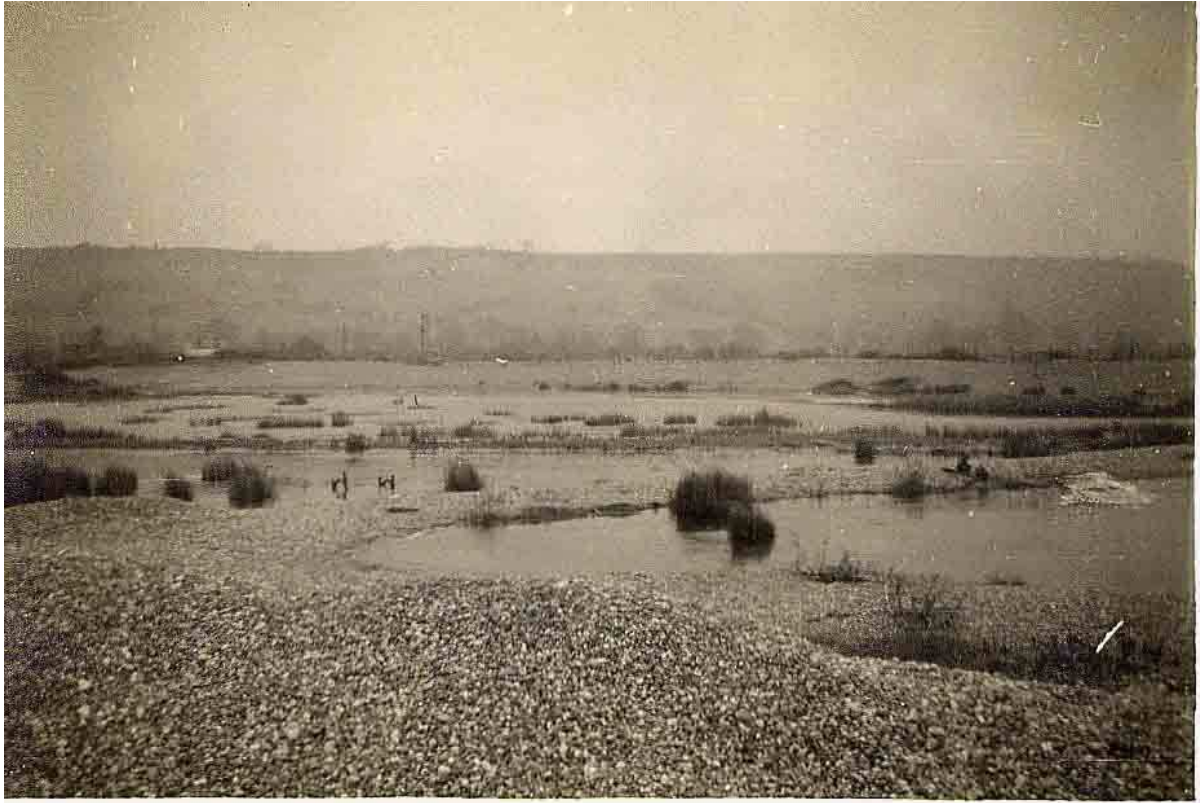


THE BIRDS OF PALMARSH GRAVEL PIT

R. K. Norman



The old pit in 1951



The gravel pit in 1998

AN ACCOUNT OF INTERMITTENT VISITS TO PALMARSH GRAVEL PIT 1950 – 2000

On April 1st, 2001, the management of Nickoll's Quarries Ltd created a new leisure club at their gravel pit at West Hythe (Palmarsh). Instead of the organisations using the water – angling, sailing and windsurfing – paying one set fee for all their members, from that date all individuals, regardless of interest, would be required to apply to join and pay an annual subscription to the new club. Also in 2001, Shepway Council announced proposals to build a number of houses and industrial units on part of the Nickoll's site.

These two situations do not sit happily together and although it may take several years for the second of them to be realised, it does seem appropriate now to present an account, if somewhat disjointed, of birdwatching at the quarry site from 1950 to the end of 2000. Additional notes for the years 2001 – 2006 are also given.

DESCRIPTION, HISTORY AND SITUATION

The whole site covers c. 57 hectares and is bounded (in rough directions) by the A259 to the south; Botolph's Bridge road to the west; Southern Water treatment plant and the Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch railway to the north and the back gardens of Palmarsh Crescent to the east. At the present time the water area covers 22 hectares and apart from the works area much of the rest is backfill, mostly grassed over. The only part of the site still used under lease by a local farmer is on the extreme western side, between the pit and the Botolph's bridge road. That road is separated from the site by a mature hedge of Willow, Hawthorn, Blackthorn, Alder, Elder and Bramble.



Palmarsh Gravel Pit in 1998 - looking south-west across the site towards Dungeness

A double row of trees, predominantly White Poplar with a few Alder, Jack and Monterey Pines, runs from the works entrance parallel to the A259 to the Garage and Filling Station at the south-east 'corner' of the site and a low hedge runs the other way to the south-west 'corner'. There is vehicular access for members adjacent to the filling station, down the eastern side (which is also a public right of way) and along part of the north side to a parking area. The pit edge which holds a scattering of Willows has been fenced off from the right of way and large double gates on the northeast 'corner' prevent all but club members, provided with the appropriate keys, from gaining access to the rest of the area. Patches of reeds grow along undisturbed edges but are affected by changes to the infilling routine in those parts close to the works. At the works itself, the lagoon into which the laden dredging boat arrives to discharge the shingle, holds the only sizeable reed-bed in the whole site. There is one small flat 'islet' and two larger and more rugged 'islands'.

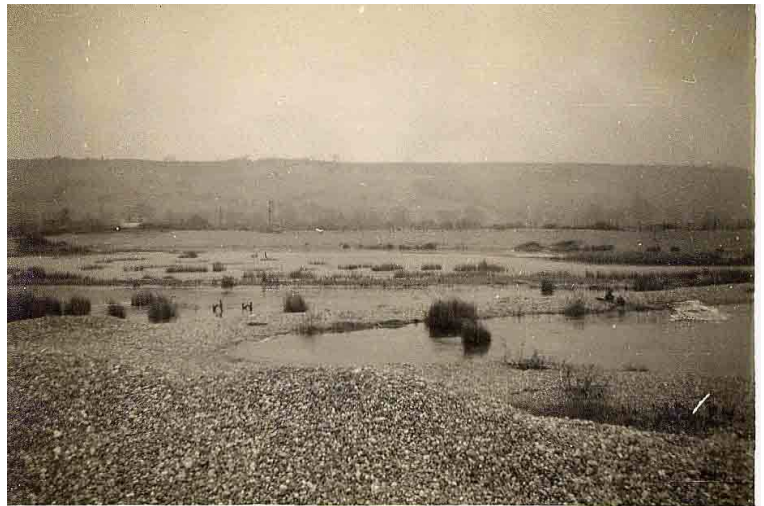
This is a very different scene to the one I was introduced to at the end of 1949. Then there were two small pits, one roughly narrowly triangular in shape and approximately 370 metres by 200 metres at its widest, reached from behind, i.e. to the north of Norrington's garage as it was then, almost to the railway line and, as it was abandoned in 1939, was known as the old pit; the other roughly oval in shape was immediately east of the works reaching to the edge of the tiny 'Beach Bank' caravan site, and could in part be overlooked from the A259, and was called, not surprisingly, the new pit. Apart from some reeds, which extended over the years, on one side, it was an open water area with sand and shingle edges.

By contrast, much of the old pit was a series of shallow pools intersected by shingle 'causeways' on some of which grew some stunted Hawthorn, bramble and other vegetation. Reeds grew mainly in the narrower southern end and extensively along the eastern edge of the largest patch of water which comprised about one third of the total pit area. A few scattered Hawthorns grew on banks of the north and west side of the pit and some spindly Elder were situated at the southern tip. The ground sloped quite steeply up from the railway fence to the edge of the pit allowing to some extent an unseen approach from the north.

