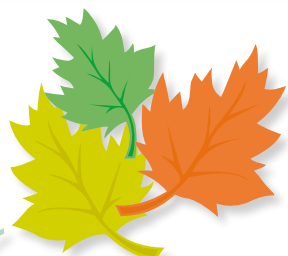


STRATFORD PARK BIRD REPORT 2009



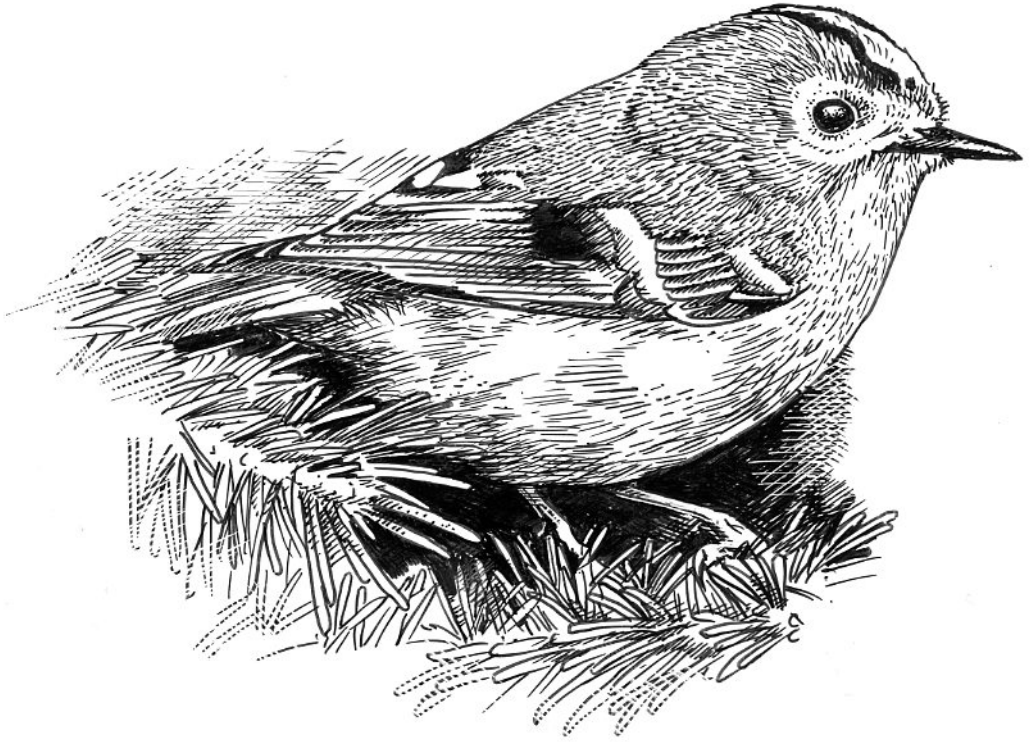
Stratford Park



COMPILED BY MIKE McCREA

In Association With





Goldcrest by S. Roberts

STRATFORD PARK BIRD REPORT 2009

M N McCREA

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I. Introduction:

The objective of this report is to provide up to date information on the current status of wild birds at Stratford Park and its outlining fields. This report will also form the basis for future monitoring of the park's avian fauna.

Stratford Park is the largest green space in the Stroud area consisting of 56 acres. The available habitat to breeding birds is diverse including an arboretum, ancient mixed woodland, coniferous woodland, grassland, open pasture, lake and stream. Stratford Park's lake has undergone a huge transition over the past 30 years, and holds only Mallard, Coot and Moorhen, all of which are adaptable species that are able to tolerate the sparsity of natural food sources in the lake.

In previous times, Stratford Park lake was an important body of water in the Stroud area, with strong populations of wildfowl, amphibians and invertebrates. Changes in environmental policy, health & safety and aesthetic consideration substantially reduced the habitat and available nest sites for waterfowl, resulting in a decline in species such as Tufted Duck and Pochard, both of which frequented the lake pre-1980.

At the time of writing, it is pleasing to see that proposals are now in place to restore bio-diversity to the lake by way of re-introducing marginal plants, the removal of silts and creating natural access points for amphibians, all of which will benefit waterfowl, and perhaps attract new species.

