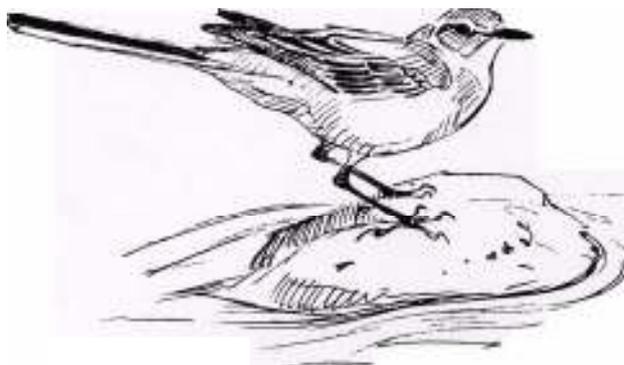


1998
BREEDING BIRDS
of
PAXTON PITS,

**Little Paxton village
and surrounding area**

includes five year review of all breeding species

Foreword



On behalf of St Neots Bird & Wildlife Club, I have pleasure in presenting the 1998 breeding bird report for Paxton Pits, village and surrounding area.

This is the fifth such publication and draws heavily upon the excellent work carried out by teams of observers in May and June. This is fully described in the introduction by Julian Hughes, who co-ordinated this first Paxton Breeding Bird Survey.

Such work - and very enjoyable work too - is, in my view, the life blood of local wildlife management. Without the key information about the fortunes of breeding birds, it is impossible to make decisions about habitat management.

From the knowledge gained over five years, it has become very clear that the most important habitat for breeding birds at Paxton is the scrub which surrounds most of the southern pits. It is summer home to important populations of nightingales, blackcaps and a host of other breeding birds.

The fact is that, whilst Paxton Pits is well visited by birdwatchers - both local and from further afield - few records of breeding birds are received. Personally, I am very pleased to receive any breeding bird records, never mind how common you might think the bird may be!

Thank you again if you have contributed to this report and thanks are especially due to Bardon Aggregates, Redland and Huntingdonshire District Council for their continued co-operation, and to the RSPB for the use of the line-drawings and for printing this report.

Trevor Gunton
Chairman

December 1998

Please send all records of 1999 breeding birds to Trevor Gunton, 15 St James Road, Little Paxton, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire PE19 4QW. Tel: (01480) 473562.

Or e-mail: julian.hughes@rspb.org.uk

Or record them in the sightings book at the Visitor Centre.

Introduction



Paxton Breeding Bird Survey

1998 was the first year of an initiative which, it is hoped, will become an annual survey of breeding birds at Paxton Pits. Seven lakes and their surrounding scrub/woodland were surveyed, in addition to arable and set-aside land adjacent to the river. This covers the whole of the nature reserve (Heronry North and South and the surrounding scrub, the Concrete Road scrub, the Meadow and Rudd, Hayling and Cloudy Pits), plus adjacent areas which are considered of particular importance for breeding birds (Sailing Lake, Weedy Pit and the farmland between the reserve and the river).

The area was divided into nine areas and simultaneous counts were made between 7 am and 9 am on 10 May and 21 June. Sixty-eight species were recorded in the area during the surveys, of which 58 species showed some signs of breeding; others may do so nearby.

The prime objective of the PBBS is to monitor songbirds, which are often hard to estimate from casual walks around the reserve. They are not ideal for counting colonial nesting species (e.g. cormorants, common terns), nor waders which can be very mobile. However, the PBBS is also useful for mapping the distribution of all the birds which use the reserve. The information can then be used to inform the management of these areas, which are the subject of conservation measures (much of the survey area is within the Site of Special Scientific Interest).

Besides cormorant (160 nests confirmed), the commonest species in the study area were wren (62 pairs), blackcap (57 pairs), willow warbler (56 pairs), robin (53 pairs) and sedge warbler (45 pairs). The islands on the Sailing Lake held the highest density of birds overall (terns and waders), while 'the Sanctuary' - the scrub between Heronry North and the river - held the highest densities of songbirds.

It is intended to repeat the survey annually in order to provide an index of the populations of Paxton Pits' birds. As well as ensuring we know as much as possible about the fortunes of the reserve's birds, it will also enable HDC and the Friends of Paxton Pits to judge the success of the habitat management programme. In the longer term, we hope to expand the survey to include a wider area. That of course will depend on volunteers, and my thanks go to all those listed below. I would be pleased to hear from anyone else who would like to help us (just four hours a year!) - full training is provided!

Julian Hughes
December 1998

Thanks to all the volunteers who took part in the survey: Debra Clayton, Martin Davis, Ian Dawson, Sandra Franks, Trevor and Veronica Gunton, Dean Harlow, Roger Hughes, Paul Lippett, Jim and Doreen Mackman, Ray Matthews, Steve May, John Paice, Alison Pearson, Laurence Rose, Chris Sargeant, Mark Southgate, Pat Sumner and Jamie Wells.

Cover illustration: nightingale, by Mike Hodgson. Foreword illustration: grey wagtail.
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BREEDING BIRDS 1998

Great crested grebe

Status: resident and winter visitor

1998: between 10 and 12 pairs bred or attempted to do so. These raised 15-17 young. A late nesting pair remained on Heronry South until well into October.

Five year review: this species has remained remarkably constant, with around 10 pairs nesting annually. Factors affecting success include fluctuating water levels, disturbance and predation by pike and, perhaps, cormorants. There would also seem to be direct competition for suitable nesting sites from coot.

Little grebe

Status: resident in very small numbers and winter visitor. Traditionally up to 30 birds gather in autumn, principally on A1 (North), Pumphouse Pit and, more recently, on Farm Pit, where 26 birds were counted on 12 October 1997.

1998: only proven breeding occurred on Farm Pit, where four young were raised. Late autumn gatherings noted on Heronry North and South.

Five year review: during this period, up to three pairs have bred, usually successfully, on Farm Pit, with occasional pairs on Pumphouse Pit. No proof of breeding elsewhere, but heard calling around Meadow Trail.

Grey heron

Status: mainly resident. However, Clark presumed some arrive from Continental Europe between July and October. Paxton herons are susceptible to hard weather and sudden freezing of the Pits result in our birds leaving their home base for nearby unfrozen river systems.

1998: the breeding season began early, with the main site in and around the willow tree on Heronry South being occupied from mid January. By 25th March, eight nests were

active and, two weeks later, young were noted in two nests. By the end of May, five young were ready to 'go' - but by 27th June, three other nests remained with young birds.

Interestingly, one pair seemed to attempt nest-building adjacent to the Sailing Lake. This was unsuccessful. Overall, it may be considered that the general decline in the fortunes of breeding herons at Paxton may be linked to the increase in the numbers of cormorants, which would appear to be taking over some traditional nesting sites.

Five year review: our heronry, formed in the early 1970s and which at one stage - in the late '80s - held over 20 pairs, has declined slowly since. During the last five years, we may have underestimated the number of pairs, as in 1995, cormorant ringers counted 14 occupied nests in early May. This fell to seven pairs the following year and this again was the number estimated in 1997.