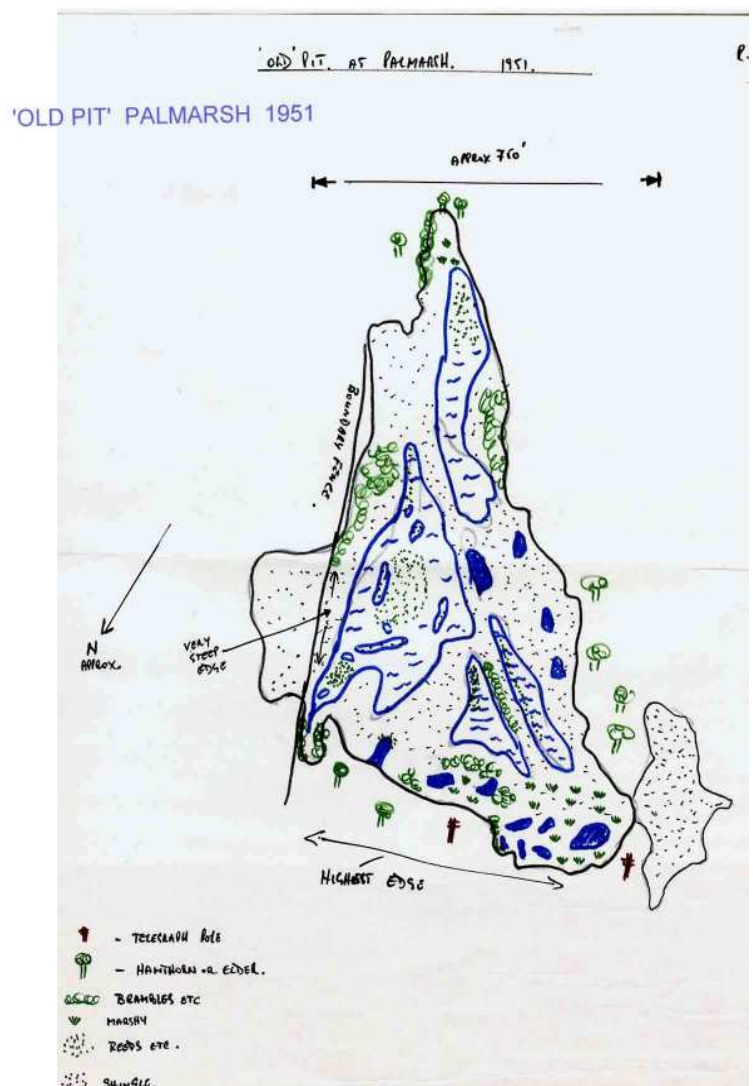
The combined area of these two pits was just 10 hectares, the rest of the area was grassed, that to the west and north of the works being fenced off as small fields and leased to local farmers who in part, grazed sheep there at least in the early years. One narrow field immediately west of the works was ungrazed and was almost like a water meadow and part of another, bordering the sewage works (now the Southern Water treatment plant), was avoided by the sheep being covered by long coarse grass and rush.

Although the term should have applied to the whole site, it was only that part between the two pits which was still known to locals as the 'aerodrome'. It had been used in 1917-18 as an Air Gunnery school by the then Royal Flying Corps which was to become the Royal Air Force. Chocks for aircraft wheels have been found during gravel extraction and also timber used for ancient waterside staging and parts of Roman amphorae show that the site had a much earlier and varied history.

In 1954 a channel was cut from the new to the old pit which was then reworked, much of it being dug out by the end of 1957, though not completely until 1960 when expansion, initially to the west, took place and eventually covered most of the part known as the 'aerodrome'.



The 'old pit' at Palmarsh in 1952. Looking roughly northwards towards the greensand escarpment known as the 'Roughs'



Sketch map of the 'old pit' at Palmarsh in 1951

The grazing land west of the works was drained, new dykes deepened and a new dyke cut during the autumn of 1981; between then and 1984 a channel was cut southward from the works and shingle was extracted to form an oval shaped pit close to the A259 boundary. This pit was then left for 7 or 8 years allowing reeds to grow and providing quiet habitat for e.g. nesting Little Grebe, some winter ducks and various passage migrants.

My interest in birds started in what was then the normal boyhood activity of egg-collecting, a hobby which could only be pursued for a few months each year. However, the egg was the absolute proof that bird and or nest had been seen and it took a long time to accept, following my 'conversion' at a lecture by RSPB bird artist Roland Green, that entries in a notebook would equate with the possession of an egg.

PERSONAL CONNECTION

A chance meeting with a bird-watcher from Saltwood in 1949, in which year I also acquired my first bicycle, led to my introduction to the old pit. He was, I seem to recall, in the Royal Air Force at that time and therefore (as indeed I was in later years) not regularly in the area. Pocket diaries which would most probably have revealed his name and the duration of our contact, were lost in the early 1960's. I am sure that he could have provided invaluable information from the late 1940's.

Employment ambitions took me to the South London area in autumn 1950 but I returned after a few months. I remained in Hythe until September 1952 when instead of the obligatory National Service, I opted to serve in the R.A.F. for five years, half of which was spent on camps in the Middle East. I returned in March 1956 and at the end of my period of service in September 1957, I once again resided in Hythe, my parental home. Due to both redundancy and a failure to find other suitable employment, I re-enlisted for a further 5 years in the following May. Before this second period of service was completed, my surviving parent died and the family home was sold. I moved to London shortly after leaving the service in May 1963, staying for two years and in that time meeting the person who was to become my wife, and getting married. I decided to settle in Lincolnshire where I had been stationed for three years, moving there in July 1965. Family holidays to this area (in 1968, '83, '84, '86 and 1989) until my permanent return in 1990, were the source of a few more visits to the pit.

I had only two contemporaries, Eric Pilcher and Brian Uden, who either visited the pit with me or on their own and the latter, who had from a tender age accompanied his father on shooting excursions on local farmland, had fully adopted that pursuit by the time I returned in 1956 from a two and half year 'tour' in the Middle East with the R.A.F.; Eric was involved in higher education out of the county. Two other younger lads had, however, started to take an intermittent interest. There were two or three older, 'established' birdwatchers, particularly W.S. Nevin and G.R. Shannon, living in Hythe with whom we had contact and who occasionally watched the pits, sometimes with us, though mostly as a response to an alert by one of us regarding a particular wader or grebe.

Undoubtedly the attraction of watching a gravel pit is primarily to see waterbirds and waders and this was fixed firmly in our minds and as such in our novice state we may not have always recorded other species or at least not too diligently. There was not the intensity which prevails today and only a fraction of the number of people interested, no field-guides until 1954 (and that by today's standards was poor) nor tripod-mounted 'scopes. I am not mentioning these either as an excuse for not including more species in the following pages or as a 'poor us' story but merely to show that there was a disadvantage in not always being able to see birds well or to identify them easily.

Memory, as they say, plays tricks, and it did seem, looking back, that I (we) were always there but that was not, in fact, the case. And there were many and extensive gaps in cover due not only to service in the armed forces or education, but also to attractions elsewhere in the Palmarsh area such as the Little Tern colony on Hythe Rifle ranges or in places further afield such as Dungeness where there was much activity and excitement when the observatory was established in 1952; the Midrips and Wicks on Lydd Ranges; Rye Harbour, where there were still Kentish Plovers; and Pett Level. Hythe ranges were not fenced off as they are today and there was far less firing so access was easy when the red flags were down.

The number of personal visits each year in the 1950's as recorded in my field notebooks is listed below, the average being 35. Other visits may have occurred in the first three years and been noted in pocket diaries which unfortunately were all lost during the late 1960's (I was a complete novice at keeping a field notebook in 1950 and did not always adhere to the discipline). Changing personal circumstances and a move to London in 1963 then Lincolnshire in July 1965 meant that only 32 visits took place in the 1960's.

1950	5	1951	25	1952	12	1953	9	Sept 53 – Mar '56	Abroad
1956	12	1957	86	1958	81	1959	13	1960	18
1961	8	1962	3	1963	0	1964	1	1965	2

By contrast, personal visits in the 1990's totalled considerably more and increased each year to 1995, but varied widely after that. From July 1991 the pit was on my route to my place of employment, so at least, when there was sufficient daylight I was able to call in, if only for 10-20 minutes on weekdays. A major change in duties and circumstances at my place of work resulted in less time available for early morning visits and this is reflected in the figures for 1997 and 1998. The improvement in 1999 was as a result of my retirement in June of that year. Visits of longer duration, of course, were made on one or other day of the week-end – one to three hours. The number of personal visits are as follows:

1990	13	1991	57	1992	73	1993	108	1994	148		
1995	190	1996	131	1997	97	1998	84	1999	115	2000	132

The average in these years was 113. The number of visits may not, of course, bear any relation to the number of hours spent at the site. Indeed, I spent more hours there in 2000 than in 1995.