Stratford Park is represented with around 65 species of wild birds, a relatively small number considering the diversity of habitat. Of these, 12 species are considered winter and summer visitors and 4, occasional visitors. During the last 20 years, the park has lost several species including Bullfinch, Pied Flycatcher, Spotted Flycatcher and Little Grebe. Other species have declined dramatically, notably Nuthatch, Marsh Tit, Tree creeper and Lesser-spotted Woodpecker.

The decline in numbers of Nuthatch is primarily due to the loss of available nest sites. Decaying Walnut branches are its favourite nesting sites within the park, and these were cut back during the 1980s resulting in a loss of natural nesting holes. The introduction of a nest box scheme at the park during 2009 has been successful in providing the species with alternative nest sites, and 2 broods were raised successfully during April and May 2009. Present ground's management at the park is sympathetic to the nesting requirements of birds, and annual nest sites are monitored and avoided during the nesting season.

The decline in many species at the park is subject to ongoing research. The disappearance of many species is surprising, as much of the park land has remained unchanged over the past 30 years. Global warming and changeable climatic conditions may have affected the immigration of summer visitors, particularly Spotted Flycatcher which used to be a common summer visitor to the park, nesting in vines and ivy on the mansion house.

A visit to the park at any time of the year will prove rewarding for birds, and the best times to see them is in the Spring and Winter. During the breeding season birds become very active. Great Spotted Woodpeckers converge in the woodland and along the Poplars beside Painswick stream, anything up to 6 pairs during April. Blue, Great and Coal Tits can be seen foraging throughout the park, and Tree creepers may be found spiralling the Wellingtonias and Cedars.

Kingfishers are occasional visitors, darting along the Painswick stream and Dippers are frequent on the shallower river bed near Salmon Springs. A resident Heron can be seen on the lake from August and through the autumn.

The stunning Atlas Cedar, Cedar of Lebanon and Wellingtonia are a favoured habitat for our smallest European bird, the Goldcrest, which may be found commonly on the lawns below the museum.

Birds of Prey are well represented at Stratford Park including Kestrel, Sparrow hawk, Buzzard, Little Owl and Tawny Owl. The Little Owl has frequented adjacent Callowell fields and the outskirts of the park for 30 years, and has occasionally bred in the walnut tree adjacent to the children's play area. This species is another that is benefiting from the introduction of nest boxes, and has returned in 2009 after a 2 year absence. The Tawny Owl ceased as a breeding species during the 1980s, but still occurs in the Beech woodland on the North perimeter of the park. Pellets have indicated that the Tawny Owl is still present in the park, and a purpose built nest box has been erected in the woodland to encourage breeding.

During the summer the Green Woodpecker can be seen amongst the large Oaks on the upper fields. This species is usually seen foraging the ant hills on the grass banks adjacent to the sports pitch.

It's undulating flight and familiar call unmistakable.

In 2009 the Green Woodpecker nested successfully in one of the park's large oaks, rearing 4 young.

Winter is a very productive time for birds at the park, and our resident species are supplemented by other visitors from Scandinavia including Fieldfare, Redwing and Siskin. These 3 species may be found on the adjacent Callowell fields and the perimeter of the park amongst the alders, sweet chestnut and Ash. During the cold weather of January / February 2009, Fieldfares and Redwings moved closer into the park in search of food, and could be seen around the lake and museum.

Mixed groups of finches roost in hedgerows above the playing fields from December to March. These groups consist of up to 200 Goldfinches, Greenfinches and Chaffinches.

In general, despite the loss of some species, Stratford Park has a thriving bird population and this is being enhanced and maintained by Stroud District Council's continuing commitment to improving bio-diversity, maintaining and increasing present habitats within the park and increasing it's communication with the public on all aspects of conservation. With the introduction of the nest box scheme, it's long term commitment to improving Stratford Park Lake and proposals for future woodland management, the future looks good for birds at Stratford Park.

