

Breeding birds – a mixed picture

Jan Wilczur and Richard Gray report



Like the curate's egg, nesting and breeding in the Park last summer was good in parts, with worrying disappointments but some surprising successes.

Despite a national decline in numbers of 75% over the last 40 years, skylark nesting territories were the highest recorded in the Park since 2009. Excellent early summer weather and efforts to alert visitors and dog owners to sensitive nesting sites may have turned the tide, although the number of successful

fledglings is not known. Hopefully, we'll hear Shelley's "blithe spirit" singing over the Park's grasslands for years to come.

Raptors also fared well: two hobbies fledged in mid-September, up to 18 young kestrels fledged and there was a notable first with common buzzards nesting and at least one young buzzard heard.

Sand martins were another significant first; a pair raising two young in the artificial nesting bank, installed in 2011. Stonechats, once extinct in the Park, saw 17 young in six broods, the best breeding season since at least 2000.



A major concern for the Park's Bird Group has been continuing poor breeding by water birds, particularly around Pen Ponds. Jan Wilczur's bird breeding bulletin noted:

- Mute swan: two young surviving from seven
- Greylag goose: two young, disappeared
- Mandarin duck: one fledged
- Mallard: one survived
- Pochard: no evidence of breeding
- Tufted duck: one young survived from 18
- Great crested grebe: failed to breed
- Moorhen: one fledged from 10 pairs
- Coot: one fledged from 10 pairs

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