OTHER OBSERVERS

Dave Weaver watched from 1978 to 1984, in which year Sue and Chris Phillpott came to live close by and although they did not keep detailed records, they provided much useful information for the period to 1989. Both Pat Miller and Peter Wells added excellent material for some years between 1979 and 1990. During the 1990's Ian Roberts was a regular observer, even more so from 1997 when he moved to live in Hythe. Dale Gibson also visited occasionally and Perry Haines started watching in July 2000. Examination of the archive records for the years 1963 to 1989 produced several useful records but specific location for some species was often too vague and although it was possible to contact some of the observers concerned others, sadly, have passed away.

SPECIES RECORDS

Given not only that the site has changed so much over the years but that watching was mostly confined to the two small pits, it is obviously not possible to make direct comparisons especially for passerines and near-passerines and even figures for some waterbirds (Garganey comes to mind) might differ had the 'aerodrome' dykes been regularly checked. However, I have used whatever data is applicable to the whole site regardless of the lack of cover of some of it in the early years.

I do not have yearly totals for all of the early years but for two of them – 1952 and 1957 – they were 69 and 75 respectively. An overall total of 124 species was recorded between 1950 and 1965, a figure which has been exceeded in a single year in the 1990's when the average was 121 and the highest 133. From 1990 to 2000 the number of 'true' species seen was 182, another nine were 'escape' or 'feral'. Only six species remained 'unique' to the early years – Eider, Common & Velvet Scoter, Montagu's Harrier, Corncrake and Red-backed Shrike.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Apart from those persons already mentioned, Geoff Manser and Geoffrey Munns provided records in the earlier years. I am grateful to the management of Nickoll's Quarries Ltd for giving me permission to watch at the site and am indebted to the workmen, particularly the foreman, at the works; to Derek Weller the bailiff, and to numerous anglers over the years who have alerted me to the presence or behaviour of certain species.

SIGNIFICANT ADDITIONAL NOTES FROM 2001 - 2006

Significant additional records from 2001 to 2006 have also been included in the report.

The increase in wader records during this period is due to attractive habitat created on the extreme west side of the pit complex in 1999 – a shallow area known to us as the 'shingle shallows' (see photo). This was backfilled during 2004, no longer existing from late August. The backfilling caused much disturbance to all of the west bay.

Increase in passerine records is due to regular attention being paid to the hedge bordering the boundary with the Botolph's Bridge Road and referred to as the 'west hedge'.

All extraction operations ceased in 2004 and the land put up for sale. Anglers were allowed to fish from all around the water except for adjacent to the works site. The north field was covered in Ragwort from 2003, becoming unattractive to winter Skylark, Meadow Pipit and Song Thrush. The west field was sown with crops until 2006 when windblown rape, Ragwort and other plants flourished unchecked.

The number of visits and species for these years are:

Year	Visits	Species
2001	169	133
2002	146	143
2003	145	133
2004	110	125
2005	65	103
2006	66	118



The 'shingle shallows' - an attractive area for waders in 2001 to 2004, but has now been backfilled.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>
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During the early 1950's, oiled birds were seen regularly from January to March in the new pit. There were up to 5 in 1951 but only singles in the following two years. In 1957, one was present through January, one 'recently dead' on 28 February and one on 27 December. There were three in both pits mid-January 1958, and one on 30 December 1959. Noted as infrequent visitor in the 1980s by R and S Phillpott.

Recorded in five years of 1990s. With the exception of 1996, 1 – 2 were seen on a total of 10 dates from late December to mid-March. In 1996, a single bird was present on 9, 10, and 17 February and seen regularly 18 March to 4 April.

2001-2006: One present from early January to end March 2001 and another on 2 December 2006.

Black-throated Diver	<i>Gavia arctica</i>
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Two records in all: single birds on 12 January 1958 and 6 January 1995.

Great Northern Diver	<i>Gavia immer</i>
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A single bird seen by Steve Hollands in the west pool on 26 December 1992 is the only dated record, but Peter Wells recalls a bird being present for two weeks in winter 1986 or 1987.

Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
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A pair bred in the old pit 1950 – 1952 and probably to 1960 as birds were seen in late spring 1958 and also in the new pit – 2 pairs – where a large patch of reeds had developed by that year; and a juvenile was seen there in June 1959. Breeding most likely continued in subsequent years and a juvenile on 25 August 1963 suggests that though D. Weaver made no reference except to winter birds 1978 – 83. Pat Miller saw nests or pairs with young 1988 – 90 (probably two in the first year) in the west pool, the quietest part of the pit complex, and breeding may have continued there to 1996 when the pool was reworked.

Not recorded in winter in the early years and the only autumn records were of five in October/November 1957 and 1960 and four present 28 September to 5 October 1958. D. Weaver noted 2 – 5 birds December – February in the early 1980's. In the 1990's, dates from which seen regularly falling between 3 and 15 October though isolated single dates in September (August in 1998) in some years. Last seen between 26 March and 9 April (24 April in 1996). 2 – 3 birds regularly seen through the 'winter' months though up to 6 (and 8 in October 1990). The largest number recorded was 13 – in the severe weather of February 1991.

2001-2006: Present to 15 April 2001 and in same year an early isolated record of one bird – trilling – on 2 September. Other early records on 7 September 2002 and 7 September 2003. In 2004 noted until 15 April but one was trilling on 6 July and a juvenile was seen on 28 August – just possibly a pair stayed to breed undetected. Seen only in the 'winter' months in 2005 but observed on single dates in June and July 2006, the latter being a family of four which may have arrived from the nearby Willop sewer.

Great Crested Grebe

Podiceps cristatus

Before extensive enlargement of the pit – 1962 – single birds were seen on only four dates in three years (January, February and November), though one was reported to me as ‘present for some time’ in the winter of 1954/55. Dave Weaver’s only records were 3 on 31 January and 2 on 10 March 1979 but noted as ‘seasonally regular’ by R and S Phillpott 1984 – 1989.

In the 1990’s, 1–2 recorded in most months of the year as single date or very short stay visitors. Longer visits occurred 23 March – 14 April 1995; 6 – 15 November 1998 and 7 October – 31 December 2000. In 1996, 3-4 in January and through February increased to 6 –8 from 26 February to 19 March, then singles to 1 April and also on 19-21 April.

2001-2006: At least one pair present throughout 2001 when species bred for the first time. Since then one or two pairs have nested each year but produced no more than two fledged young in any year. 11 birds present 31 December 2004.

Red-necked Grebe

Podiceps grisegena

Single birds were recorded on 21 January 1951; 9-11 March 1958, 10 March 1979 – plus one dead (D. Weaver), and 16 February 1985 (R and S Phillpott). In the 1990’s there were three October/November records of single birds – 13 and 23 November 1994 and 15 October 1999 - another stayed from 26 February to 8 March 1996. Outside the ‘winter’ period, two were present on 23 August 1973 (M.E. Upstone).

Slavonian Grebe

Podiceps auritus

In 1958, one, rapidly achieving breeding plumage, was present in the new pit 13 – 20 April. One was seen by D. Weaver on 10 March 1979 and two were recorded by R and S Phillpott on 16/17 February 1985. Pat Miller saw one on 21 February 1987 and another was present from 7th to 22nd April 1989 (J. Sanderson and I. Andrews). In the 1990’s, one in full breeding plumage stayed from 27 April to 4 May 1994; two were present from 21 February to 22 March 1996 and autumn singles seen on 19 November 1995 and 17 October 1999. There is also a report by an angler of a bird, either this species or Black-necked Grebe on 24 February 1994.

2001-2006: One on 7 January 2003.

Black-necked Grebe

Podiceps nigricollis

Recorded in only three years: 1958, 1990 and 1991. In 1958 one, possibly the same bird, was seen in both pits in the periods 13-15 March; 21-23 March and 3 April. In 1991 one bird was present throughout the severe weather of 13 – 24 February.

Outside the winter period there was an immature on the ‘west pool’ on 26 August 1990 (P. Miller).

Fulmar

Fulmarus glacialis

Possibly an unlikely species but single birds flew over the site on 3 June 1994 and 22 August 2000.

Cormorant

Phalacrocorax carbo

In the early years there were only two records of single birds – in the old pit on 18 November 1950 and 24 March 1957. However, in 1958, when 81 visits were made, 1-4 birds were regular to mid-April (both pits), and 2 present on 24 May. Strangely, notebooks contained no other references.

Records of 'up to 8' January – April 1973 and 'up to 6' in November 1976 at 'West Hythe' by the same observer on KOS record cards may possibly refer to the pit but Dave Weaver recorded up to three very occasionally in December/January 1979 – 81 and it was noted as 'regular' by R and S Phillpott 1984 – 1989.