Mike McCrea February 2010

Mandarin Duck (a frequent visitor to the lake)



STRATFORD PARK BIRD REPORT 2009

SYSTEMATIC LIST

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor* (resident)

1 pair present on Stratford Park Lake. Attempted breeding 14th April.

1 clutch of 4 eggs.

2 eggs hatched 5th May. One cygnet predated by bird of prey 'probably Sparrow Hawk',

The 2nd cygnet killed by parent swan. This was probably due to territorial behaviour by the adult. 2 remaining eggs infertile.

Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata* (occasional resident)

1 pair was present on the lake between April 18th and throughout May, June, July and August.

No evidence of breeding.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* (common resident)

Present throughout the year. The park supports around 80 pairs. A small number of these have hybridised with domestic ducks. A reasonable breeding season, with 14 successful broods. The first of these hatched on March 30th and the last on May 12th. Average brood size was 8, with one brood of 13 on April 15th. Most birds use nest sites adjacent to the Painswick stream, amongst herbage, and within Stratford Park woodland. 2 nest sites were in trees to 3 metres.

The mortality rate for ducklings is high, with primary predators being Herring Gulls and Common Rat.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula* (occasional resident)

1 pair was on the lake on 2nd April and 6 birds were again present on 22nd May. This species was previously quite common on the lake during the winter, but not now established in the park primarily due to lack of natural food sources in the lake.

Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus* (occasional resident)

A few individuals most years, mainly in Stratford Park woodland and adjacent fields.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* (scarce visitor)

Another species that previously inhabited and bred on the lake, especially during 1975-76 when 2 broods were successfully reared. 1 record only pre-2009 of an individual bird April 18th 1984
2009 (no records)

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* (regular resident)

A regular visitor to the lake. One individual present at the lakeside from August to October

Sparrowhawk *accipiter nisus* (fairly regular resident)

2009 was a good year for this species with many sightings throughout the park and flying overhead, though there was no evidence of breeding. The species has previously nested in Stratford Park woodland during the 1970s and 1980s. Individual sightings occurred on 28th January, 3rd & 25th February, 12th, 18th & 26th April, 13th May, 1st, 11th, 21st & 22nd July, 8th September, 9th – 14th November.

One superb female with kill (woodpigeon) by bowling green on 26th August

Buzzard *Buteo buteo* (resident)

Found throughout the Stroud area amongst larger woodlands and open countryside, often seen soaring over the park. This species has increased its range and numbers in recent years. Present at Stratford Park in every month, usually along the perimeter rough grass areas between the park and Callowell fields.

Kestrel *falco tinnunculus* (resident)

A regular species primarily found along the rough grass perimeter between Callowell fields and the open grass areas of the park. During 2009, sighted every month. Nest boxes were provided for this species during 2009, and although these were inspected and used by the birds, no breeding occurred.

Peregrine *falco peregrines* (rare visitor)

1 sighting of a bird in high altitude flight over Stratford Park on June 2nd (no further records)

Moorhen *gallinule chlorops* (common resident)

Present all year on the lake. Nesting commenced on 14th April with a clutch of 9 eggs, all of which were predated. 2 more nests, one on the island in the lake and another amongst herbage adjacent to Painswick stream produced 12 young. Of these, only 6 survived and grew to maturity. Absence of marginal plants in the lake has seen a reduction in numbers and breeding over last 20 years.

Coot *Fulica atra* (resident)

2 pairs present throughout the year. Very territorial during the breeding season. Nesting commenced on 12th April with a nest constructed on an outcrop of vegetation on the island in the lake. 5 eggs were laid but were all parasitized. A second clutch was laid in early May resulting in 4 young. Another species suffering from a lack of suitable nesting sites on the lake.

Black-Headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* (common visitor and passage migrant)

Present throughout the year peaking in summer. A large influx occurred during August, presumably immigrant birds, that flocked on the lake and the grassed areas by Callowell fields.

Remains common to abundant.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus* (frequent visitor)

A frequent visitor, often flocking with Black-Headed Gulls, and at the lake, occurring mainly during Autumn and Winter.

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus* (occasional visitor)

Large gull and less gregarious than the previous two species. A pair was present on the lake during April, and were responsible for predating Moorhen and Coot chicks. Singletons were sighted throughout August and November.

