successfully fledged 1 youngster and a pair on the Lea just downriver from Thrales End Lane fledged 2 birds. The highest winter counts recorded were of 4 birds on 24/1 and 6 together on 16/1.

Cormorant: *Phalacrocorax carbo*

As in previous years, an average of three birds could be seen around the area each month, with 4 birds summering between 13/6-25/7 (2 adults and 2 immature). On 7/2 an impressive count of 9 birds together in the ‘Cormorant tree’ by the mill contained 5 adults.

Little Egret: *Egretta garzetta*

This was the best year ever for this species at East Hyde with birds seen virtually daily throughout 2009. Maximum monthly counts were;

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
2	2	4	5	1	1	3	1	1	1	2	2

The 5 birds seen roosting together at the mill on 4/4 was a site record.

East Hyde must now be the most reliable wetland site in Herts & Beds in which to encounter this species. (*Many obs*)

Grey Heron: *Ardea cinerea*

Present throughout the year with an average of 4 birds present each month. On the scrape an adult could regularly be seen sunning itself on the roof of the hide throughout July and August, and on 14/3 one was watched catching and eating spawning frogs. Hope they weren’t our Marsh Frog!

Red Kite: *Milvus milvus*

The breeding pair mentioned last year just to the west of the recording area again bred this year (fledging at least one young) and undoubtedly accounted for the 18 records during the year. All but one involved single birds with the exception being 2 birds together on 24/9. (*LGRE, BS, MR et al*)

Sparrowhawk: *Accipiter nisus*

A pair again held territory around the area with both adults frequently seen perched in trees lining the scrape. On 2/2 a male was observed chasing, catching and eating a Skylark along Cooters End Lane.

Common Buzzard: *Buteo buteo*

Around the East Hyde/Luton Hoo area seven territories became established, the same as with 2008. This magnificent bird is now very much a regular feature of the area and it’s now very unusual not to see at least one bird whilst visiting East Hyde. The only notable multi count was of 5 birds together on thermals on 11/3 and 4 together on 4/4.

As with last year a light phased adult favoured the scrape area and could regularly be seen dozing in surrounding trees. On 7/2 an adult was watched eating a rabbit whilst on 7/3 another bird was seen plucking and eating a Lesser Black-backed Gull! (*Many obs*)

Kestrel: *Falco tinnunculus*

As with 2008 two pair bred successfully this year, a pair at the sewage farm and a pair just downriver from the mill.

Merlin: *Falco columbarius*

A bird thought to be either a female or juvenile was seen flying across farmland along Thrales End Lane on 15/1, only the fifth record for the site. (AG)

Hobby: *Falco subbuteo*

This was a great year for this species following the rather dismal showing of 2008 with a bird seen virtually weekly hunting the House Martins at the mill between 20/6-3/10. Some fantastic views were often achieved during its hunting mode and a good indicator as to its presence was the distinctive high pitched twittering and the mass exodus of the martins away from the colony. (MR, PW)

[Harris Hawk:] *Parabuteo unicinctus*

Two were flown around the meadow much to the distress of all things furry and feathered on 2/1, 10/10 & 31/10. To arrive at East Hyde and find absolutely nothing flying, crawling, hopping or running would be a great indicator that these birds were being flown. As to the point of this exercise continues to baffle me. (MR, AC)

Water Rail: *Rallus aquaticus*

One bird resided along the stream from Thrales End Lane between 8/11-31/12. It was joined briefly on 24/12 by a rather thin and emaciated bird during extreme cold conditions. (AC, MR, BP)

Moorhen: *Gallinula chloropus*

Maximum monthly counts included;

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
16	16	10	6	6	6	6	7	10	17	12	22

Three pair bred this year with 2 fledglings raised from nests on the scrape, downriver from Thrales End Lane and by the mill.

Coot: *Fulica atra*

Maximum monthly counts included;

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
16	16	9	6	6	6	6	4	10	10	10	17

Three pair bred this year with a pair on the scrape fledging 4 young, a pair fledged 2 young downriver from Thrales End Lane and the third also raised 2 by the mill.

Golden Plover: *Pluvialis apricaria*

Two records this year involving flocks of 28 birds over the sewage farm on 14/3 and 35 birds over New Mill End on 21/11. (MR)

Lapwing: *Vanellus vanellus*

This delightful species continues to just exist as a breeding species with one pair nesting this year in a field along Cooters End Lane. By Late May they had somehow traversed the railway line and were feeding 2 half fledged young along the stream by Thrales End Lane.

Notable winter flocks reported included 96 birds on 16/1, 62 birds on 17/1, 41 birds on 21/2, 83 on 17/10 and an impressive 125 birds on 21/11.