During the 1990's, present in all months, though mostly absent June and July. Numbers usually in single figures though there is some suggestion of an increase in first half April and from end September to mid-November when up to 18 counted. 23 flew north-east across the site at 06.00 on 23 August 2000. Examples of the southern race (*P. c. sinensis*) were present 19 – 22 March 1998 and 22-31 March 2000, and an immature wearing an orange darvic ring was seen intermittently from January 1995 to January 1996.

2001-2006: Peak numbers occurred in early March in 2001 & 2002, late March in 2004, late February 2005, and end August 2002.

Shag

Phalacrocorax aristotelis

One at the main bay on 9 December 1999 was the only record.

White Pelican

Pelecanus onocrotalus

One flew east across the site at 15.00 hrs on 30 January 1996 and was present in the south-west corner of the main bay on the following morning. This bird was seen at Rye on 29th, over Folkestone on 30th and at Felixstowe a few days later, and was presumably an escape.

Pink-backed Pelican

Pelecanus rutescens

One which, according to anglers had been present all day, was seen at 20.00 hrs on 31 July 1991. Workers at the pit told me later that it had stayed on the west side close to the works until 5 August. It was undoubtedly the same bird which was reported at Stodmarsh on 6 August and almost certainly an escape.

Common Bittern

Botaurus stellaris

An angler provided an excellent description of a bird in the reeds at the south end of the long bay on two consecutive days at the end of March 1995.

2001-2006: Remarkable series of sightings by knowledgeable anglers in 2004: - 26 February; 7, 11 and 15 April.

Little Egret

Egretta garzetta

Three of the seven records since 1990 occurred in 2000 – singles on 29 April and 7 May (possibly same bird) and two on 17 July. The others were in 1993, '94, '97, and 1999 between 18 May and 26 September.

2001-2006: Continues to increase in regularity with singles on 3 dates in 2001 and 1 or 2 on 7 dates in 2002 (between March and August inclusive). Singles on 11 dates in 2003 mid-July to mid-November, plus two on 29 March and three on 27 July. Also three on 7 August 2004. The latest record was on 27 November 2004 (but what may have been the same bird was reported as present daily in the nearby Willop Sewer during the last two weeks of December). Of 65 visits in 2005, seen on 10 of them, though not later than end August. Just two July records of single birds in 2006.

Grey Heron

Ardea cinerea

In the 1950's, birds, usually 1-2, were most regularly recorded up to end April or into May though in 1957, when there were more autumn visits than in other years, singles were seen regularly from 10 August with three on 25th and five on 11 October. The only other numbers greater than 2 were 7 on 24 July 1951 and 4 on 20 April 1958.

During the 1990's, often absent November to February, one's and two's being seen in other months but greater numbers – up to 8 – have been recorded in July/August in five of those years (from 12 June in 1997)

2001-2006: The earliest multiple occurrence was of five birds on 30 May 2003.

Spoonbill

Platalea leucorodia

A party of five were present in the evening of 31 July 1991, feeding along a 'creek' between old and new backfill south of the main bay. They had earlier been seen flying north-east over the RSPB reserve at Dungeness. There was also one on 12 May 1997.

2001-2006: Singles on 26/27 June 2003, 21 March 2004 and 24 July 2004.



Little Egret - June 2003



Spoonbill - June 2003

Mute Swan	Cygnus olor
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No more than 6 birds were seen in the old pit 1950 – 1954. A pair bred “in usual place” in 1950 but not subsequently, though a nest was found on the bank of one of the airfield dykes in following year. Presumably it was this pair with four cygnets which stayed in the pit from mid-May to the year end. Generally less than five intermittently through the year 1957 – 1960, with higher numbers (10-25) in January 1957, '58 and '59; March 1959; May 1958 and 1961 and June 1960. Highest totals were in November and December 1958 when up to 56 present.

During the 1990's, present intermittently in most months of the year though mostly absent July – September. Numbers varied considerably – often single figures or up to 20 but larger numbers occurred during periods of cold weather: 73 in February 1991; and up to 58 January 1997. Anglers talk of birds commuting from and to fields at dusk and dawn during winter months, 30 – 50 birds being involved.

2001-2006: 110 during November 2001 was highest recorded figure.

Bewick's Swan	Cygnus columbianus
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The first record was of 7 seen by G. Munns on 17 January 1970; D. Weaver watched 22 arrive at dusk on 21 February 1979 and a flock of 29 in what is now the west pit, was recorded by R and S Phillpott in 1988 but the actual date cannot be recalled. During the 1990's, most seen were flying across the site: 3 flew west on 30 October 1995; 1 and 2 occurred on single dates in December 1995 and 1996 and a group of 8 flew north-east on 14 November 1999.

Whooper Swan	Cygnus cygnus
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2001-2006: Three flew east on 28 December 2005.

Black Swan	Cygnus atratus
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Three birds were present 15-24 October 1994, and singles from 3 September to 15 October 1997 and on 19 November 1998. All were certainly escapes.

(Tundra) Bean Goose	Anser fabalis rossicus
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A single bird stayed from 16 February to 23 March 1997.

2001-2006: One commuted daily with Mute Swans from local fields between early January and 24 March 2001 – almost coinciding with the final date of the bird in 1997. Possibly a different bird appeared on 12 and 16 April.

Pink-footed Goose	Anser brachyrhynchus
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A flock of 16 flew north across the west pit on 12 October 1997.

White-fronted Goose	Anser albifrons
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A flock of 29 flew west across the new pit on 9 February 1958 and 10 were present on 13 January 1969. In the 1990's singles were present on 25 February 1994 and 5-7 February 1996; a flock of 29 flew east on 14 January 1996.

2001-2006: Three birds overflowed the Main Bay on 19 March 2002.

Greylag Goose

Anser anser

The only records prior to the 1990's are of one bird on 5 February 1962 – undoubtedly a genuine wild bird – 2 on 16 January 1984 and 6 on 8 June 1984. During the 1990's probably all records were of wanderers from the large feral populations at Dengemarsh, Scotney and elsewhere on Romney Marsh. Although present in 1996 from the beginning of the year, there was a tendency for birds to occur from March to May and from August to October. Usually 1-3 birds associating with Canada Geese but very occasionally 4-6 and 10 or more have been seen twice in October.

Snow Goose

Anser caerulescens

Single birds were present on 3-8 February 1993 (associating with Barnacle Geese), 11 April and 16 August 1994, and 4 May 1998. Two, presumably the same birds were seen on 30 March and 6 April 2000. Most were presumably escapes though the one in February 1993 probably has the best credentials for being considered to be a genuine vagrant.

Canada Goose

Branta canadensis

R and S Phillpott recorded it as 'infrequent' during the 1980's. From 1990 to 1994 the species was irregular July – November and generally less than 10 in other months though there were five dates (four of them in August) when up to 53 counted. Apart from apparently isolated records in 1975 and 1990 regular breeding started in 1992 with one pair until 1995, increasing to at least 12 pairs by 2000. Average numbers present increased slowly to 40-80 by 2000, with peak numbers occurring in August, when the local population was augmented by temporary visitors, e.g. 123 in 1996; 243 in 1999 and 165 in 2000.

2001-2006: A record 15 pairs bred in each of first three years. Peak numbers occurred in June/July (August in previous years) with 168, 147 and 77 respectively. Increased backfilling; closure of the works and subsequent extension of angling into hitherto restricted areas resulted in a loss of nesting sites and only two pairs bred in 2005 & 2006. Often absent outside breeding season in 2006, the only large number was 60 on 19 February.

Barnacle Goose

Branta leucopsis

Recorded only in the 1990's. A flock of 35 stayed 3 – 8 February 1993. Other records were during 1995 to 1997, of which six were of 1-2 birds on single dates March to August. In 1996, 2 stayed 15 – 22 March and between 2 and 6 from 10 June to 1 September. In 1997 there was one from 13 – 22 May.

2001-2006: In 2001 12 flew north on 7 May and 10 in opposite direction on 10 June. Two regularly May – July 2004 and again June – July 2005 and 2006.

Brent Goose

Branta bernicla

Occurred very infrequently, often singly but in numbers usually less than 10 in most years of 1990's, dates falling between 9 October and 22 March, also on 17-19 April 2000. Higher numbers were counted on 7 February 1992 – 26; 13 February 1992 – 18; October 1994 – 12; 1 January 1997 – 46 south-east; and 19 November 2000 – 15 west. A bird of the pale-breasted form (*B. b. hrota*) was present on 24 February 1994.