Feral Pigeon *Columba livia* (common introduced resident)

A small flock of around 15 birds are present in Alders by the stream throughout the year, often feeding on grain put out for the park's wildfowl.

Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus* (abundant resident)

Common throughout the park and woodland. Recorded in every month.

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocta* (resident)

Although generally a common species, there are few sightings in the park. However, sightings occur in every month of the year.

Cuckoo *calculus canorus* (occasional summer visitor)

Heard most days during May and June, but seldom seen. One bird in flight on 23rd May.

Barn Owl *Tyto alba* (rare resident visitor)

Not recorded in the park. Pre-2009 has occasional been sighted hunting in Callowell fields and adjacent farmland. 2009 (no records).

Little Owl *Athene noctua* (local resident)

This species occurs amongst trees on the northern perimeter of the park, usually arriving in March, and remaining throughout the summer. This period of residence is undoubtedly due to the rich invertebrate fauna in Callowell fields prior to harvesting. Cockchaffers are a favourite prey, and these are abundant in the fields during May and June.

Little Owls have been present in the park for many decades, but do not always breed, probably due to a lack of suitable holes in which to nest. In recent years, they have bred successfully in cavities in a walnut tree on the lower fields. However, these nest sites have now been occupied by Jackdaws.

The owls presently use one of the large Oaks along the North perimeter, using a basal cavity in which to enter the tree. A nest box was sited in this tree during 2009, and although the owls could be seen using this as a roost, there was no evidence of breeding. The box was taken over by squirrels, and a new special box was sited in the same place during winter 2009. The species on the whole remains local. It is found throughout the adjacent Painswick valley particularly in the Pitchcombe area.

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco* (resident)

Another owl that is not often seen, but more often heard. Tawny Owls occur in Stratford Park woodland where they roost in the taller Larch trees. This is evident from the pellets retrieved from these roosts. No previous records of nesting, again probably due to a lack of suitable hollow trees. The Tawny Owl is one of the nest box 'target species', and a purpose made nest box was sited in the woodland during March 2009. Pre 1980s the owls used the old Oak tree in the park's car park.

Swift *Apus apus* (Common passage migrant and Summer breeder)

May be seen between May and August flying over the larger grass areas of the park, often at high altitude. Common. No evidence of breeding in the park.

Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* (Local resident)

Local but often seen along the Frome and its tributaries. Kingfishers appear in the park throughout the year, but mainly along the shallower parts of the Painswick stream at Salmon Springs. Occasionally it may be spotted around the lake. Although there are a few small areas of suitable riverside bank in the woodland for it to nest, there are no records to support this as a breeding species in the park.

Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis* (Resident)

2009 was a good year for this species. The park supports only 1 resident pair, but these are often seen, especially during summer, on the grass bank by the outdoor sports pitch. Here they feed on ants from the many ant hills there. It bred successfully during 2009 in a freshly excavated nest hole in one of the large oaks, and 3 young were raised and fledged. These, along with the two adults, could be seen throughout the summer feeding on the large grassed areas of the park.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major* (resident)

The commonest of our 3 resident woodpeckers. The Great Spotted Woodpecker is common throughout Stratford Park Woodland, mainly amongst the large black Poplars along the Painswick stream, where they may be seen and heard 'drumming' in the spring and early summer.

As a breeding species, it has nested every year for many decades, often using the same nest hole year after year. April 23rd 8 seen in the woodland.

Remains common.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopus minor* (Rare Resident)

Scarce and possibly overlooked woodpecker owing to its small size. Its status in the park is uncertain. Only 1 sighting (a female) in 2009 on 3rd May, adjacent to Stratford Park Lake.

Skylark *Alauda arvensis* (Local breeding resident)

Not present in Stratford Park, but occasionally seen in Callowell fields. Locally present on the surrounding calcareous grasslands throughout the Stroud District.

Swallow *Hirundo rustica* (Common Passage Migrant and Summer breeder)

Common summer visitor flying over the larger grassed areas of the park and Callowell fields.

Previously nested in the park's service compound. Post 1990 (no further records of breeding).

House Martin *Delichon urbicum* (Common Passage Migrant & Summer Breeder)

Common from May to September over grassy areas of the park.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis* (Fairly common passage migrant and summer breeder)

Occasional in Callowell fields, 23rd, 28th, 30th May (6 seen on telegraph wires)
No records of breeding, but breeds commonly at nearby Edge Common.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* (Resident)



May be seen by the lakeside during most months of the year. 2009 no records of breeding

Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba* (Common breeding resident and partial migrant)

The commonest of the 2 wagtails present in the park, often seen feeding on the bowling green and at the lake. Pre 1990s has nested on the Painswick stream at Salmon Springs during 1975.

2009 no records of breeding, though remains a common species.

Dipper *Cinclus cinclus* (Local breeding resident)

An uncommon visitor to the park, although found locally along the Frome and its tributaries.

This species can be found more commonly along fast flowing, shallower waters along the Painswick stream. At Stratford Park, the deeper water is not suitable for it to seek aquatic prey, and this is why Dippers are infrequent in the park.

They may be seen occasionally flying along the stream during its course through the park, and Dippers have previously bred under the bridge at Salmon Springs on the park's boundary.

2009 no evidence of breeding. Individual sightings on 22nd April, 3rd May, 9th, 11th and 20th July, 12th September, 1st October.

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* (Common breeding resident)

A common species in the park, nesting each year usually on ivy covered walls around the walled garden and in the woodland. Recorded in every month. 2009 4 nest sites located. Remains a common species.

Dunnock *Prunella modularis* (Common breeding resident)

Relatively common species occurring at the park throughout the year. Its favoured nesting site is the Beech hedge adjacent to the old putting green and amongst shrubs around the bowling green. 2 nesting sites located during 2009. Sighted in every month, remains common.

Robin *Erithacus rubecula* (Common breeding resident)

The park supports about 6 pairs of Robins, occurring mainly around the museum shrubberies, old putting green and walled garden, but also in the woodland. The birds usually nest amongst ivy around the walled garden and the park's service

compound. A target species for the nest box scheme, though the birds did not use these during 2009.

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* (Uncommon passage migrant)

Not present at Stratford Park, but 1 seen in adjacent Callowell fields on 19th May (undoubtedly a spring passage bird) on route to more favoured habitat.

Blackbird *Turdus merulus* (Common breeding resident and passage migrant)

One of the commonest breeding species in Stratford Park found throughout the year.

During September and October 2009 large numbers of immigrant birds arrived in the park with Redwings and Fieldfares. The species nests throughout the park, especially around the perimeter shrubs, Beech hedge adjacent to the putting green and amongst bramble along the north perimeter. A common species in every month.

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris* (Winter visitor)

The cold weather during January and February 2009 produced large numbers of Fieldfares that flocked on the large grassed areas and throughout the park. Normally a shy bird, many were seen feeding on the Holly trees throughout the park and around the bowling green area.

The first birds of the autumn migration appeared again on 22nd September 2009 (a very early date) and continued arriving throughout that month and into October and November peaking in December with around 200 birds observed on the grass areas adjacent to the sports pitch.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos* (Breeding resident)

The Song Thrush was once abundant in the park and bred prolifically amongst the many shrub beds and hedges. It has declined dramatically during the past 20 years, which appears to be a national trend.

This thrush may be seen mainly during the spring and early summer. Autumn and Winter sightings are less frequent. 2 nests located in 2009 1 with a clutch of 4 eggs, the second in the service compound was predated. Remains a local resident.

Redwing *Turdus iliacus* (Winter visitor)

Large numbers of Redwings arrived with Fieldfares during the early cold snap in January and February, and these too, were forced into the park to search for food.

Flocks ranging from 20 – 100 birds were present on the grassed areas throughout January and February. During the second winter passage (Autumn), the first birds were seen on 12th October 2009.