Dunlin: *Calidris alpina*

A fantastic and intriguing record was of a bird seen briefly on the meadow during a snow storm on 3/2. This is only the second record for the site following that of a bird on another mid winters' day on 5/1/85. (TE)

Common Snipe: *Gallinago gallinago*

A good year for this species with up to 6 birds seen along the stream from Thrales End Lane during the early part of January with the last bird reported on 28/2. During the later part of winter up to 4 birds was regularly seen from 17/9 until the years' end. Sadly long gone are those heady days of the '90s when winter 'flocks' of up to 30 birds were regularly seen around the meadow!

Jack Snipe: *Lymnocyptes minimus*

Following an absence of records for four years it's great to report a number of sightings of this charismatic bird during 2009. Firstly 2 birds were seen daily along the stream between 11/1-17/1, and then a solo bird at the same place from 22/11-31/12, which may or may not have been the bird first seen amongst the cut sedge in front of the hide on 22/11. (BP, DS, JR, MR)

Woodcock: *Scolopax rusticola*

Two records were obtained this year both of single birds disturbed from around the scrape on 15/2 and 12/12.

On the table inside the hide a wing on display is very probably of this species but as yet no further details are known of its discovery. (AC, MR)

Redshank: *Tringa totanus*

One bird seen briefly at the mill on 18/7 was only the 8th record for the site. (MR)

Green Sandpiper: *Tringa ochropus*

Only July and August were the months that this 'common' species was not recorded throughout 2009. Up to two birds resided between 1/1-11/4, one bird presumably on passage was seen on 16/5 and 15/6 then two birds remained from 17/9-31/12. A super count of 4 birds was obtained on 12/12.

As in previous years their favoured abodes were the scrape, along the stream and around the muddy fringes of the meadows' floods. Like with the egret statement East Hyde is fast becoming one of the most reliable county sites in which to enjoy seeing this species almost throughout the year. (Many obs)

Black-headed Gull: *Larus ridibundus*

There were 4 notable counts for this species during the year, those of ca300 birds on 31/1, 230 on 21/2, ca350 on 28/2 and 75 on 14/3.

The first returning post breeding birds were 3 on 25/6.

A strange sight was noted on 10/10 where a number of birds were watched hovering and alighting in trees near the mill and constantly pecking at the branches. I can only assume that they were coated in insects of some variety?

Common Gull: *Larus canus*

Recorded as individuals or in 'small parties' flying down the valley during both winter periods. Previous BTO Gull Roost surveys have indicated that the majority of gull movement down the Lea valley result in birds roosting at Hilfield Park Reservoir.

Lesser Black-Backed Gull: *Larus fuscus*

Flyovers were noted throughout March, July, September and October.

Herring Gull: *Larus argentatus*

Flyovers were noted mainly in a south-westerly direction during March and October.

Yellow-Legged Gull: *Larus michahellis*

My personal highlight of the year when a spanking adult spent 20 minutes sat bankside on the meadow near the mill before flying off downriver on 21/2. This is the first record for East Hyde and a much sought after gem. Interestingly it arrived and departed in the accompaniment of an immature 'Herring Gull' type bird but my absolute ignorance as to differing plumages of young Herring/Yellow-Legged Gulls left me managing a claim of just the one bird! (MR)

Great Black-Backed Gull: *Larus marinus*

Singles were noted flying down the valley during March, September and October.

Common Tern: *Sterna hirundo*

Two birds graced the river by the mill for several hours on the morning of 8/7 before flying off high upriver. They were later found relocated at Luton Hoo. (AG, MR)

Feral Pigeon: *Columba livia*

Three pair bred around the vicinity of the mill this year and beside the resident 15 white doves that continue to favour the village gardens and rooftops a flock of 55 birds were noted feeding amongst stubble in fields near Cooters End Lane on 28/11. The only other pigeons noted were the usual squadrons of racing pigeon seen flying up and down the valley throughout the year.

Stock Dove: *Columba oenas*

Two pair resided around the area and regularly drank and bathed along the stream and scrape.

Woodpigeon: *Columba palumbus*

This species continued to be a common sight throughout the year.

Collared Dove: *Streptopelia decaocto*

Two pairs held territory around the village. 10

Turtle Dove: *Streptopelia turtur*

Just one record noted this year which was an improvement on 2008, when a bird flew downriver over the meadow on 6/6. (MR)

Barn Owl: *Tyto alba*

Just one record this year that of a bird hunting over the meadow at dusk on 8/2. (AC)

Little Owl: *Athene noctua*

The resident pair again held territory near the mill though breeding was not proven. For the second year running a second pair was found holding territory a short distance away on the Hyde Estate. (Many obs)

Tawny Owl: *Strix aluco*

A most under recorded species around East Hyde with at least two territories held. One bird was heard calling at the scrape on 22/11. (BP)

Swift: *Apus apus*

In comparison to last years late date of 26/5 of arriving birds, this year the first 3 birds were noted on 26/4. The only other significant records for the year involved 55 birds feeding around the pumping station on 6/6 with 85 there on 29/7. Although a number of old buildings exist around the area this species has yet to be proven as a breeding species for the site, though 6 pair regularly nest just a mile down the road at Batford.