2001-2006: In 2001, a single on 5 April; six present and 30 flew west on 9 November.

Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiacus</i>
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A single bird was present on 4 and 13 March 1997 but anglers told me that they had seen it several times either side of those dates.

Bar-headed Goose	<i>Anser indicus</i>
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Single birds on 13 October 1995 and 6 April 1997. Associating with Canada Geese on both occasions, and presumably escapes.

2001-2006: One on 26 March 2005.

Emperor Goose	<i>Anser canagicus</i>
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One present in the early morning of 2 May 1999, was later seen flying north-east. A certain escape.

Domestic Chinese Goose	<i>Anser sygnoides</i> ?
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Two birds were apparently introduced to the pit during the 1980's, one remaining through the 1990's to 1995 when it suddenly disappeared.

White-faced Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna viduata</i>
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2001-2006: One on 12 July 2002. Presumably of escaped origin.

Fulvous Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna bicolor</i>
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2001-2006: One on 13 January 2004. Presumably of escaped origin.

Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>
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Not recorded in the early years and the only pre-1990 records were 3 on 24 March 1979, a pair on 21 February 1982, 3 juveniles in the west pool on 10/11 August 1984 (local breeding?) and a single bird at the same place on 15 April 1985.

In the 1990's there were very occasional records of 1-2 in January/February, then fairly regular occurrences of a pair (or more) from late February to late May (2nd June in 1995). Maxima 12 were seen on 24 April 91 and 7 on 23 May 1995. Single juveniles were seen in the west pool twice in early August (1996 and 2000) and immatures on 2 occasions: 29 August and 8 September. Of the 17 records in the period October – December, half occurred in the last month. The only 'large' autumn number was 12 on 19 September 1994.

2001-2006: The regular spring occurrence continued in all years - to the end of June in 2002. The prevalence of December records was maintained in 2002 when 9 present on 11th and 12th and 19 flew east on 15th; and in 2003 a singleton stayed from 20th.

Mandarin	<i>Aix galericulata</i>
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There were single males on 9 October 1992, and 6/7 June 1995, a pair on 2 May 1995 and 1 January 2000, and 3 males, 1 female on 28 November 1998.

Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>
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Before 1990, recorded in January of five years (1954,'58, '82, '85, and 1989) remarkably between 18th and 26th. 5 to 18 birds except in the severe weather of 1985 when circa 200 present. A pair also seen on 9 February 1987 and heard at dusk on 21 February 1982.

Occurred in each year of the 1990's, usually in cold spells during the winter months and for periods of 1-12 days and mostly in very small numbers, though occasionally more than ten and on 21-23 February 1996, and 1st January 1997 flocks of 135 and 120 respectively were counted. The latest 'spring' date was 22 March and early autumn birds have been seen in five years between 29 August and 19 September. In seven of the ten years it has been recorded in the last few days of December.

2001-2006: 43 on 4 March 2005 was the largest number recorded in March.

Falcated Duck	<i>Anas falcata</i>
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2001-2006: A male of unknown origin present during May 2003.

Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>
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Only two references prior to 1990 – 4 in January 1985 (R and S Phillpott); and a pair on 26 February 1989 (P. Miller). During the 1990's present in numbers up to 10 – once 16 – between mid November and third week February, usually during cold weather. Single records of presumed migrants fall between 3 March and 3 April (but two on 29 April 1992). Autumn birds occur between 7 and 27 October but a party of 11 were present on 7 September 1994.

2001-2006: A party of seven on 4 March 2005.

Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>
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Up to 9 on five dates (2 years) 1950 – 1953, all in the old pit. In the two years with most visits – 1957 and 1958, seen regularly 10 August to 4 September 1957, - max: 11, and 1-6 late March to mid-April 1958, with 8 birds earlier on 3 February. A pair on 29 April 1957 was 'late'. A maximum of two noted on only three occasions (out of 39 visits) in 1959 – 1961.

The only significant note by D. Weaver in the 1980's was of at least 38 on 21 February 1982.

During the 1990's occurred in winter months in numbers mostly less than 10-15. Higher numbers in 1996 – 30 on 1 January; 39 on 17 March and 40 on 8 April. 'Late' records fell between 31 March and 12 April. Apart from a female present throughout June and July 1996, autumn records occurred in July – 2 years; August – 6 years; September – 4 years, often between 10 and 16 birds.

2001-2006: 46 in December 2002 and 18 on 26 January 2005 were the highest numbers recorded.

Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
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A pair bred in the old pit in most years of the 1950's but ducklings were not seen until 1958. The only double figure counts – maximum only 18 – occurred in August/September. 2-4 pairs bred 1990's (also in the 1980's) - mating noted as early as end December – and usually 10 to 20 birds counted April – June. July increases probably merely reflect the addition of fledged birds but

there is another increase in August/September. Highest numbers occur in December, often over 100 and reaching 150. Fewer in the following two months and a marked drop late February/early March. These numbers would appear to have established in the late 1980's as winter counts by D. Weaver 1978 – 1983, were mostly in single figures. However, average figures have fallen through the 1990's and mirror the national levels, as given in the WEBS report for 1999 – 2000, which shows a 27% drop since 1994. The corresponding drop at Palmarsh was 28% for the whole year and 31% for the winter period October – March.

2001-2006: The introduction of game and wildfowl shooting on the site by the bailiff since 2000 may have accelerated the continuing fall in winter numbers – average 55 in 2001 and 15 in 2002; less than ten from 2004

Pintail	Anas acuta
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There were three records prior to 1990, each of two birds – on 16 January 1955, 31 January 1959 and 20 January 1985. During the 1990's 1-4 birds were present for up to six days on five occasions; e.g. 14 – 20 January 1995 and 31 Jan – 5 February 1996, and there were 10 single date records between 15 October and 3 April though six of these were between 29 December and 10 March.

Bahama Pintail	Anas bahamensis
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A male was present on 7 October 1993. A certain escape.

Garganey	Anas querquedula
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Memory suggested that this species was seen almost annually in the 1950's but written record shows that it was seen in only two years. In 1957, 4-6 birds were present daily from 25 August to 3 September. An unusual record that year was of a female flushed from an 'airfield' dyke on 9 June, on which date 2 Garganey/Teal were briefly seen flying away from the old pit. In 1960 a pair in the old pit initially on 15 March then up to 3 pairs (including two birds in 'airfield' dykes) until 27 March which, unfortunately, was the last visit until 4 June. In recent years, a male and two females were seen on 28 March 1991 and a late female was present on 7 October 1998 but a remarkable record was of a male on 17 January 1999, and probably the same bird a month later on 14 February.

2001-2006: A male on 10 May 2002.

Duck species	Anas sp.
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On 30 August 1953 a small duck at the far end of the old pit was Teal size and female. Before I reached an optimum viewing position it flew off, not dropping into any of the nearer dykes but in that brief flight view the inner wing seemed to be distinctly pale blue. This was almost certainly the bird shot by my wildfowling friend in the same place on the following day which he initially thought was Teal but the wings looked so different that he cut one off to keep. He later showed me the wing and I wrote a description of it intending to pursue the identification later but due possibly to the fact that I was on embarkation leave at the time and had to travel to the R.A.F embarkation unit at the beginning of September, the identity was not resolved. The wing and even the description were lost, so the remote possibility of Blue-winged Teal will have to remain a mystery.

Shoveler

<i>Anas clypeata</i>

There were nine records of 1-3 birds in the period 1950 – 1961, four of them between 23 December and 31 January, four in April (all 1968) and one in August. It was also one of the duck species shot by a wild-fowling colleague in the 1954/55 winter. Not recorded by Phillpotts or D. Weaver in the ten years from 1978. During the 1990's small numbers, usually less than 10, appear in cold spells December to February, though there were up to 19 in January 1993 and 18 on 25 December 1994. Spring migrants occur between 10 March and 24 April (also a pair on 5 May 2000). Six autumn records fall between 21 August and 19 September and another four between 11 October and 10 November.

2001-2006: Up to 3 male and 2 female through March and April 2001 initiated thoughts of possible breeding. Unusual appearance of a female on 28 June and 2 July 2002.

Red-crested Pochard

<i>Nettion rufina</i>

A male, of unknown origin, was seen in the main bay on eight occasions between 10 February and 5 April 1996 and one was present on 13 November 1997.

Pochard

<i>Aythya ferina</i>

In the earlier years very small numbers were noted 1958 – 1960 and only in the first year, when there were frequent snow falls in spring, were there more than single dates records: 1-2 female from 16 to 31 January and a male on 8 April. The largest number recorded by R and S Phillpott in 1980's was 21 on 20 January 1985.