Cormorant

Status: resident during breeding season and winter visitor. However, the success of breeding cormorants at Paxton and other similar inland locations is one of the most interesting phenomena of the last decade. Our colony was established in 1988, with just one - unsuccessful - pair, but by 1996, the colony had grown to 218 breeding pairs. We are reliably informed that such a colony is initially established by Continental birds, and on average will hold c.80% of this sub-species. Some interbreeding exists with more traditionally coastal UK birds of the Atlantic form.

1998: another long and successful breeding season, with mating on nest-sites recorded from mid-January. By late March, young birds were being fed. The average nest will hold two young, but a number of clearly seen birds have, in recent years, successfully raised four young. This year, young birds remained in nests until

mid August. Birds originating from colonies at Rutland Water, Besthorpe (Nottinghamshire), Abberton Reservoir (Essex) and Jylland (Denmark) have all been noted in the Paxton Pits colony or roost during 1998 (per Faith Darlow).

Five year review:

Year	No Occupied nests	Date
1994	123	17 th April
1995	176	7 th May
1996	218	May, per WWT
1997	c.200	
1998	165+	mid-April

Mute swan

Status: resident, with a large non-breeding flock occurring in most years. Fluctuating fortunes as a breeding species are linked to considerable human disturbance, eg, water sports, dog-walkers, and there is evidence of some predation by foxes. Powerlines and discarded fishing tackle also account for a number of swan deaths each year.

1998: a very successful breeding season, with c. 15 pairs, raising about 17 young. The most successful pair was those in residence on Hayling Pit, which raised no fewer than five young. Of special interest is the non-breeding flock, which reached 77 birds on 28th June; these are principally adult birds. Where do they come from, and where and when do they breed?

Five year review: from only four pairs in 1994, a record 26 young were raised the following year. In 1996, we were back to only five pairs, but fortunes again changed in 1997 when 7-8 pairs raised 15 young. Fluctuating water levels and predation may be responsible, but no hard evidence exists.

Greylag goose

Status: resident, with some local movements up and down the Ouse Valley.

1998: maximum post-breeding flock counted was on Pumphouse Pit, on 16th August, when approximately 650 birds were present. Principal breeding sites included Sailing Lake and Pumphouse Pit, but successful breeding also took place on other Pits in the complex. First young were reported on Sailing Lake on

16th April, when two pairs had 12 goslings. At this site, earlier in the month both greylag and Canada geese attempted to create a nest on a silage stack. No complete count of nests was made, but from various observers, it would be reasonable to estimate that Paxton breeding greylag raised between 150 and 200 young. A very successful year.

Five-year review: Feral birds were introduced into the area from the early 1960s, in many ways replacing the native greylags which had bred in the Fens until late in the eighteenth century. Post-breeding flocks at Paxton during the last five years have reached c.600 birds (1996).



Canada goose

Status: this introduced species is resident in the Ouse Valley, breeding in and around the gravel workings since the late 1950s.

1998: up to c.20 pairs nested, with 7-10 nests on the two Sailing Lake islands, where sites were occupied from mid February. Young appeared from mid April and, by mid May, a creche of 30 young was being guarded by adults. Flocking of young and adult birds occurred from early August, with a maximum of 170 birds on Washout Pit on the 16th.

Five year review: in contrast to most areas of lowland Britain, the spread of this species has been slow in our recording area. However, in more recent years, things have changed! From only two pairs raising 14 young in 1994, the Canada goose now rivals the greylag for the best breeding sites, with a flock of over 100 birds being noted at the end of the breeding season.

Shelduck

Status: spring passage (?) and summer visitor. Rare breeding species, many around new diggings and adjoining farm (hay stacks).

1998: records of up to four adults from early March to mid-summer. On 22nd March, four adults were seen prospecting a hay stack in a field adjoining the Pit complex. All records are from Pumphouse Pit and nearby new workings, where there were three together on 31st May. No confirmed breeding.

Five year review: noted each year in small numbers in the spring and during breeding season. In 1994, one pair raised two young. Other records of small family groups are suspected to have originated from nearby Grafham Water.

Gadwall

Status: winter visitor and rare breeding species in the Ouse Valley.

1998: present up to late June on likely breeding sites, with displaying birds noted regularly on the well-watched Heronry South pit. No suspicion of breeding, and 15 birds on Pumphouse Pit on 31st May may have been non-breeding wanderers.

Five year review: the only record of possible breeding success comes from 1996, when two regular observers claimed a female with two ducklings. This is the only such record for Paxton Pits.

Mallard

Status: resident and winter visitor.

1998: mallards can be observed mating on the water at most times of the year, with up to five males soliciting a lone female. During the early part of this breeding season, there seemed to be few mallards around the Pits and it was not until 8th May that a pair with eight small ducklings appeared on Sailing Lake. This site held at least three pairs. The flooded meadow, south of the Visitor Centre, attracted many wildfowl during spring, and on 13th May, a pair with five young appeared at this location. On the PBBS, teams confirmed ten breeding pairs, with a further seven possible breeding pairs. Half of the pairs were on Cloudy Pit, with others noted on Sailing Lake and Heronry

North and South. The lack of records from other areas during the breeding season highlights just how little we know about a supposedly common breeding species.

Five year review: under-recorded and ignored by most local observers, we remain unclear as to the true status of this familiar species. In 1995, it was conservatively estimated that the Pits held c.15 pairs, but this could be a gross underestimate. Post-breeding flocks of up to 300 birds congregate annually on Pumphouse Pit, with smaller numbers elsewhere.

Tufted duck

Status: resident and numerous winter visitor. The status of this species has strengthened along with the rapid increase in the number of gravel pits in the Ouse Valley.

1998: from records submitted, a highly productive year, with record numbers of pairs and young birds. First young were noted from Heronry South (a pair with six young on 23rd June) and from the Meadow floods the following day (a female with seven young). Ten young were raised on Sailing Lake and, amazingly, 36 from four families on Heronry North and South. This latest statistic was verified by the fact that all four families were noted on the water together. It is also known that a pair raised three young on Farm Pit (2nd August) and that a pair bred successfully on the new workings, where a female with eight small young were noted on 16th August. In summary, it is likely that 10+ pairs raised around 60 young in 1998. Quite a contrast to the single pair breeding in 1994.

Five year review: although the PBBS did not confirm any breeding pairs, this is a very late nesting species, with young not appearing until July or August in some years. During the period under review, it has been noted that this species young suffer considerable predation. Mink, pike and cormorants have all been cited as potential predators on young tufted ducks. Do herons also eat young tufties? In the last five years, estimates of breeding pairs have ranged from one to 10, and it is likely that this species is increasing as a Paxton breeding bird.

Sparrowhawk

Status: resident. Some visual evidence of migration in April, September and October (Clarke).

1998: one bird was killed on a window pane in the village in October. The body was forwarded to the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology at Monk's Wood for analysis. Regular garden sightings from all over the village, but no firm evidence of breeding locally this year. Can this really be correct? Most sightings of single birds originate from the feeding station outside the Hayden Hide on Heronry South.

