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**UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL
PRECINCT, STOKE BISHOP, CLIFTON HILL**

BIDIVERSITY MONITORING 2015:

BIRDS

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INTRODUCTION

This report describes the findings of breeding bird surveys carried out around University of Bristol landholdings in three areas of Bristol. These were the second of an annual series of surveys and comparison with the results of the 2014 surveys has been possible. Birds are suitable for monitoring because the large amount of information available nationally has allowed species that remain relatively widespread but have suffered significant population declines to be identified and included on amber and red lists of conservation concern. Their position high up the food chain means that they act as indicators of overall environmental quality.

METHODS

The survey method used was the same as that employed in 2014: it was based on the British Trust for Ornithology's (BTO) Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) technique. A transect passing through a representative range of habitat types in each area was identified and walked, with each walk starting within two hours of sunrise. All birds seen and heard were recorded. Overflying birds were not recorded, unless they were feeding over the area or were judged to have taken off from or intending to land in the area. This is particularly significant in relation to gulls, which often were seen overflying: only birds landing on buildings were recorded.

In addition, the same route was walked between 11-00am and 2-00pm in order to record swifts, which may not be present in the early morning.

RESULTS

The following species were recorded:

Precinct

	2014 (maximum count)	15/5/15	30/5/15
Blackbird	8	7	5
Blackcap		1	1
Blue tit	1	9	4
Carrion crow	3		1
Chiffchaff		1	
Dunnock	5	4	4
Feral pigeon	6		
Goldcrest	1		
Goldfinch	3	3	2
Great tit	4	2	3
Herring gull	7	2	5
Lesser black-backed gull	18	9	17
Magpie	3	1	
Mallard		1	
Robin	9	8	7
Swift			2
Wood pigeon	3	6	4
Wren	3	4	4

BAP species are marked in bold; red list species in red; and amber list species in amber.

Stoke Bishop

	2014 (maximum count)	29/4/15	16/5/15
Blackbird	17	11	11
Blackcap	4	3	1
Blue tit	9	7	9
Bullfinch	2		1
Carrion crow	3	4	2
Chaffinch	2		3
Chiffchaff	1	3	1
Coal tit	1	2	2
Dunnock	3	5	2
Goldcrest	4	5	1
Goldfinch	2	1	4
Great spotted woodpecker	2	1	
Great tit	5	3	6
Greenfinch	2	2	
Green woodpecker	2	1	3
Herring gull	2	1	1
Jackdaw	3		2
Jay	2	3	
Lesser black-backed gull		1	1
Long-tailed tit	6	3	4
Magpie	6	2	4
Mistle thrush	1	2	
Nuthatch	2	2	2
Robin	11	9	13
Song thrush	4	3	1
Starling	19		8
Swift	2		1
Treecreeper		1	
Wood pigeon	25	27	13
Wren	13	10	9

BAP species are marked in bold; red list species in red; and amber list species in amber.

Clifton Hill

	2014 (maximum count)	30/4/15	17/5/15
Blackbird	9	4	7
Blackcap	1	1	
Blue tit	5	6	6
Carrion crow	1	1	2
Collared dove		3	
Dunnock	2	2	2
Goldcrest	1		
Goldfinch	2	1	2
Great tit	4	3	5
Herring gull		2	
Lesser black-backed gull		1	
Magpie	1		
Robin	6	5	6
Song thrush		1	1
Swift	3		2
Wood pigeon	3	6	4
Wren	5	4	4

BAP species are marked in bold; red list species in red; and amber list species in amber.

Discussion

The 2015 survey showed that the bird populations of the three areas remained broadly similar to those detected in 2014, both in terms of species diversity and population sizes.

The following species of conservation concern were recorded, with the maximum count for each area in each year shown:

	Precinct		Stoke Bishop		Clifton Hill	
	2014	2015	2014	2015	2014	2015
BAP Species						
Dunnock	5	4	3	5	2	2
Herring gull	7	5	2	1		2
Bullfinch			2	1		
Song thrush			4	3		1
Starling			19	8		
Amber List Species						
Lesser black-backed gull	18	17		1		
Green woodpecker			1	3		
Mistle thrush			1	2		
Swift		2	2	1	3	2

None of the species whose absence was noted in the 2014 report – house sparrow, spotted flycatcher, willow warbler and house martin – were recorded in 2015. As

noted in the earlier report, the possibility remains that house sparrow and house martin might recolonise any of the sites.

There was an apparent and very small increase in the swift population. However, the good state of maintenance of University buildings means that either modifications to lofts or provision of nest boxes would be required to achieve significant increases. This remains one of the easier methods by which biodiversity gains could be achieved.

The changes in the populations of other species are within the normal levels of fluctuation that can be expected in any breeding bird survey. There has been apparent large decline in the number of starlings at Stoke Bishop. However, the 2014 maximum was the result of the presence of a single post-breeding flock. No comparable flock was recorded in 2015 but such parties are highly mobile and this is not of any significance.

Amongst the other species the record of treecreeper at Stoke Bishop is of some interest. As a woodland species this is generally scarce in Bristol and it joins a population of other species of woodland and parkland – green and great spotted woodpecker, nuthatch and jay – at this site.

The most numerous species of conservation concern at the Precinct are herring and lesser black-backed gulls, which may come as a surprise to those dealing with their increasing urban populations. However, the much larger coastal populations are declining rapidly. In the case of herring gull, the British population declined by 48% from 1969 to 1988, a further 13% from 1988 to 2002 and another 33% from 2000 to 2011. The higher population levels of earlier years were in large part the result of artificial features such as uncontrolled refuse sites, and historic populations were lower. Both large gulls are, however, species in rapid decline. It is understood that control will be required in some situations but the birds should be tolerated where possible.

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