In the 1990's most occurred in cold spells November – mid February, some staying to as late as mid-March. Except for 1996, numbers involved were up to 25. In that year 38 were counted on 1 January and 30-46 from 30 January to 10 February with 76 on 8th. There were isolated single date records in mid-April (2), July, and also, since 1995 five records between 4 September and 11 October.

Tufted Duck

<i>Aythya fuligula</i>

From 1950 to 1962 there were only single records of 1-2 birds in five of those years and in 1958, 3 males on 3 February, a pair on 6-8 April and on 30 November. A strange female on 30 March may have been a Ferruginous Duck hybrid.

By contrast in only eight visits (five of them personal) in 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988 and 1989 birds were seen in each year ; 1-5 except 25 on 31 December 1987; 17 on 23 November 1988; and 17 on 12 January 1989. By far the largest counts, however, were 60 on 14 January 1982 and circa 100 on 16 February 1985 (R and S Phillpott). This difference may be solely due to the vastly increased water area by the 1980's. Highest counts by P. Miller were 8 on 12 February 1988 and 12 on 3 December 1986 and 9 February 1989.

During the 1990's, birds were present for longer periods in cold weather November to March than other duck species. Highest numbers between 34 and 48. Spring migrants occur in very small numbers from 5 to 25 April and autumn birds pass through 1 September to 15 October. Summer (May-August) records in most years may suggest nesting not too far away.

Scaup

<i>Aythya marila</i>

Only one bird has been recorded during the 1990's – a male on 6 March 1996. Prior to that Dave Weaver saw an immature male on 23 January 1979; RandS Phillpott a male on 16/17 February 1985 and later that year Pat Miller noted 2 females on 19 December, which remained to 1st January 1996 when, in mid-morning, Peter Wells counted a remarkable 14 birds. The Phillpotts reported another for circa 3 weeks in February 1988 and another stayed from 24 – 30 April 1989.

2001-2006: A female was seen intermittently from 26 November to end December 2002.



Falcated Duck - May 2003



Scaup - January 2003

Eider

<i>Somateria mollissima</i>

In response to a friend's claim of seeing two Surf Scoter in the new pit on 12 January 1951, I found an immature male of this species on the following day.

Common Scoter

<i>Melanitta nigra</i>

Birds, oiled to various degrees, were present at the new pit – almost always sitting on the shingle edge – throughout January/February 1951 and January 1952. Regularly 1-3 birds but 7 on 9 February 1951. Two were in the old pit on 2 March 1952 and one in the new pit on 27 April. The only other year in which recorded was 1958 when single males were in the old pit on 5 January and the new pit on 9 February.

[Surf Scoter

<i>Melanitta perspicillata</i>]

[A bird-watching friend was quite certain that he had seen two of this species in the new pit on 12 January 1951. He told me that he had distinctly seen the large 'swollen' bill and the white nape patch. When I visited the pit on the following day, I saw only one immature Eider.]

Velvet Scoter	<i>Melanitta fusca</i>
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Oiled birds were present in the new pit in 1950 and 1951 through January and February. 1-2 birds, occasionally 3. There was a male in the old pit on 27 January 1952 and another there on 13 January 1958.

Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>
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Birds were recorded in 1958 – two on 30th November and in six years of the 1990's. Most were single dates of 1-2 birds in cold periods, December to February but slightly more, 2-4, were present from 9 to 18 February 1991 and a party of 9 flew across the site on 26 December 1996. Earliest date was 11 November 1990.

2001-2006: In 2001, present from 7 to 13 November with four on 9th. 7 November is now the earliest record. A female or immature seen briefly on 21 November 2006.

Smew	<i>Mergus albellus</i>
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Recorded in cold periods in winter 1985, 1991 and 1996-99. Mostly 1-2 'redheads' on single dates but present from 9 to 24 February 1991 with a maximum of 13 (2m) on 13th. Occurred most frequently in 1996; 2-5 'redheads' from 8 to 18 February; 1-2 on 23 February to 6 March; and 3 'redheads' 29-31 December. In January 1997, 8 'redheads' appeared on 1st and there were up to 4 on 25/26th.

2001-2006: Two red-heads were present on 20/21 January 2001 and six briefly seen in flight on 12 December 2002.

Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>
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Noted in only four years – 1958, 1979, 1996 and 1997, between 23 January and 25 March and the latest date for each year fell between 19 and 25 March. More than one bird involved only in 1979 when male 7 female on 23 January and 2 females on 10 March and in 1996 when a male and 2 females were present from 10 – 25 February and 2-5 females from 15-19 March.

2001-2006: 2004 – the fifth year in which this species has been recorded; one on 3 April.

Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>
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I was told by a wildfowling friend that a male was in the new pit in December 1954. In six years of the 1990's six records of 1-3 birds fell between 15 December and 1 January, and there were one or two birds on 27 January.

2001-2006: The species remains faithful to (almost solely) December occurrences, with one on 14th in 2001 and three on 7th in 2002. Also one on 27 January 2002.

Ruddy Duck	<i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i>
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There were four single date records of single females in the years 1993 – 1996, three between 21 November and 23 February and one on 18 September. R and S Phillpott recorded 4 on 17 February 1985.

2001-2006: A female was present from 15 November to 20 December 2002.

Honey Buzzard

Pernis apivorus

2001-2006: One reliably seen over the west side of the area on 14 September 2004. This constituted the 200th species for the pit area.

Red Kite

Milvus milvus

A wing-tagged bird was watched as it flew east across the site on 19 May 2000. It proved to be a bird from the Chilterns re-introduction scheme, which was wild-fledged in 1999.

Marsh Harrier

Circus aeruginosus

Two records: a female flying north-east on 19 May 1999 and another flying south-west on 30 July 2000.

Hen Harrier

Circus cyaneus

Three records - 'ringtails' on 24 January 1979 and in 1992, on 9 February and 29 April.

2001-2006: A male on 25 November 2002.

Montagu's Harrier

Circus pygarcus

A male was watched on 11 May 1958 as it flew slowly north across the west end of Hythe Ranges, over the old pit, then west across the 'airfield'

[Goshawk

Accipiter gentiles]

[2001-2006: A possible bird seen too briefly on 15 and 16 November 2002.]

Sparrowhawk

Accipiter nisus

Seen only in the 1990's and except for 1999 and 2000, just one to three sightings each year – Jan; Feb; Mar; Sept; and Oct;. Noted on three occasions in 1999 and in the following year once in April and at least ten times between late August and the year end.

2001-2006: Recent greater frequency maintained with 10 sightings in 2001, 9 in 2002 and 8 in both 2003 and 2004. Eight sightings for 2005 & 2006 combined may merely reflect the far fewer visits.

Common Buzzard

Buteo buteo

2001-2006: One circling above the west bay and heading high to west on 3 September 2003.

Osprey

Pandion haliaetus

There have been three records, all in the 1990's. One, apparently grounded in torrential rain, was seen flying off low to south-west on 24 April 1991; another, which frequented the Royal Military Canal at West Hythe for much of September 1994, was seen over the pit by anglers on two occasions during that month; and a third flew west on 7 September 1997.

2001-2006: The long-stayer at Hythe in 2005 visited on 23 & 24 September and 27 October.

Kestrel

Falco tinnunculus

It is rather surprising that, during the 1950's, the species was only noted in 1958 – in May and September. Possibly a familiar bird being ignored. Seen fairly regularly hunting over the area in the 1990's, usually one bird, occasionally two, and three on 18 July 1993.

A pair have bred at the nearby Redoubt in most years.

2001-2006: Seen very infrequently in 2003 – 2006.

Red-footed Falcon

Falco vespertinus

On 14 May 1995, a female chasing prey across the southern edge of the main bay, perched briefly on a prominent boulder.

Merlin

Falco columbarius

Prior to 1990 there were just two records – one on 19 November 1961 and one on 7 May 1980. Of the 14 records of single birds during the 1990's, 5 occurred between late November and early February; 4 from mid-March to mid-April; 3 from late September to late October and the other two were on 3 May 1995 and 20 August 2000.

2001-2006: Single birds on 8 December 2001, 28 March and 29 November 2002, 7 March and 16 September 2003.

Hobby

Falco subbuteo

Observed over the pit on seven occasions in 5 years of the 1990's between 27 April and 17 May; and 8 and 27 August. There was also one on 5 July 1992 and a late bird on 12 October 1993.

