

BirdAid Report 2018

The winter of 2017/18 turned out to be one of the worst since BirdAid started over 15 years ago, with more snowfalls over the winter into spring than we have seen for many years. The effort involved in feeding birds was daunting for all and particularly for older members of the team! Thanks to all the dedication and perseverance of everyone a good many birds survived.

Funding continues from two key donors (for which we are extremely grateful) and Ditchley Estate support four local sites by providing two tonnes of tailings (left over seed and small grain); enabling the scheme to be of great benefit to large numbers of yellowhammers and other farmland birds. In addition to the above the Ditchley Estate continues wild bird feeding on at least six sites throughout the year on the Estate. Also more feeders have been set up containing mixed grains. However due to various factors numbers of birds were again considerably lower this winter.

The bird surveys at Honeydale Farm and Over Norton Farm (see Wychwood Project BirdAid site for details) has established the importance of continuous supplementary feeding well into the spring. Large numbers of farmland seed-eating birds were supported on these farms particularly yellowhammers, chaffinches, skylarks, linnets, bramblings and reed buntings. This is in contrast to other farms, both locally and in the wider context, as bird numbers at both farms remained relatively high into the mid-spring period.

However tree sparrows at Walk Farm and Over Norton have crashed and recent surveys have established that they have possibly disappeared. The cause of this decline is not understood. In view of this all summer feeding at Walk Farm has stopped. Yellowhammer numbers have declined on some sites however a newly established site at **Stonesfield** is regularly feeding targeted farmland birds such as yellowhammer, linnet and skylark including a small flock of corn bunting. Linnets, reed buntings and goldfinches all continue to do well. Bramblings were down in numbers generally. **Charlbury's Broadstones** had a very difficult season again possibly due to density of the grass sward and an abundance of pheasants. It has been decided to try moving the feeding station to a trackway nearby.

The site at **Taston** continues to attract more farmland birds with flocks of over 20 yellowhammers and 20 linnets counted. **Ash Cottage**, Hailey has had fewer yellowhammers this winter. **The Paddocks**, Crawley had a good winter attracting a wide range of farmland and water birds and there was a possible sighting of 10 tree sparrows. **Salford** continues to attract a good range of species and in spring has a number of yellowhammers singing. **Glyme Farm** had up to 30 skylarks on winter stubble and 20/30 yellowhammers in the chicken run.

I would like to thank all those volunteers who recorded birds on various sites. More volunteers are always welcome. Please contact me on 07833586283.

Summary of the feeding stations:

Over Norton, Glyme Farm Chipping Norton, **Honeydale Farm** Shipton-under-Wychwood, **Ditchley Estate**, Charlbury **Broadstones and Quarry**, Middle Farm Taston, The Paddocks and Bridge Cottage Hailey, Salford and Stonesfield.

Louise Spicer July 2018