A favourite roost site is the Hawthorn hedge along the Northern perimeter of the park.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus* (Resident)

Present throughout the year in all areas of the park. The species has declined since the 1980s although suitable nesting sites remain throughout the park. During the 1970s and 1980s Mistle Thrushes nested regularly amongst the larger Yews along the A46 boundary. No evidence of breeding during 2009, although many nest sites are possibly overlooked. Individuals and pairs sighted 29th Jan, 10th, 12th Feb, 4th, 12th 23rd March, 2nd April. Remains a frequent but local species in the park.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* (Occasional summer visitor)

Previously sighted regularly in the woodland until 1994. 2009 No further records.

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* (Common summer visitor and breeding migrant)

A regular summer visitor to the park, arriving in April. During 2009 the first bird was heard on 5th April and birds were singing daily throughout the spring and summer until mid August.

No evidence of nesting, although suitable nesting sites occur in the woodland fringes.

Possibly overlooked as a nesting species due to the difficulty in locating nests.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus* (Local breeding resident)

Our smallest British bird, this species may be seen throughout the year feeding amongst the large Cedars and other conifers below, and adjacent to the mansion and museum.

During 2009 it was recorded in every month of the year, and there appeared to be no major impact on the species following the very cold months early in the year. No evidence of breeding, but nest sites probably overlooked. Nests have been located in previous years in conifers by the orangery.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* (Uncommon summer visitor)

Prior to 1982 this species was a regular summer visitor to the park. It has been absent for many years. 2009 no records.

Long –Tailed Tit *Aegitholas hypoleuca* (Common Resident)

Regularly seen in the park, especially during winter and spring, where it may be seen joining other birds foraging in trees. A flock of around 30 birds seen 19th December 2009.

Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus* (Common breeding resident)

A common species present throughout the year. The most common species using nest boxes in the park.

Great Tit *Parus major* (Common breeding resident)

A common species present throughout the year, regularly using nest boxes.

Coal Tit *Periparus ater* (Local breeding resident)

Not as common as the previous two species, but found throughout the park mainly amongst the larger Cedars and conifers. No evidence of breeding, but nest sites probably overlooked.

Marsh Tit *Poecili palustris* (Rare resident)

No records for 2009, but occasionally recorded during the 1980s in Stratford Park woodland.

Nuthatch *Sitta europaea* (Local breeding resident)

The Nuthatch has been a key target species in the nest box scheme, having previously lost many natural nesting sites. During 2009 it is pleasing to record that the birds have been using the newly erected boxes in the woodland. There has been a steady increase in numbers during 2009, and with the help of the nest boxes, it appears that this species is increasing.

Recorded throughout the year, and found mainly throughout Stratford Park woodland and amongst trees around the orangery and museum.

Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris* (Local breeding resident)



Found mainly throughout Stratford Park woodland and amongst trees by the orangery and museum. Special nest boxes were erected in the park for this species during 2009.

Despite the recent cold winter of 2009, the Tree Creeper appears to be on the increase.

Jay *Garrulus glandarius* Fairly common breeding resident

As a breeding species, the Jay has been present in Stratford Park woodland for many decades.

Although the nests are difficult to find, usually high in the fork of a deciduous tree, one pair often nest each year in a large Sycamore in the woodland.

The birds may often be seen in Autumn, collecting acorns from below the mature oaks in the park. Found throughout the year, the species remains relatively common.

Magpie *Pica pica* (Common breeding resident)

A common bird in the park, often predated smaller bird's nests. Nests in large Hawthorns around the park, and found throughout the year.

Jackdaw *Corvus monedula* (Common breeding resident)

Although not a pest species, the park's Jackdaws have been responsible for taking over important nest sites for Little Owl *Athene noctua*, resulting in a decline in the breeding status of that species. Presently, Jackdaws nest in the Walnut tree on the

main fields, and in old woodpecker holes in the woodland, which they have enlarged. 3 cavities within the walnut tree were used during 2009, and 3 individual broods were raised. A common species.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus* (Common breeding resident)

Stratford Park supports two rookeries, each containing about 6 to 8 pairs. One of the earliest species to breed, nest building commences in early February. The two rookeries within the park, are situated in an oak tree adjacent to the outdoor swimming pool entrance and in high conifers along the park's southwest boundary. The Stratford Park birds feed almost exclusively in the adjacent Callowell fields and the large grass areas near the woodland. A common species.

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone* (Common breeding resident)

More solitary than the previous two species. Nesting sometimes occurs in the larger oaks within the park, and in the woodland. May be seen all year round, mainly on the large grass areas and in adjacent Callowell fields.

Raven *Corvus corax* (Uncommon breeding resident)

Although not on the park's list of birds, it is sometimes seen on passage. During 2009 two sightings of birds flying over the park, July 23rd and August 1st.

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* (Common breeding resident and abundant winter visitor)

Despite being one of our most numerous species, there are surprisingly few Starlings seen in the park, probably due to the lack of suitable nest sites. However, large flocks do occur during autumn and winter on Callowell fields and on the park's sports fields. Elsewhere throughout the Stroud district it is a common bird.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* (Common breeding resident)

There has been a national decline in the UK House Sparrow population during recent decades.

Previously a common nesting bird in the park, only a small number of birds are seen each year, mainly around the museum and leisure centre. Pre 1980s, House Sparrows nested frequently in and around the walled garden, outdoor swimming pool and museum.

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* (Common breeding resident and winter visitor)

The commonest finch in the park, reaching peak numbers during winter months when many birds arrive from Europe. May be seen throughout the year, and nests frequently in hedges and conifers, especially around the bowling green and putting green.

Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris* (Common breeding resident)

Found throughout the year mainly around the conifer hedges by the bowling green, where it often nests. Numbers peak during the winter when immigrants arrive from Europe.

A common species.

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis* (Fairly common breeding resident)

Found throughout the year, but more abundant during winter and early spring.

A flock of around 100 birds roost throughout the hawthorn hedges on the northern perimeter of the park, and these may be seen most mornings between October and March.

Elsewhere throughout the park, it is often sighted feeding on teasels adjacent to the synthetic sports pitch. Nesting usually occurs most years in mature Box hedges and small conifers.

Siskin *Carduelis spinus* (Fairly common winter visitor)

A regular visitor to the park during the winter, but occurring only amongst alders above the open grassed areas, and around Birch trees by the car parks, where it finds seeds.

12th Feb 2009 (a flock of 15 birds feeding in alders) 13th Nov 2009 12 again feeding in alders.

Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* (Local breeding resident)

Another species which has almost disappeared from the park. Pre 1980s, Bullfinches nested regularly in the Beech plantation at the far end of Stratford Park woodland.

During the 1970s these trees were 2 metres high, which proved perfect for nesting Bullfinches. As the trees increased in height, they were no longer suitable for the Bullfinches' nesting requirements, and although some have nested in other parts of the park, the species remains scarce and not often seen. 22nd April 2009 (1 pair by the bowling green).

STRATFORD PARK NEST BOX SCHEME

The nest box programme was started during spring 2009 primarily to target species that showed dramatic decline through loss of natural nesting holes. Key species were Nuthatch, Coal Tit, Little Owl, Kestrel and Spotted Flycatcher. An initial batch of 12 boxes was sited during February at locations throughout the park. Felling of rotten branches, removal of trees and changes to the horticultural topography of the park have all contributed to the decline in these species. During February 2010, a further 10 boxes have been sited, including another owl box in the woodland making a total of 22 boxes. At the time of writing, the installation of a 'camera nest box' is being considered with a wireless transmission to a monitor in the museum in the park, where the public can view the activity inside a bird box.

All of the boxes are numbered and inspected during the breeding season, and information on the egg clutch size and young birds is documented. Nest boxes are cleaned out during the winter.

During 2009 the most successful species was Blue Tit which occupied 12 of the nest boxes, followed by Great Tit. Nuthatches used one box situated in the woodland, and Little Owl was seen roosting in one box, but did not use this for breeding. Another specially adapted box was erected to replace the open type one, and it is hoped that this box will emulate the Little Owls' nesting requirements more specifically. The installation of nest boxes provides these species with important nest sites and is part of Stroud District Council's ongoing commitment to improve bio-diversity at Stratford Park.



Inspecting a Nuthatch box in the woodland



Great Tit eggs

All photographs by Mike McCrea. All illustrations by Steve Roberts.



Blue Tit by S. Roberts

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