Five year review: during the last five years, one pair has bred regularly either on or near to the reserve. The number of sightings in Paxton village strongly suggests that there could be at least two pairs. The Sparrowhawk can be very difficult to locate during the breeding season, and as a principle, nesting locations are neither sought nor publicised. Throughout the period under review, gardens have provided good hunting ground - with lots of easy-to-catch food available. Generally agreed to be slowly increasing locally.

Kestrel

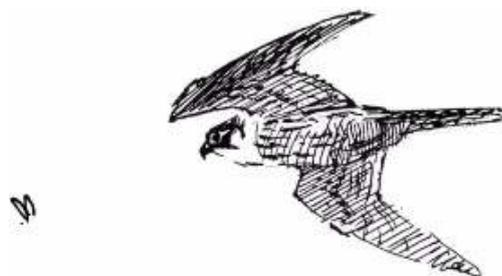
Status: resident in spring/autumn, passage migrant (Clarke).

1998: one or two birds present locally throughout the year. No reports of family parties. Did the kestrel breed at Paxton in 1998? A single bird carrying food near the river on 19th July may have been significant.

Five year review: many local observers have commented that the kestrel is declining locally. In the last few years, one or two pairs have nested within our recording area, but recently, no reports have been received of groups or family parties. Is the suggested decline a result of a lack of suitable food, or a shortage of nesting sites locally?

Hobby

Status: a possible/potential breeding species, which appears regularly each spring as a passage migrant. Hobbies use the Pits as



feeding areas during the breeding season and it has been suggested that the increase in breeding numbers in the east Midlands is linked to the rich source of damsel- and dragonflies on gravel pits.

1998: first bird noted over Heronry North on 1st May. Peak movement/activity occurred between 10th-14th May, when up to six birds hunted over the Meadow floods and also Heronry South. Early sightings of one or two birds throughout the breeding season again suggested that a pair may have nested locally, but no family party was seen. The last recorded bird was around the Pits on 20th September.

Five year review: traditionally, hobbies nest in old crow nests, and whilst Paxton regularly attracts up to eight birds in the spring, we have no evidence of breeding within the Pits complex. In some years, birds have been seen behaving in a manner which would suggest breeding and, with a national increase and suitable habitat existing locally, we remain hopeful.

Grey partridge

Status: the dramatic national decline as a result of intensive farming practices is reflected locally. This species hangs on as a rare resident. In some years, no records are submitted.

1998: hearsay information about single birds found along northern pit margins, but no firm records received. There may be some confusion with red-legged partridge.

Five year review:

1994 - no records

1995 - two records of single birds

1996 - one pair in February, and singles in the same area in May and June. May have bred.

1997 - scattered records of singles and pairs throughout the year.

Red-legged partridge

Status: dramatic decline of a previously-common local breeding bird. Now a scarce breeding resident. Originally introduced for sporting purposes, mainly occurring to the north of Bardon's gravel washing area.

1998: it is worth noting that few birdwatchers visit farmland bordering the northern pits, where they may still breed.

Five year review: recorded only in very small numbers annually. Small groups of up to seven birds reported, but this is another species which may be overlooked or under-recorded, as it mainly occurs in areas of the workings closed to the public.

Pheasant

Status: Considered by Clarke to be 'now numerous and widespread'. However, this species continues to be reared locally for sporting purposes and so is of little interest to local birdwatchers - hence an almost total lack of records.

1998: only a few males recorded around northern pits.

Water rail

Status: principally a winter visitor, but long-staying spring birds continue to cause considerable speculation.

1998: the long awaited first breeding record came on 24th June, when Faith Darlow and Steve May saw a single adult with a young bird on the flooded meadow, south of the Visitor Centre. No other follow-up sightings were reported.

Five year review: Records of wintering birds have increased dramatically recently and in 1996 it was estimated that 10 individuals occurred, mainly around the southern pits and Meadow Trail. This estimate was doubled in the winter of 1997, when it was considered that up to 20 birds may have wintered locally.

Moorhen

Status: resident, common around most south pits and the Meadow Trail. Very hard weather makes life difficult for moorhens, which will leave for the nearby river banks.

1998: during the PBBS, only one confirmed pair on Heronry South, but the overall picture is very different, with up to three pairs on Heronry South, one pair on Heronry North, one pair on Washout, two pairs on Sailing Lake and one pair on Farm Pit. Pairs and singles alongside the Meadow pits, but no young were seen. An overall estimate of 10 breeding pairs would seem fairly accurate, with each producing up to four young.

Five year review: over the last few years, estimates have varied from 10 to 20 pairs, with excellent productivity - especially around Heronry South.

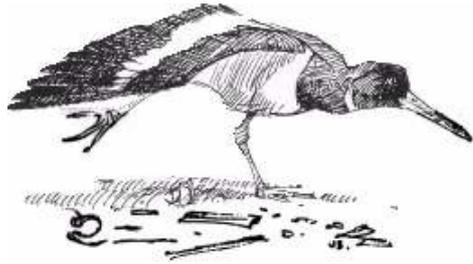


Coot

Status: breeding resident and common winter visitor, with 1,880 birds present during winter 1992.

1998: the PBBS confirmed 20 breeding pairs and listed a further three possible, with pairs recorded on Heronry South, Sailing Lake, Rudd, Cloudy and Hayling Pits. Productivity was high, with pairs raising up to six young each. Young birds appeared from early May and beyond the PBBS area: pairs nested on Farm Pit (2), Pumphouse (2+) and A1 South (2+), which may give the Pits complex up to 30 breeding pairs in '98. This figure discounts any pairs which may have nested along the river, south to Samuel Jones mill.

Five year review: this is a species which appears to be on the increase, with c.15 pairs estimated in 1996 and no fewer than 23 pairs in 1997, including five pairs on Heronry South. However, as noted in the 1997 report, a more detailed survey of this dominant and interesting species would be a useful exercise.



Oystercatcher

Status: summer visitor and occasional breeding species.

1998: birds were noted regularly on the new workings, Pumphouse Pit and Sailing Lake. On 28th June, two adults were accompanied by one juvenile on the Pumphouse islands; on July 1st, there were three adults around the Sailing Lake; and 1st August there were two adults and two juveniles on the Sailing Lake islands. The origins of these birds are unknown - it is possible that they could have bred undetected on the new workings.

Five year review: in recent years, the oystercatcher has summered regularly around Pumphouse Pit and the Sailing Lake. In 1995, a single pair produced two young, birds summered and displayed in 1996 and 1997, but no young were seen.

Little ringed plover

Status: summer visitor and autumn passage; first seen at Paxton in 1956, the breeding population peaked at about 12 pairs in the late 1960s, since when suitable habitat has declined. They may have also been affected by an increase in the number of the more aggressive ringed plovers.

1998: the first bird, probably on passage, was noted on 5th April. Apart from two on Washout Pit on 19th May, there were only a few scattered records of single birds during the breeding season. The worst season for this species since it became established here in the 1950s. Now perhaps lost as a regular breeding bird.