2001-2006: Single birds on 2 June and 25 July 2001, and 2 July 2005 may suggest a not too distant breeding pair. In 2002 birds were seen on 14 May and 27/28 September, and two on 26 August. There were no records in 2003 or 2004 but in May 2006 there were two on 5th and one on 11th. One resting on a lamp standard by the works entrance on 22 October 2001 was the latest record.

Peregrine

Falco peregrinus

Single birds flew over the area on 27 February 1992; 8 December 1995 and 19 November 2000.

2001-2006: An adult on 12 January and a juvenile on 14 October 2002. Other adults on 1st May 2003, and 13 January 2004. Two surprisingly on 28 August 2006.

Red-legged Partridge

Alectoris rufa

Although recorded on the nearby army ranges from early 1960's – I have no reference to them at the pits or on the 'airfield' in pre-1990's years except for one on 30 April 1989 seen by Ian Roberts.

During the 1990's always seen on the west side of the complex, which was rarely visited until 1994. Most regularly seen in autumn / winter, highest counts: 11 – 18 birds. Up to 10 in January but no more than 2 in February – June period. Some autumn birds may have commuted from the ranges (where two or three pairs breed) but a pair definitely bred in 1995 when a female with 4 juveniles was flushed.

2001-2006: Not recorded from autumn 2002 to 3 April 2005 when a single bird present. Up to eight occasionally during autumn 2006.

Grey Partridge

<i>Perdix perdix</i>

Recorded irregularly in small numbers (up to 8) in the years 1950 – 1953. Noted on single dates in 1958 (13 January); 1959 (2 August); and 1960 (7 February). The largest party recorded was 21 on the 'airfield' on 2 August 1959. Only three sightings in the 1990's; two birds on 14 June 1992 and 26 February 1995 and one on 7 May 2000.

Pheasant

<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>

Until 1998 there were only four single date records. Singles in November 1993, December 1994, March 1996 and six birds on 28 December 1997. In 1998, up to 6 in March-April and December and a single bird through September. Present throughout 1999 (max: 5) and a female with chicks was disturbed on the west side on 1 August. Probably also bred in 2000.

N.b. The species was first recorded for the ranges in 1999.

Water Rail

<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>

One flushed from reeds on east side of the old pit on 11 September 1957. There were single date records in January 1970, 1979 and 1982 and December 1980. At least one calling at dawn from reeds in the inner lagoon through November/December 1997 and 1999, one there on 10 December 1995 and two on 8 November 1998. It is quite possible that in the 1990's the species was present through the early winter months each year 1995 – 1999 but dawn or dusk visits were most likely to detect it, and in some years only one or two visits were made at that time. Records away from the winter period were singles on 2 September 1999 and 9 April 2000 and one was also seen by R and S Phillpott on 9 October 1987.

2001-2006: Sightings in March (1) and October (3) suggest passage birds. Wintering birds heard at dawn on 16 December 2002, 26 January (2) & 16 February 2003. One in late December 2005 remained (and was joined by another) until 1 May 2006. Probably four present in December 2006.

Corncrake

<i>Crex crex</i>

A colleague, who from 1948 used to regularly accompany his father shooting partridge and rabbit recalls initially being shown and then seeing occasional single birds each year to 1951 or 1952, in a grass field (where the grass was always particularly long) close to the current 'Southern Water' site and on the west side of the whole site. Pheasants were virtually absent from the marsh in those years and Red-legged Partridge were infrequently seen.

Moorhen

<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>

Five pairs bred in the old pit in 1950 / 51 then 2 or 3 pairs in subsequent years at least until 1965. 15 on 18 November 1950 was, curiously, the only count in winter greater than 8.

During the 1990's one or two pairs bred, perhaps more in the final 2 – 3 years when the west side had been opened up for gravel extraction. Until 1998, spring counts were of 2 – 5 birds; autumn / winter counts 3 – 8. In the last three years maximum spring counts were 10 – 15 and numbers in autumn and early winter reached 19 (26 in the cold snap at the end of December 2000).

2001-2006: Peak numbers were 17 – 19 in August/September 2002 and 25-27 in mid-July 2006, the former concurring with 1998 – 2000 data. 31 on 13 October 2002 may have included passage birds.

Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>
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Breeding occurred in each year 1950 – 1961 (and presumably after that) with six pairs in the early years and at least one pair from 1953 – three families were seen in the summer of 1958. The first significant winter numbers were recorded in 1957/58, after which up to 60 or more were recorded December to February in 3 of the next 4 years (peak numbers in early February each time). The highest numbers were in 1962 when on the only two visits made that year a minimum of 130 was counted on 5 February and 80 were present on the relatively late date of 25 March, on 23 January 1979 – 180; 14 –21 January 1982 – 120 to 200 (D. Weaver); and in February 1985 when “well over 100” present (R and S Phillpott).

During the 1990's a single pair bred in 1992 and 2000 and possibly in other years as there are single date records in May, July and August. The first ‘winter’ birds appear early to mid September but more regularly from mid-October. Last dates fall between 13 March and 8 April (once 24 April). Maximum numbers occur in colder periods, generally between 34 and 54 but in more severe weather as in February 1991 and 1996 and January 1997 counts reached 72, 79, and 83 respectively.

One in a flock of 87 on 28 December 1969 was almost albino.

2001-2006: January maxima ranged from 63 to 73. One to three pairs bred in 2002 – 2006.

Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>
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Just one record in the early years - one in the old pit on 29 April 1958. Spring visits by Dave Weaver in the 1980's were very few (and he apparently made no summer visits) but ‘pairs’ were present on 1 April 1981 and 21 March 1982 and three birds were displaying on 9 May 1980, so breeding in the area may already have been taking place then. Six seen flying in from south-west at 17.00 hrs on 18 May 1983, however, may have been migrants.

During the 1990's it was proved to breed from 1996 onward but 2 birds were fairly regularly seen in the spring and early summer of 1995, and during March and in mid-July of the previous three years so may have also bred in those years on parts of the site then inaccessible. Since 1996, the first date of regular sightings was between 28 February and 13 March (once 30th). Earliest date when small chicks found was 23 May and the latest 25 June. Regular sightings cease from as early as 20 July but in the last two years were at the end of August, and 5th September respectively.

Few records of migrants – 8 flew east on 27 April 1993 and 18 on 8 May 1994. In 2000, 20-25 commuted from the shore to the west pit from 18th to 25th August.

2001-2006: Resident birds arrived in first two years in mid-January, early to mid-February in the others. One pair breeding in 2001 then two pairs. 13 fledged in all. Both pairs were predated in 2005 and, curiously, abandoned the nesting attempt in 2006. One of the 2004 pairs was caught up in discarded line and drowned: found to be ringed - as a nestling at Felixstowe June 1998.

Black-winged Stilt

<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>

One reported in 'Birds of Kent' as at West Hythe on 23 May 1965 was presumably seen at this site. One, first seen by Ian Roberts mid morning on 7 September 1997, was still present in the late afternoon.



Red Kite - May 2000



Black-winged Stilt - September 1997

Avocet

<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>

On 20 April 1958 one flew in from the south and circled the new pit but did not alight. During the 1990's recorded in autumn 1994, spring 1997, spring and autumn 1999 and 2000. A total of five spring records of 1-4 birds occurred between 18 March and 23 April but three of them were 30 March-4 April. The three autumn sightings were of single birds on 19 October 1994; 12 November 1999 and 6 September 2000.

2001-2006: In 2001 a trio present on 22 April; singles on 29 March & 15 August 2002; 28 March & 1 April 2004 and two birds on 28 May 2004 & 16 May 2005.

Little Ringed Plover

<i>Charadrius dubius</i>

The first record was of one which stayed briefly in the old pit during the morning of 29 April 1957 before flying off to the north. One was seen in the west pool on 4 August 1986 and one in display flight on 15 May 1988 though the species was not listed by R & S Phillpott.

During the 1990's arrival dates were between 23 March & 18 April in seven years (31 March – 2 April in four). Display was noted in at least seven years, being more intense in late April, and breeding was proved in four years and probably occurred in another three. No more than 3 birds present on any date in spring. Adults and juveniles seem to desert the area in July between 7th & 26th and passage birds appear from mid-August to mid-September. There is also a record of a late bird on 23 October 1991.

2001-2006: 16 March 2002 was earliest arrival date. Bred in 2001 and 2002, producing two young each time but much delayed (replacement?) in 2002. Nest abandoned in 2003 and again

much delayed in 2004 – 3 fledged. Abandoned again in 2005 and, disconcertingly, in 2006 although behaviour suggested nesting, neither of the pair were seen after mid- June.