Kingfisher: *Alcedo atthis*

Two pair again held territory and bred along the river this year. One pair that nested near the sewage farm fledged at least one young and was noisily feeding it in front of the hide on the scrape on 16/5 at the scrape. The second pair also succeeded just downriver from the pumping station and had also fledged at least one young by late July. Three birds were caught and ringed at the mill that included a retrapped bird.

Green Woodpecker: *Picus viridis*

A pair could regularly be seen around the meadow during the year particularly favouring the anthills in the small car park off Thrales End Lane.

Great Spotted Woodpecker: *Dendrocopos major*

Two territories were again established this year, one around the wooded slopes to the east of the meadow and the other in the woods lining the scrape and sewage farm. As with last year the male bird of the latter pair continued to boss the bird feeders at the scrape throughout January and February.

Skylark: *Alauda arvensis*

This year attempts were made to assess the numbers of wintering birds around farmland bordering Thrales End and Cooters End Lanes with impressive counts of x140 on 28/11 and 207 on 2/2.

Swallow: *Hirundo rustica*

The first returning birds were noted on 4/4, over a week earlier than last year and the last bird to leave was recorded on 3/10. At least one pair bred around the barns at the mill.

Sand Martin: *Riparia riparia*

The first bird recorded along the river this year was on the very early date of 14/3, by far the earliest recorded date for this species at East Hyde. The only other record was of a bird amongst the House Martins at the mill on the strange date of 13/7. (MR)

House Martin: *Delichon urbicum*

The first returning birds included 20 birds seen over the mill on 18/4. This year around 30 pairs nested at the mill with 92 birds caught during the various ringing sessions that included 50 new birds and 42 retraps. (PW)

Meadow Pipit: *Anthus pratensis*

Birds were regularly heard flying over the meadow, but this still remains a very under recorded species. Maximum winter counts this year were of 25 birds on 7/11 and 30 on 12/12.

Yellow Wagtail: *Montacilla flava*

A very poor showing this year with only two records, those of single birds feeding amongst the horses at the mill on 25/7 and 19/9. (MR)

Grey Wagtail: *Montacilla cinerea*

The only confirmed breeding record was of the mill pair feeding at least one recent fledgling from 25/7. The sewage farm pair again held territory throughout the year but breeding could not be confirmed.

Pied Wagtail: *Montacilla alba yarrellii*

A pair nested at the mill and had fledged 6 young by 6/6.

Wren: *Troglodytes troglodytes*

This remains a common bird both heard and seen around the site.

Dunnock: *Prunella modularis*

Common.

Robin: *Erithacus rubecula*

Common.

Stonechat: *Saxicola torquata*

The only record this year was of an immature male seen briefly near the pumping station on 17/10. (MR)

Wheatear: *Oenanthe oenanthe*

A female was seen on farmland bordering Cooters End Lane on 13/4. (J&F D)

Blackbird: *Turdus merula*

Common.

Fieldfare: *Turdus pilaris*

The three highest counts for the year were 70 birds on 28/2, x50 on 5/12 and 98 on 12/12.

Song Thrush: *Turdus philomelos*

Individuals continued to be seen around the village and the meadow. An interesting observation on 25/10 involved a small party of 'grey backed' individuals that were quite possibly of the continental sub species.

Redwing: *Turdus iliacus*

The only two reasonable counts noted for 2009 were x48 birds on 17/10 and an impressive 230 birds on 21/11, the third highest count for this species at East Hyde following the counts of 500 birds in 1995 and 250 birds in 2001.

Interestingly during the morning of 28/3 an adult bird was observed repeatedly carrying nesting material into a Hawthorn hedgerow near the mill but with no subsequent activity. On a later inspection it was noted that the base of the nest had been laid using small twigs and dead grass stems. (MR)

Mistle Thrush: *Turdus viscivorus*

Individuals continue to be regularly seen around the area.

Sedge Warbler: *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

Just one territory was held during the breeding season, that being in the reed bed on the scrape.

Reed Warbler: *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

As with Sedge Warbler this was a poor year for this species with just one record of a bird in sporadic song during the second week of May.

Lesser Whitethroat: *Sylvia curruca*

Another migrant warbler having a poor showing around this part of the valley this year with just two records of birds 'rattling' involving singles along the embankment by the car park and at the scrape neither stayed to successfully hold territory.

Whitethroat: *Sylvia communis*

This species fared a lot better than the previous three this summer. The first was heard in song at the scrape on 18/4 and by the first week of May there were four vocal birds, all of which stayed to hold territories.

Garden Warbler: *Sylvia borin*

The first returning bird was in song along the old railway near the scrape on 2/5. In total two territories were held this year both around the reserve.

Blackcap: *Sylvia atricapilla*

Three territories were held this year around the reserve with a fourth near the car park. On 24/9 a family unit comprising 2 adults and at least three recently fledged young were feeding just outside the hide.

Chiffchaff: *Phylloscopus collybita*

The first singing birds for the year were 3 birds around the scrape on 21/3. Four territories were established around the scrape and meadow throughout the breeding season.

Willow Warbler: *Phylloscopus trochilus*

Just two territories were established this season both around the reserve.

Goldcrest: *Regulus regulus*

Continues to be seen and heard around the site, especially along the old railway footpath just south of Thrales End Lane.

Spotted Flycatcher: *Muscicapa striata*

Sadly no birds were again recorded this year.

Long-Tailed Tit: *Aegithalos caudatus*

Commonly seen around the area, especially favouring the old railway line.

Blue Tit: *Cyanistes caeruleus*

Common. From the tit boxes positioned around the reserve 9 pair bred from which 50 pulli were ringed. (PW)

Great Tit: *Parus major*

Common. From the tit boxes positioned around the reserve 7 pair bred from which 39 pulli were ringed. (PW)

Coal Tit: *Periparus ater*

More often heard than seen, especially in trees lining the old railway footpath. Individuals became more noticeable on the feeders between February and April.

Marsh Tit: *Poecile palustris*

Just two records were noted for this species this year which is very concerning to say the least. These involved two birds seen along the old railway line on 3/1 and a bird calling by the hide on 8/3.

Nuthatch: *Sitta europaea*

Remained a common resident and was regularly heard all year in the woods lining the scrape and sewage farm.

Treecreeper: *Certhia familiaris*

Very much an under recorded species around the area with the best chances to encounter one being to hear its high pitched call in trees adjacent to the scrape, where a pair were watched feeding young on 15/5. On 3/1 one brave and intrepid individual was watched mobbing a dozing Little Owl near the mill. (MR)

Jay: *Garrulus glandarius*

The resident pair was again ever present around the scrape all year.

Magpie: *Pica pica*

Common. A pair nested this year on the reserve and fledged at least 3 young.

Jackdaw: *Corvus monedula*

Winter roost counts around the mill averaged around 400 birds during late November and December, slightly down on last years' numbers. Generally amassing by 2.30pm-3pm each evening the noise and overall spectacle of these birds was as ever impressive. By mid March numbers had dwindled to around 50 birds. It is always difficult to assess numbers of breeding pairs as the majority of pairs favour the private woodlands to the east. However around the chimney pots of the village and mill at least 6 pair bred this year including one pair in a roof space of the Methodists church.

Rook: *Corvus frugilegus*

Common.

Carrion Crow: *Corvus corone*

Two pair bred this year along the old railway between the mill and sewage farm. A white-winged adult was a strange sight as it flew over the meadow on 19/9.

Crows: *corvus sp*

An unusual gathering of crow occurred in a stubble field near the mill on 18/7 when x400 Jackdaw, x150 Rook and x75 Carrion Crow intermingled and appeared to be feeding on newly immersing flying ants. (MR)

Starling: *Sturnus vulgaris*

Common.

House Sparrow: *Passer domesticus*

A small but sustaining population continues to exist around the village though actual numbers remain unknown. Two pair bred in Yew trees at the cemetery.

Chaffinch: *Fringilla coelebs*

Common. A flock of 45 birds were in fallow fields near the pumping station on 14/3.

Greenfinch: *Carduelis chloris*

Common.

Goldfinch: *Carduelis carduelis*

The only notable flocks recorded this year were x32 birds on 19/9 and x25 birds on 12/12.

Siskin: *Carduelis spinus*

Just two records noted this year those involving a singleton on 7/11 and 3 birds on 5/12, both on the reserve. (MR)

Linnet: *Carduelis cannabina*

The only notable flock recorded involved just 22 birds near the pumping station between 26/9-3/10.

Bullfinch: *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

Up to two pair was reported around the site during the year including a pair that regularly visited the bird feeders throughout February and March.

Yellowhammer: *Emberiza citrinella*

Two notable flocks were recorded this year those involving x35 birds on 14/3 and x45 birds on 14/11. Both counts were from hedgerows bordering Cooters End Lane.

Reed Bunting: *Emberiza schoeniclus*

At least 3 pair held territories around the site, those at the mill, Thrales End Lane and the scrape where fledged birds were noted on 18/8. The birds at the scrape often utilised the bird feeders by the hide especially during the latter winter period.

During 2009, of the 106 species of birds listed in this report, 4 were considered as being feral or escapes, with 1 other listed but not seen. This meant that this year 100 species were recorded at East Hyde an improvement of 3 on 2008.