Five year review: normally arrives at Paxton in late March, well after the more dominant ringed plover has established itself in suitable breeding areas. By 1994, the little ringed plover was already in rapid decline, and few young have been successfully raised in the last

five years. No young were located in 1994 and 1997, though one pair raised young in both 1995 and 1996.

Ringed plover

Status: summer visitor, spring and autumn passage migrant. First bred locally at Grafham in 1969, and in 1995, the species had become so dominant that c.10-12 pairs bred on the Pumphouse Pit islands.

1998: first birds returned on 12th February, when four birds were displaying around the Sailing Lake. This had increased to eight birds by 4th March, followed by 14 on Pumphouse Pit on 22nd. Passage continued until the end of May. One pair raised two chicks on Sailing Lake and a minimum of three pairs raised young on the Pumphouse islands. Other birds were present around the new workings and Washout Pit during the breeding season, but no young were seen. A poor year, perhaps caused by the flooding out of early breeders?

Five year review: from two pairs raising five young on Pumphouse Pit in 1994, a huge increase to c.10-12 pairs (see above) the following year. In 1996, eight pairs which were studied raised over 10 young. 13+ pairs bred on Pumphouse Pit and Sailing Lake islands in 1997, where this species appears to have completely replaced the little ringed plover.

Lapwing

Status: resident in small numbers, passage migrant and winter visitor. The size of post-breeding flocks is much reduced, as is the number of pairs noted on adjoining agricultural land.

1998: Pumphouse islands held around six breeding pairs, while the Sailing Lake islands also had six pairs. Birds were present in small numbers on the new workings, where they may have nested. Flocks of 100-300 birds were in the fields between the A1 and Pumphouse Pit during February, July and August.

Five year review: in recent years, the number of pairs known to breed around the Pits complex has doubled to an estimated 20, with half of these on the Pumphouse Pit islands. However, this species is poorly-recorded and a

full survey has never been attempted for the whole recording area.

Redshank

Status: mainly a summer visitor and spring passage migrant. A dramatic decline has occurred, perhaps as a result of agricultural changes, particularly the drainage of wet meadows. In the future, the redshank may only be maintained as a breeding species in Cambridgeshire on well-managed nature reserves and gravel workings.

1998: the first birds were noted on Washout Pit on 1st March, with pairs taking up displaying areas on Sailing Lake and Pumphouse Pit from 8th March. Spring passage was witnessed from 14th March, when 13 birds were on the Sailing Lake islands, to 12th April, when the Pumphouse islands held 20 birds. Eventually, Pumphouse supported 4-6 pairs, where late young were seen up to the end of June. Sailing Lake hosted four pairs. Breeding waders at this latter site used the flooded meadow extensively to feed - a potentially valuable new, if transient, habitat.

Five year review:

Year	Number
1994	max. 6 pairs
1995	10+ pairs
1996	13 displaying pairs
1997	6 pairs
1998	8-10 pairs

Records show that after the breeding season, most birds leave the Pits and there are few redshank present after early July. The breeding records highlight the importance of habitat management work undertaken on the Pumphouse and Sailing Lake islands, now critical to the success of this and other waders in this part of the Ouse Valley.

Black-headed gull

Status: formerly a common breeding bird on Island Pit. Deliberate disturbance at both Paxton and Buckden gravel pits in the early 1990s led to complete desertion of both sites. Many thousands of black-headed gulls roost on Grafham Water, with hundreds feeding on some of Paxton's northern pits.

1998: no breeding records.

Five year review: in 1994, c.10 pairs raised young on Pumphouse islands. However, no other breeding records have been reported since. Each year, hopes are raised of a return by pairs of black-headed gulls displaying on potential nesting sites on Pumphouse Pit and Sailing Lake.

Common tern

Status: summer visitor, first breeding at Paxton in 1969. Thirty pairs on Island Pit in 1987 were disturbed the following year when it is likely that they moved to Buckden gravel pits (Clarke).

1998: first birds (two) returned on 10th April. Both Pumphouse Pit and Sailing Lake islands were quickly occupied by terns, with the former initially proving the most attractive. Eventually, numbers on Sailing Lake increased: 15-20 pairs produced c.30 young. This year, one pair nested on the western Sailing Lake island for the first time. By early May, a small colony had been established on Pumphouse Pit, and on 28th June, ten birds were active, bringing in food. An estimated 3+ pairs nested. Also on 28th June, one pair was located away from the main sites, in the new workings. The success of this nest is unknown. A very successful season: 54 terns were counted over the Sailing Lake islands on 21st July. The last birds on breeding grounds were 21 on 5th August.

Five year review:

1994 - 6-8 pairs nested on Pumphouse islands, along with black-headed gulls. Young were observed being fed in June and July.
 1995 - by the end of May, 16-17 nests on Pumphouse Pit; on 20th-21st June, there was unexplained disturbance/predation and only six or seven young were raised at this site. The colony reformed on Sailing Lake, where more birds raised over 10 young.
 1996 - initially, six pairs established on Pumphouse islands, but no breeding occurred. By late April, some 50 birds had settled on Sailing Lake, where 20-24 pairs nested, raising more than 25 young.
 1997 - the colony became firmly established on Sailing Lake, with c. 20 pairs nesting successfully, raising over 20 young to fledging.

Stock dove

Status: breeding resident and winter visitor.

1998: Scattered pairs nest in the mature trees both east and west of the Kingfisher hide. Also noted in the Pump House, where they nest annually. Stock doves also occur occasionally in some of the larger, more wooded, gardens in Little Paxton.

Five year review: there is no reason to suppose that any significant change has taken place in the status of this species during the last five years. Winter roosts begin to assemble from late October around the cormorant colony in Heronry South, where up to 1,000 birds have been noted. The source of these birds remains unknown.

Woodpigeon

Status: breeding resident and winter visitor.

1998: there are no specific breeding records for 1998, but the species is known to occur in many hundreds at the evening roost on Heronry South.

Five year review: this is not a species regularly recorded by birdwatchers, so its true status is unknown.

Collared dove

Status: resident breeder, producing young throughout the year.

1998: no specific records of note. The largest flock noted was 15 birds, near St James' Road in November.

Five year review: has certainly become more numerous as a garden bird during the last five years. An estimated 20-30 pairs nest around the village. Very much linked to human habitation, only a few birds live in or around the Pits complex, and these are mostly around the gravel pit offices and Visitor Centre.

Turtle dove

Status: summer visitor.

1998: the first bird was seen during a brief snow flurry on 12th April - the earliest record

for five years and eight days earlier than 1997. The PBBS noted 12 probable pairs, with a further five pairs outside the survey area. Reported as 'calling everywhere' on 2nd August - surely a sign of a good breeding season. No records received after 16th August.

Five year review: this attractive migrant dove from Africa would appear to have increased as a breeding species locally, bucking the long-term downward national trend. Between 1994 and '98, the number increased from an estimated four pairs to over 10 pairs.