Ringed Plover

<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>

Presumed migrants (max: 3) were seen in either pits in four years during 1950 – 1957, between 24 March and 12 May. In 1959, 1960 and 1965, three of the four records were in June or July, presumably birds from the nearby breeding area on Hythe Ranges. May have bred in the 1980's as D. Weaver noted pairs in May 1981 and on 25 March 1982 but he made no later visits in those years.

In the 1990's, display was noted during May 1993, a pair bred in 1994 and possibly in 1995 though not recorded later than 13 June in that year. Occasional summer records in 2000 may also suggest breeding. There is some indication of passage birds (no more than 4) between 2 and 21 May and in 1998 a few flew north on 28 and 31 August. In four years the last dates of birds present were between 7 and 21 August; the latest was on 2 October. Not recorded in November – January and only twice in February.

2001-2006: A pair was present throughout April 2001 but seen very intermittently in May and June and not thought to have nested.

Golden Plover

<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>

It seems surprising that the species was not noted (noticed?) until the 1990's. During that decade, although regular in surrounding fields, there were 22 single date records, most of them between mid November and late February, though as late as 8 April 1996 and as early as 23 July 1999. Usually associating with Lapwings and in small numbers but 30-60 on eight occasions and circa 100 twice – 6 February 1993 and 25 February 1994.

Grey Plover

<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>

Noted in five years of the 1990's, all single date and all single birds. Four of the twelve dates fell between 27 January and 16 February and five between 29 April and 15 May.

Lapwing

<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>

A numerous breeding species at the start of the period under review, though numbers dropped steadily to 1960. Part of this decline may have been due to the spread of human habitation up to the edge of the old pit by 1951. An estimated 18 pairs nested in the area covered by the current site – 13 in the old pit alone – in 1950, and 10 pairs in the pit in 1952. There were still 1 – 2 pairs there (with perhaps another four in the whole area) at the end of the 1950's and in 1960; five pairs were reported 'in the whole area' in the following year. The earliest nest found was on 27 March 1960, the latest in mid-June 1954 (B. Uden). Poor estimates may be the reason for 'low' winter peaks of only 400 in the early 1950's; 600 were counted in mid November 1957 and 800 – again in mid November – in 1959. 'Flocks' were still present in mid March 1951, and 60 were still present on the aerodrome on 25 March 1962 but (non-breeding) birds not seen later than 5 March 1958. However, in that year weather movements occurred on 9 February – to north-west; on 16 February – to south-west; and emigration on 28 March when a minimum of 500 in small flocks flew high to east or north-east from 0550 – 0630 hrs. In 1960 there was a steady movement south-west from 0700 – 1100hrs on 31 October.

It seems surprising that D. Weaver did not mention any breeding in 1979 – 83. A pair were displaying on 15 May 1988 and (the same pair?) still bred in 1991 & 1992 in the area now

covered by the west pit and occasional sightings of 1-4 birds in April/May 1994 may indicate breeding nearby.

Although there have been large flocks in early autumn (e.g. 600 in July 2000; 350 end of August 1999), regular large numbers appear between the end of October to mid November, sometimes early December as in 1997 and 1998. Peak winter numbers occurred more often in December than January and were between 700 and 2000 and were generally significantly higher in 1991-1994 than in later years. In late February the majority of the birds depart and the last date of large numbers for most years is between 20th and 27th. On 25 February 1994, the last date of high (600) numbers, an angler told me that huge noisy flocks, perhaps 3000 or more, were present at 07.00 at which time they flew off to the south. Very small numbers, generally less than ten stay to mid-March and three April records occur to 22nd. The first return birds arrive between 4 and 16 June. The highest counts given by D.Weaver – 500 – were also in December and in 1982 he recorded 200 'in the area' on 2 March but none on 21st. There are also references on KOS record cards to 40 on 17 March 1969 and 30 on 5 March 1971.

2001-2006: A sudden drop in numbers on 5 March 2001. One on 5 May 2002 was unusual. Numbers were down to three birds by 3 March 2005 but 325 stayed overnight on 9th and headed north on following morning. Fewer than 'usual' present during autumn / winter 2005 & 2006 e.g. maximum 260 in 2005. Earliest return birds in 2006 were nine flying north on 24 June.

Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>
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Just two records for this species, both of which may be considered unusual, especially as it is so rarely seen on the nearby shore. One in the new pit on 10 May 1959, and the other was seen on the edge of the main bay on 30 December 1995.

2001-2006: Two seen on 'out-of-season' date of 17 June 2002.

Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>
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A remarkable record from D. Weaver in 1983 was of five birds on 19 February.

Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>
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Single birds were seen in the old pit on 8/9 September 1956 and 1958. Up to three birds were present on 17-19 September 1957. Also occurred in four years of the 1990's: One on 13 September 1992, two on 16 September 1998, a juvenile on 25/26 September 1999 and an adult on 30/31 July 2000.

2001-2006: Singles on 18 September 2001 and the only spring record – 11 May 2002.

Temminck's Stint	<i>Calidris temminckii</i>
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There is just one record of this one-day specialist – on 5 May 2000.

2001-2006: The second record of this species occurred on 11 May 2002.

Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferrugenia</i>
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Single birds were seen on 17-19 September 1957 and on 3 September 1999.

2001-2006: One on 30 September 2002 was the latest ever; another on 27 – 29 July the earliest.

Dunlin

<i>Calidris alpina</i>

In the first decade, 3 spring records fell between 14 March and 10 May, maximum 8 on 6 May 1958. Of 16 bird-days 13 were in 1958. Autumn records – all 1956-58 were between 5 August and 19 September, maximum 5, and one on 8 November. Of 53 bird-days, 39 were in 1957.

During the 1990's spring records occurred between 7 March and 25 May, maximum 9 on 21 May 2000. The first 'autumn' birds were seen on 30 June 1999 and from 4 July 2000 (conditions at the west pit were more attractive in those years) but otherwise from 22 July with majority in August and fewer through September. Winter records mostly confined to December/January, occasionally November and February. The vast majority of records refer to 1-3 birds but there are three autumn records of 6-7 birds; 5 were present during January 1996; but D. Weaver noted 24 on 21 February 1982.

Ruff

<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>

In the 1950's, two were present on 20-22 August 1952; one on 2 April and five on 22 May 1958, all in the old pit; and one in the new pit on 27 March 1960. Just two records since then, both in autumn : one on 4 September 1998 and two on 23/24 August 1999.

2001-2006: One on 7 May 2001 and 1 September 2002 but the best year yet in 2003 with 8 on 1 March, one on 16 July and two different birds 1 – 4 September.

Jack Snipe

<i>Lymnocyrtis minimus</i>

Single birds were regular in winter 1950 –1952 and up to 3 in 1957. During the 1950's, 9 late spring sightings occurred between 25 April and 15 May. Autumn birds in those years occurred only in 1957: 1-2 from 19 September to 5 October.

Recorded in all years of the 1990's, intermittent ones and two's mid November to March though less regularly found after the turn of the year. 3 birds noted in December 1996, 4 on 18 January 1998 and 3-4 in November/December 2000. Last dates fell between 19 and 30 March, once 8 April (1996).

2001-2006: The four reported at end 2000 remained until 21 March 2001. The latest passage bird recorded in recent years was one on 16 April of that year. Occurred only as passage bird in 2002 – up to three 23 – 28 March, and in January/February 2005 up to five seen. The earliest in recent years was on 26 October 2004. At least three birds during December 2006.

Common Snipe

<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>

In the first decade very small numbers were regular October – February in some years, very intermittent in others. Maxima: 50 on 19 February 1950, 20 on 1 March 1952, 55 on 30 November 1958. There was some evidence of passage birds in April with last dates from 14th to 29th. First autumn birds in three years were between 3rd and 5th August, and 6 were seen on 24 July 1951. Circa 40 present in late August 1950 and 1952.

One of three birds on 1 April 1981 was drumming and a pair still present in May: they may possibly have bred. During the 1990's winter numbers varied depending on both weather and local conditions, often less than 20 or even 10 but up to 30-60. Last dates between 2 April and 1 May. First 'autumn' birds as early as 19 July (1999), otherwise, clusters in late August and 18-24 September. By far the largest numbers occurred in flooded conditions on 23 January 1979 and 21 March 1982 when 150, and 11 January 1978 when 200 were present. A significant note by D.

Weaver who recorded these numbers was that the 'grazing land' was being drained and new dykes cut from October 1981.

2001-2006: An isolated single on 11 May 2002. