

Chapter (non-refereed)

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THE FAUNA OF BEDFORD PURLIEUS

R.C. Welch

The fauna of Bedford Purlieus is less well known than the flora. Very few groups of animals have been studied in the wood and of these most have received fairly limited attention. Published records appear to be non-existent and such information so far discovered is in the form of personal collections and notes, a number of which have kindly been made available to me.

AMPHIBIA, REPTILIA & MAMMALIA

All three British species of newt have been recorded in the wood. The colony of Palmate Newt in the static water tank in C 46D is the only known present day locality in Vice County 32 (Northamptonshire & Soke of Peterborough). There are no records of Common toad or frog. Four species of reptile are recorded, Adder, Grass snake, Common lizard and Slow-worm. Bedford Purlieus is one of the few remaining known localities, in this area, for the adder although it has also been observed at Wakerley Wood in recent years. When the western half of the wood was cleared in the mid-nineteenth century newts and snakes were found under roots of trees.

The largest, if not the most frequently seen, mammals in the wood are the Fallow deer. A small herd frequents every compartment in the wood and their tracks often provide the only easy access to some of the denser scrubby areas. An annual cull maintains the population at about twenty individuals which move between many of the small woodlands in the district. There are reports of recent sightings of Chinese muntjac and there is a mid-eighteenth century record of Red deer being introduced into the wood.

Other mammals recorded include Fox, Badger, Stoat, Weasel, Brown rat, Grey squirrel, Brown hare, Rabbit, Mole, Wood mouse, Bank and Field Voles. Most of these are regarded as vermin by gamekeepers and they have been subject to a variety of control measures. The Grey squirrel is a serious pest in young plantations and is rigorously controlled. The remaining predatory species threaten only the pheasant rearing activities of the shooting syndicate. There appear to be no recent records of any shrews, bats or hedgehog, although this probably only reflects the fact that nobody has specifically looked for them. Dormouse and Hedgehog were both recorded during the nineteenth century clearance, and the former species is still present at other sites in Rockingham Forest.

AVES

I am indebted to past and present wardens of Castor Hanglands National Nature Reserve for bird records. R.V. Collier recorded 71 species in the period 1961-69, of which 49 were known to be breeding in the wood. J. Robinson has provided the following notes on observations made during 1972-74.

Of the predatory birds there is one record of a Sparrow hawk whilst Kestrels occur generally in the area, mainly on the outskirts of the wood. Little Owls frequent the wood's western boundary and make use of the adjacent farmland. There are possibly two or three pairs of Tawny owls resident although the lack of large trees with suitable nesting cavities is similar to conditions prevailing at Castor Hanglands. Tawny owls will nest on old pigeon nests etc., but prefer holes. Nest boxes can be used and seven pairs have nested in a relatively small area at Castor. However, it appears that Tawny owls are dominant over Long-eared owls which now no longer nest at Castor. It is of interest to note that a Long-eared owl's nest was found for the first time in 1974 in pines in C 40A. One live and one dead fledgeling were seen on the ground beneath the nest in early May.

All three Woodpeckers occur in the wood with the Great-spotted, breeding in birch, being the most numerous. Green woodpeckers were recorded nesting in oak and birch in 1973. Their apparent decline in numbers is thought probably to be due to the reduction in suitable grassland feeding sites, although the wood ants provide an additional specialised food source for this species.

Nightingale numbers are decreasing, as at Castor. Although coppice is their frequently quoted ideal habitat, at these two sites they show a preference for nesting in areas of old scrub which have accumulations of dead material around the base. Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Bullfinch and Goldfinch are common and Lesser redpolls were more abundant during 1974, although this reflects a general trend. Blackcap, Whitethroat, Lesser whitethroat and Garden warbler are all present in fair numbers but the lack of suitable understory in most areas appears to be causing a local decline in numbers. On the other hand ideal conditions exist to suit the feeding and breeding requirements of the Woodcock.

The domestic hen has also been introduced into Bedford Purlieus in the small pens used for rearing pheasants for the shooting syndicate.

BIRDS RECORDED FROM BEDFORD PURLIEUS SINCE 1961.

+ indicates breeding confirmed

ANSERIFORMES

ANATIDAE

+ Anas platyrhynchos L. MallardFALCONIFORMES

ACCIPITRIDAE

Accipiter nisus (L.) Sparrowhawk

FALCONIDAE

Falco tinnunculus L. KestrelGALLIFORMES

PHASIANIDAE

+ Alectoris rufa (L.) Red-legged partridge+ Perdix perdix (L.) Partridge+ Phasianus colchicus L. PheasantGRUIFORMES

RALLIDAE

+ Gallinula chloropus (L.) MoorhenCHARADRIIFORMES

CHARADRIIDAE

Vanellus vanellus (L.) Lapwing

SCOLOPACIDAE

Gallinago gallinago (L.) Snipe+ Scolopax rusticola L. WoodcockCOLUMBIFORMES

COLUMBIDAE

+ Columba oenas L. Stock dove+ C. palumbus L. Wood pigeon+ Streptopelia turtur (L.) Turtle doveCUCULIFORMES

CUCULIDAE

+ Cuculus canorus L. CuckooSTRIGIFORMES

STRIGIDAE

Athene noctua (Scopoli) Little owl+ Strix aluco L. Tawny owl+ Asio otis (L.) Long-eared owl

PICIFORMES

PICIDAE

- + Picus viridis L. Green woodpecker
- + Dendrocopus major (L.) Great-spotted woodpecker
- D. minor (L.) Lesser-spotted woodpecker

PASSERIFORMES

ALAUDIDAE

Alauda arvensis L. Skylark

HIRUNDINIDAE

- + Hirundo rustica L. Swallow
- Delichon urbica (L.) House martin
- Riparia riparia (L.) Sand martin

CORVIDAE

- Corvus corone L. Carrion crow
- C. frugilegus L. Rook
- + C. monedula L. Jackdaw
- Pica pica (L.) Magpie
- + Garrulus glandarius (L.) Jay

PARIDAE

- + Parus major L. Great tit
- + P. caeruleus L. Blue tit
- P. ater L. Coal tit
- + P. palustris L. Marsh tit
- + P. montanus von Baldenstein Willow tit

AEGITHALIDAE

- + Aegithalos caudatus (L.) Long tailed tit

CERTHIIDAE

- + Certhia familiaris L. Treecreeper

TROGLODYTIDAE

- + Troglodytes troglodytes (L.) Wren

TURDIDAE

- + Turdus viscivorus L. Mistle thrush
- T. pilaris L. Fieldfare
- + T. philomelos Brehm Song thrush
- T. iliacus L. Redwing
- + T. merula L. Blackbird
- Phoenicurus phoenicurus (L.) Redstart
- + Luscinia megarhynchos Brehm Nightingale
- + Erithacus rubecula (L.) Robin

SYLVIIDAE

- + Locustella naevia (Boddaert) Grasshopper warbler
- + Acrocephalus schoenobaenus (L.) Sedge warbler
- + Silvia atricapilla (L.) Blackcap
- + S. borin (Goddaert) Garden warbler
- + S. communis Latham Whitethroat
- + S. curruca (L.) Lesser whitethroat
- + Phylloscopus trochillus (L.) Willow warbler
- + P. collybita (Vieillot) Chiffchaff
- + P. sibilatrix (Bechstein) Wood warbler

REGULIDAE

- + Regulus regulus (L.) Goldcrest

MUSCICAPIDAE

- + Muscicapa striata (Pallas) Spotted flycatcher

PRUNELLIDAE

- + Prunella modularis (L.) Dunnock

MOTACILLIDAE

- + Anthus trivialis (L.) Tree pipet
- + Motocilla alba L. Pied wagtail

STURNIDAE

- + Sturnus vulgaris L. Starling

FRINGILLIDAE

- + Coccothraustes coccothraustes (L.) Hawfinch
- + Carduelis chloris (L.) Greenfinch
- + C. carduelis (L.) Goldfinch
- + Acanthis cannabina (L.) Linnet
- + A. flammea (L.) Redpoll
- + Pyrrhula pyrrhula (L.) Bullfinch
- + Fringilla coelebs L. Chaffinch
- + F. montifringilla L. Brambling

IMBERIZIDAE

- + Emberiza citrinella L. Yellow hammer
- + E. schoeniclus (L.) Reed bunting

PLOCEIDAE

- + Passer domesticus (L.) House sparrow
- + P. montanus (L.) Tree sparrow