Cuckoo

Status: summer visitor.

1998: the PBBS recorded 11 calling males, but added the proviso that "given the mobility of this species and lack of a territory, these records may well have involved fewer birds". At Paxton, the principal host species would appear to be reed and sedge warblers, but perhaps also reed buntings. The last recorded calling birds were on 23rd June, interestingly the same date as 1996.

Five year review: it would appear that the cuckoo's status did not change between 1994 and 1998, with four to six calling males.



Barn Owl

Status: seemingly a rare, non-breeding resident.

1998: reports received:
6th May - one found dead on northbound A1, near Little Paxton road bridge.
Mid June - seen hunting between set-aside farmland and river on two occasions; also near Heronry South.

Five year review: apart from a record of a pair in a suitable nesting location in 1994, only the very occasional sighting continues to raise hopes that this bird may once again breed at Paxton. Failed and, perhaps, unwise reintroductions continue to confuse the situation.



Tawny Owl

Status: resident.

1998: birds heard calling near river and near Wray House garden in May and June.

Five year review: we have almost no information about this species at Paxton. Heard calling around the Pits and occasionally in the village, usually by local anglers. Only one record of successful nesting (1996), which resulted in the fledging of one chick.

Swift

Status: summer visitor and passage migrant, sometimes occurs in large numbers when avoiding bad weather.

1998: there was a big movement all day on 10th May, involving many hundreds of birds. Northward movements of swifts continued until early June, but some birds were seen prospecting potential nest sites around the village on 20th May. However, it was not until 29th June that about six birds were seen to enter the eaves of a house near the Church. Such action may be taken as proof of breeding - perhaps two or three pairs.

Five year review: formerly nesting in St James' Church, the swift is now principally a numerous spring passage migrant in this area, with few breeding records in recent years.

Kingfisher

Status: resident; affected by harsh weather conditions which tend to drive the birds to the river and perhaps farther afield.

1998: a very well watched species, recorded throughout the Pit complex. Most records come from around Heronry South, the pits close to the centre and Sailing Lake. Do these records represent the distribution of birds or that of observers? There is no firm agreement on the number of pairs nesting on the reserve in 1998, but it is estimated at 2-4 pairs. The first indicator of successful breeding usually comes from sight records of birds carrying food. This occurred on 17th June, too late for courtship display. On 4th August two adults and two young were seen feeding together, after which there were a number of sightings of four birds together. A successful season for this greatly enjoyed species.

Five year review: during the period 1994-96 it was estimated that between two and six (1994) pairs nested. In 1997 all birds left the Pit complex in the harsh January weather. Birds returned, or new colonists arrived, from mid June, but too late to breed.

Green woodpecker

Status: resident.

1998: whilst listing seven probable pairs, the PBBS concedes that all records might be accounted for by just two pairs. However, as Pumphouse Pit lies well outside the survey area, it is concluded that there is a minimum of three pairs. Only occasionally recorded in the village, a juvenile in a garden on Bydand Lane (3rd August) was a first for this location.

Five year review: this is a highly vocal and very mobile species which has proven rather difficult to survey. The best estimates have varied between three and five pairs. Young birds and feeding family parties are regularly observed, and birds have been seen regularly feeding around Pumphouse Pit during the breeding season.

Great spotted woodpecker

Status: resident.

1998: the PBBS listed four probable pairs, but no confirmed nesting sites. These records are confined to the southern end of the pit complex and there are likely to be other pairs breeding locally. Five pairs may be a realistic estimate. Further comments are welcomed.

Five year review: great spotted woodpeckers have increased locally, from 2-3 pairs in 1994 to 3-4 pairs in recent years. There is no knowledge of any breeding records in Little Paxton gardens, but this cannot be ruled out. An increased number of garden records may suggest that such an event is not too far away.

Lesser spotted woodpecker

Status: resident.

1998: not recorded during the PBBS, but occasional records of birds along the southern area of the Concrete road, and around the Kingfisher hide area, suggest two breeding pairs. No family groups were seen, however.

Five year review: this elusive species seems to have maintained its status at two breeding pairs. Very unusual in the village, though a spate of records in 1997 suggested that there might be an additional pair. This suspicion is now probably unfounded.

Skylark

Status: resident and winter visitor. Passage migrant?

1998: no records have been received of any birds and so it is presumed that no-one has seen a skylark this year! It is suggested that skylarks continue to breed in small numbers



around Pumphouse Pit and next to the A1 Pits. Its status as a breeding bird on nearby agricultural land remains largely unknown, though several were recorded in recent summers on Manor Farm, Southoe, just the other side of the A1 from the Pits.

Five year review: generally considered to be declining locally, in line with national trends. Flocks of 30-50 birds noted in the winter months, but no big flocks which traditionally occurred annually.

Sand martin

Status: passage migrant and summer breeding species.

1998: the first birds were recorded on 26th March, when a group of 10 was seen, but spring passage was light until it peaked at c.1000 birds over Pumphouse Pit on 10th April. These movements continued sporadically up to the end of the month, with a continual stream of birds moving north on 28th, involving many hundreds of martins. This was a very poor season for breeding sand martins, with only one small colony of c.10-15 pairs being located on the new workings on 28th June. Late in the breeding season about 20 pairs nested in a large heap of soft sand just north of the main site office and works. This site remained active until early August and perhaps resulted from a previously displaced colony.

Five year review: the sand martin, no longer breeding along most river systems in our area, is now almost totally dependent upon artificial habitats such as gravel pits. Colonies tend to follow new areas of extraction, but in recent years numbers in a series of small colonies have probably not exceeded 100 breeding pairs, usually considerably less. The earliest dates from 2nd March (1997) have been followed by heavy spring movements which have continued well into April - in 1996 up to 1000 birds were noted on Pumphouse Pit. Autumn passage is always less well marked.

Swallow

Status: spring passage migrant and rare summer visitor.

1998: first noted on 4th April. This year more birds were seen on the reserve than in previous years - hopefully a positive sign. Breeding was proven at Samuel Jones paper mill (c.six pairs), a neighbouring farm and Diddington village. There was also a suspicion that one pair might have attempted to nest within the village, where birds were regularly seen.

Five year review: during the last few seasons only about 10 pairs have been found breeding

within the recording area. However, despite being a much loved bird, there have been virtually no breeding reports from local birdwatchers, so it may be under recorded.

House martin

Status: spring passage migrant and declining summer visitor.

1998: the first birds had moved through the area by 5th April, but it was well into May before any pairs looked interested in nesting. The village was surveyed and by the end of June only 13-14 nests were located, none of which were in the heart of the village. These included 4-6 pairs on the Samuel Jones paper mill by the river crossing.

Five year review: house martins have been surveyed in some detail since 1995, when every house in the village was viewed. 54 occupied sites were located. In 1996 and '97, this had fallen to about 35 nesting sites. From 1996 onwards, the estimate includes birds nesting on the Samuel Jones paper mill. It is perhaps worth noting that many householders do not like having martin nests on their homes. Some nests are clearly destroyed and at other locations, plastic bags and old rags are hung out to dissuade potential nesting birds.

Meadow pipit

Status: spring passage and former breeding species. Last confirmed breeding record in 1964 (Clarke).

Tree pipit

Status: rare on spring passage; formerly bred in small numbers, but not for at least ten years.

Yellow wagtail

Status: passage migrant and declining breeding species of wet meadows.

1998: first record was a single bird on 10th April near Pumphouse Pit; severe flooding of the fields near the river over Easter attracted a host of spring migrants, including c.30 yellow wagtails, principally males. This movement began on 12th/13th April. Small movements continued up to mid May, but no large flocks were noted. Only occasional sightings of

single birds during the rest of May and June suggested a poor breeding season, with few pairs nesting locally. On 28th June, two adults with a juvenile and a small mixed group of adults and young were recorded on Pumphouse Pit. These birds may have bred locally. Birds were recorded up to the end of August, but no late passage was noted.

Five year review: lack of suitable breeding areas has restricted the number of yellow wagtails nesting locally. Most obvious on spring passage, with groups of up to 40 birds noted from mid April. In 1996, return passage seemed especially pronounced, with regular movements of up to 50 birds recorded in mid August.

Grey wagtail

Status: winter visitor in small numbers to the Pits and on the southern edge of the recording area. Usually one breeding pair, dependent on suitable water levels.

1998: birds present at usual site, but no young seen.

Five-year review: one pair raises one or two young annually.

Pied wagtail

Status: resident and passage migrant, with some flocking during the winter.

1998: only one pair confirmed on PBBS, but main breeding areas lie outside the scope of this survey. No specific spring movements reported.

Five year review: appears unchanged. A familiar garden bird in the village and during the autumn, can be found roosting or pre-roosting around the playing field and eastern end of the Sailing Lake. Breeds around the works buildings and factories, but no confirmed nesting records in the village. Almost certainly under-recorded as a breeding species.

Wren

Status: resident.

1998: the PBBS confirmed the status of the wren as the most numerous songbird, with no fewer than 62 singing males counted. Given that large numbers of wrens also breed in the village, this count is clearly only a part of a larger local breeding population. The scrub around Hayling Pit had a particularly high density of singing wrens.

Five year review: the only count was made in 1995, when 31 singing males were recorded on 15th April. A familiar garden bird, but rarely reported by local birdwatchers. Why?



Dunnock

Status: resident.

1998: the PBBS confirmed one pair, and found another 17 probable pairs and seven others present. The Paxton garden population of this species is large.

Five year review: apart from the 1995 count of 19 singing birds around the Pits complex, few records of dunnocks are submitted. However, the species remains a familiar garden bird.

Robin

Status: resident and winter visitor.

1998: the PBBS confirmed four pairs and recorded 49 probable pairs and the presence of six other birds. This makes the robin one of the Pits' commonest breeding species. Add to these statistics the number of robins elsewhere in the recording area probably results in a population of well over 100 pairs.

Five year review: a 1995 count found 21 singing males around the Pits, but who knows the number of pairs which breed in gardens? In 1996, it was estimated that the Lower Pits complex held around 20 territories - see 1998 for the true facts!

Nightingale

Status: summer visitor.

1998: first recorded on 6th April (Faith Darlow, Julian Hughes) - the earliest ever record for Huntingdonshire. The PBBS found 26 singing males - the highest since regular monitoring was instituted. The scrub around the Lower Pits provides ideal habitat for this species which continues to decline nationally. Recent habitat management should maintain this scrub for our most popular songbird.

Five year review: arrival dates vary between 6th and 13th April. Numbers of singing birds, some no doubt non-breeders, has varied between 15 and 26 birds. However, the number of actual breeding pairs remains unknown, since few family groups are ever noted.

Blackbird

Status: Resident and winter visitor.

1998: the PBBS suggested 32 probable breeding pairs, two confirmed and 42 other individual birds present. How many blackbirds breed outside the survey area? Given the vast population in the village, we must have a minimum of 100 breeding pairs.

Five year review: a highly successful breeding species, both in the village and the Pits complex. The general feeling is that the blackbird is now more common in the village than it was five years ago, but there is little firm evidence for this.



Song thrush

Status: resident.

1998: the PBBS recorded four probable pairs and eight others present, but there is no estimate available of numbers in the village or northern pits/riverbank.

Five year review: despite a national decline of over 50%, the song thrush remains a familiar breeding bird in many Paxton gardens. Its decline is due largely to changes in farming practices and not - as some would claim - a result of increased numbers of aggressive blackbirds. In fact, blackbirds are now showing a national rate of decline similar to the song thrush.

Mistle thrush

Status: resident.

1998: surprisingly, the PBBS recorded only one probable breeding pair and a further four individuals. Other reports suggest that one pair raised young around Heronry South (near the Hayden Hide), one pair near to Pumphouse Pit and at least two pairs within the village. Lack of information prevents an accurate estimate outside the PBBS recording area.

Five year review: generally considered to be increasing, both within the village and the Pits complex. The best estimate is 3-4 pairs.

Sedge warbler

Status: summer visitor.

1998: first recorded on 10th April, a fairly typical date. The PBBS confirmed only two breeding pairs, but no fewer than 43 possibles, suggesting that previous estimates for the whole Pits complex were wide of the mark. Including A1 South and the riverbank north to Pumphouse Pit, there could be as many as 100 breeding pairs.

Five year review: over this period, a range of surveys and different observers have repeatedly suggested that there are approximately 50 pairs breeding locally. This is a widely distributed species, breeding in dry scrub, hedges and the margins of waterbodies.

Grasshopper warbler

Status: a rare breeding bird; no evidence of breeding in some years.

1998: one was reported briefly around the Sailing Lake early in the season. A bird in full song was seen on 20th July, with possibly another silent bird present.

Five year review: in 1994, four 'reeling' birds were heard and, in the following year, it was considered that two pairs nested. No breeding was confirmed in 1996 or '97 - a species apparently in decline.

Reed warbler

Status: summer visitor.

1998: the PBBS confirmed at least 25 singing males. Add to this about 30 singing birds in the reedbeds surrounding A1 South, some birds along the river, Farm Pit and Washout Pit, the breeding numbers could perhaps be 100 pairs. The first record was on 2nd May, with six birds singing in a small reedbed on Washout Pit by 4th. Birds were still being reported from breeding sites as late as 31st August.

Five year review: generally a late migrant into this area, with the earliest record on 21st April 1996. However, it is normally May before the breeding season is underway. Formerly more numerous in the reedbeds by the side of the river than it is today. However, expanding

reedbed habitats within the Pits complex should ensure an ever increasing population.

Lesser whitethroat

Status: summer visitor.

1998: the first record was on 26th April. During the PBBS, five probable pairs, plus two other birds, were located. There were other birds outside the survey area, such as the riverbank and the large hedge by the playing field, so an estimate of 8-10 pairs would seem reasonable.

Five year review: this species favours mature, overgrown thorn scrub (Clarke), and this is certainly reflected locally. Birds generally arrive at the end of April. Between 1994 and '97, it has been estimated that 4-10 singing males have been present during the breeding season.

Whitethroat

Status: summer visitor.

1998: first seen on 24th April, twelve days later than in 1997. PBBS confirms the status as 18 singing males and two other birds. Areas outside the survey (ie. Pumphouse Pit and the hedge between the A1 pits) held singing birds, lifting the number of possible breeding pairs to c.25.

Five year review: this species seems prone to dramatic swings in population fortune resulting from conditions in Africa and weather-related factors on migration. Since 1995, numbers have fluctuated between 10 and 20 singing males, with the maximum number recorded in 1997.

Garden warbler

Status: summer visitor.

1998: not recorded until 26th April, the centre of the garden warbler's habitat is to the east of Heronry South and along the concrete road. There are a few scattered pairs around the Kingfisher Hide and sanctuary area. PBBS confirmed one breeding pair, 11 probable pairs and four others.

Five year review: Various observers have estimated that c.20 pairs of garden warblers breed locally. The first arrivals are usually from 4th April (1997) and continue through the rest of the month, into May. This can be a difficult species to track down, with considerable confusion between the song of this species and the blackcap.

Blackcap

Status: summer breeding bird, which overwinters in very small numbers.

1998: the PBBS recorded an amazing result, showing no fewer than 57 probable breeding pairs within the survey area. Given that there are also singing males north along the riverbank, around the former 'Little Chef' pit and playing fields, it is possible that around 80 singing males were present. The first male in song was noted on 29th March and may have been our first incoming migrant blackcap. 'Our' birds winter mainly in Spain and north Africa.

Five year-review: one of our most numerous visitors, early records each spring are often confused by late wintering birds (which breed elsewhere in Europe). Regular counts along the Heronry Trail from 1995 to '97 produced between 16 and 25 birds.



Chiffchaff

Status: summer visitor, passage migrant and increasingly a regular winter visitor, often to bird feeding areas.

1998: first birds returned on 13th March, with c.20 by the end of the month. The PBBS found c.30 birds, with most being located around the Heronry Pits. Not surveyed elsewhere, but a few singing males were noted along the river bank between Washout and Pumphouse Pits.

Five year review: arrives from wintering grounds as early as 9th March (1997), but numbers fluctuate annually. Breeding numbers from 1994 have been confused by birds singing on passage. As an example, in early May 1995, one observer counted 60 singing birds. In sharp contrast, in early May the following year, fewer than 10 birds could be located by song. In 1997, a careful count on the reserve suggested only 20 pairs of singing males by 18th June.

Willow warbler

Status: summer visitor and presumed passage migrant.

1998: the PBBS confirmed one pair, 55 singing males and 11 others present, suggesting that the 1995 estimate of c.80 pairs was fairly accurate. No early dates submitted, but they were certainly present by 5th April, when four birds were in the hedge on the north edge of the Sailing Lake.

Five year review: main arrivals through April, but two March records during the period 1994-97. Counts of singing males have varied between c.50 and 80 (1995). 1997 seemed a particularly poor year for this species, but no detailed counts were undertaken. Within the village, the willow warbler is a not uncommon autumn passage migrant.

Goldcrest

Status: occasional breeding suspected in suitable habitat; winter visitor to gardens and reserve in some numbers.

1998: not recorded during PBBS. No breeding reported.

Five year review: most records are from village gardens. The only suspected breeding was in 1997, when birds were present in the Old Garden conifers during spring. Nesting materials were collected on 30th March and birds were noted during May, but no family group or young were seen.

Spotted flycatcher

Status: occasional breeder and scarce passage migrant.

1998: an outstanding series of records has been submitted by Ray Matthews from Bydand Lane. First noted on 16th May, a pair were seen courtship feeding on 23rd and at least one bird was seen throughout June. Then, on 22nd June, adults were seen feeding at least two young in a nest. One egg remained unhatched. Through early July, at least one fledged juvenile was seen in the garden. On 5th August, the pair was seen with a recently-fledged young, having reared a second brood of two in the same nest. They were last seen on 14th August. There were no other breeding records.

Five year review: as far as is known, this formerly numerous summer visitor has not nested within the Pits complex during the last five years. A few pairs remain in the village, where between two and four pairs have bred. Tebbutt, in 1967, described it as 'fairly common'. How times have changed.

Long tailed tit

Status: resident and increasing locally.

1998: the PBBS recorded two confirmed and five probable pairs. A flock of 22 birds on the Meadow in May seemed a strange record for the breeding season. No other breeding notes were submitted. The most reliable location for viewing this attractive species would seem to be from the Hayden Hide.

Five year review: estimates range from three to six pairs, with family groups of up to 20 birds noted in the autumn and winter, often with other tit species, especially blue tits. Increasingly noted, even by non-birdwatchers, around garden feeders.

Marsh/willow tit

Status: unknown.

1998: neither species was recorded during the PBBS and, until the establishment of the feeding station next to the Hayden Hide, both

these elusive species had been difficult to observe. However, since late October, at least one marsh tit(?) has appeared regularly at the feeder. There has been a single record, nearby, of a willow tit. Regrettably, we are no nearer establishing the true status of either species.

Five year review: both species are clearly present on the reserve for most of the year, but no birds singing in the breeding season or family groups have ever been recorded.

Coal tit

Status: winter visitor to gardens and occasionally noted in the Pits complex.

1998: one individual recorded alongside the river during the June PBBS was of interest.

Five year review: there has been a distinct lack of records, which suggests that this species familiar in gardens during the winter does not breed. However, this is strange when one considers the number of conifers which grow in village gardens.

Blue tit

Status: resident.

1998: the PBBS confirmed eight pairs and recorded 10 probable and 33 other birds. However, many others breed in the village and there seems little chance of establishing the size of this population, known to be a rich source of food for visiting sparrowhawks.

Five year review: no change in status as a common breeding species.

Great tit

Status: resident.

1998: the PBBS confirmed nine pairs, 14 probable pairs and 18 others. The comments made about the overall blue tit population also apply to this much-loved garden bird.

Five year review: no change in status, but it remains a dominant garden bird at feeders both on the reserve and in the village.

Treecreeper

Status: resident.

1998: the PBBS confirmed one pair and located one other. A pair was seen taking food into a nest hole close to one of the hides. The other bird was recorded in trees at the southeast corner of Hayling Pit. Steve May, one of the most regular visitors to the Pits, located three definite nesting sites.

Five year review: breeds along the Concrete road and the parish boundary, it is also recorded regularly in Wray House garden.



Jay

Status: resident and winter visitor.

1998: the PBBS recorded two probable pairs and three other birds. The mature woodland along the parish boundary is the centre of jay activity, with birds also being recorded regularly along the Concrete road and Heronry South. Noted occasionally around trees east of Pumphouse Pit during the breeding season. May be under-recorded. A large influx of birds nationally during the autumn was reflected locally.

Five year review: breeds in small numbers, but proof is rare. In 1996, a family of five, west of Island Pit, was noteworthy. The Pits were presumed to hold two or three pairs, with perhaps an increase in more recent years.



Magpie

Status: resident.

1998: the PBBS recorded seven probable pairs, and another 25 individual magpies, though given the mobility of the species and the likelihood that birds from elsewhere feed on the reserve, this may be an overestimate. Are there nests in the village? We asked last year and received no response.

Five year review: Twenty-five years ago, this species was almost unknown in Little Paxton. Three or four pairs were estimated in 1994, though the estimate had increased to ten pairs by 1997. Many villagers now report them regularly in gardens, especially during the winter.

Jackdaw

Status: resident, and the predominant species in the winter roost on Heronry South.

1998: no jackdaws were seen on the PBBS and, aside from family groups in the St James' Road area, there were no records. Except at the winter roost, which contains many thousands of corvids, jackdaws seem to be ignored by birdwatchers.

Five year review: the true breeding status of this interesting species is unknown, but it is thought to breed in many older properties in the Paxton area. Around St James' Road, it is a regular garden visitor throughout the year - it must be elsewhere!

Rook

Status: resident and roosting winter visitor.

1998: although the PBBS does not include the rookery to the north of Sailing Lake (since it is difficult to count once the trees are in leaf), counts were made early in the season: the maximum were c.85 rooks on 1st March. Very dependent on weather conditions, the rookery can often be unoccupied for days after nest building has commenced. By 12th March, the rookery was estimated to hold 35+ nests.

Five year review: the rookery has been estimated to hold between 30 and 50 nests during the last five years, but is generally considered to be diminishing in size.

Carrion crow

Status: resident.

1998: the PBBS suggests that four probable pairs were present, but only one pair was confirmed. There were 20 other birds which appeared to be using the reserve for feeding. Outside the survey area, at least one other pair was regularly seen around Island Pit and Farm Pit. A total of six pairs would seem a reasonable estimate.

Five year review: since 1994, it is considered that the Pits complex has held three to four pairs. No specific change in status has been noted.

Starling

Status: resident and numerous winter visitor. Trees in the village and Heronry South are used as a pre-roost area.

1998: two pairs were confirmed, with 14 other birds present, by the PBBS. This is certainly an understatement of the true position, since about 10 pairs produced two broods in the Sailing Clubhouse. The Pump House and nearby farms also held breeding pairs. Large numbers of young birds appeared in village gardens during the late summer, suggesting a successful breeding season.

Five year review: nationally, the starling appears to be declining and certainly the winter gatherings in Paxton are attended by fewer birds these days. Birds nest around the works buildings and in holes in trees around the reserve. The breeding status of this species has

never been clarified, though as a garden bird, some report that it is in decline.

House sparrow

Status: resident and wandering winter visitor in small flocks. Now in considerable decline nationally.

1998: found mainly in hedges adjacent to gardens, the only confirmed breeding away from village gardens was at the western end of the Sailing Lake.

Five year review: remains a common bird, which continues to dominate village garden-feeders, but is increasingly scarce within the nature reserve. Owing to its familiarity, no records are ever submitted.

Chaffinch

Status: resident.

1998: the only proper count was made during the PBBS, when 28 probable pairs, one confirmed and three other birds were recorded. In the woodland to the north of the Sailing Lake, a pair of chaffinches was found every 25 metres.

Five year review: in 1996, we commented on a massive increase locally, with 40 singing



males recorded around the Heronry Trail alone. Chaffinches would also seem to have increased in local gardens, regularly visiting feeders and birdtables. Whether this increase was maintained in 1997 is unknown.

Greenfinch

Status: resident and common throughout the year at garden feeders.

1998: the only information comes from the PBBS, which counted 12 probable pairs and 22 other birds. Given that it is a regular garden breeder in the village, the true number of this species must be far higher. Seemingly another species which is overlooked or ignored.

Five year review: the 1996 and '97 reports suggest that greenfinches may be increasing locally. Is this really correct?

Goldfinch

Status: resident.

1998: the goldfinch was not recorded in the PBBS and so, despite there being many sightings (including juveniles) on the reserve during the breeding season, can we presume that these are all visiting birds from neighbouring areas?

Five year review: perhaps increasing locally, based on an increased number of sightings around village gardens.

Linnet

Status: resident (and winter visitor?)

1998: only four probable pairs recorded by the PBBS, no doubt because most breed outside the Survey recording area. Details of breeding records from the village in 1998 would be welcomed.

Five year review: linnets appear to have recovered their breeding numbers after some lean years, they are reported regularly because they breed within sight and sound of the Visitor Centre. A typical scrub species, occurring during the breeding season north to Pumphouse Pit, where linnets can be seen feeding at most times of the year. Has bred in village gardens.

Bullfinch

Status: resident.

1998: the PBBS confirmed two breeding pairs, six probable pairs and 13 other birds, with most records from the Sanctuary area, Concrete road and from the hedgerow around the Meadow and Hayling Pit.

Five year review: few confirmed breeding records. Despite this, the overall view of regular observers is that there has been a steady increase in the bullfinch population at Paxton. There is no information about whether bullfinches breed in village gardens, though they are regularly seen feeding on fruit tree buds.

Yellowhammer

Status: resident.

1998: the year started well, with a winter roost of c.40 birds on 1st February (Laurence Rose), but there is no way of knowing whether any of these breed locally. Most yellowhammer territories lie outside the PBBS area and thus only two probable pairs were located. The stronghold is in a rarely visited area of private land in the northern part of the Pits complex. Birds are regularly seen feeding in small groups on neighbouring farmland.

Five year review: in 1994, it was estimated that the entire Pits complex contained no more than five breeding pairs. By 1997, this estimate had increased to c.10 pairs. Whether this is a real increase or simply a reflection of increased reporting as the species has become nationally scarcer is unknown. Nevertheless, this is just a small fraction of the population in the 1960s.

Reed bunting

Status: resident.

1998: the PBBS found nine probable pairs and six other individuals. Reed buntings were also noted in the breeding season around Pumphouse Pit, the new workings and the A1 Pits. Given limited knowledge, it would be reasonable to presume that c.20 pairs breed around the reserve.

Five year review: the estimate of c.40 breeding pairs in 1996 would now seem to have been excessive, if more recent records are typical. The consensus is that there has been a

slow decline in the number of breeding pairs, but since there are so few reports, it is difficult to judge.

Corn bunting

Status: resident.

1998: none were found by the PBBS. Occasional reports of individual singing males were received from around the A1 Pits, west of the new workings and the northwest corner of Pumphouse Pit. On the basis of these, it would seem that Paxton is just holding on to two or three pairs. Who can forecast what the future is for the once-common 'fat bird of the barley' on Britain's farmland?

Five year review: since a record of 40 birds near Pumphouse Pit in April 1995, there has been no information on non-breeding flocks. Since 1994, only scattered records suggest that no more than two or three pairs nest annually - just enough to maintain its status as a local breeding bird. Nationally, an almost 80% decline is blamed on a lack of winter food.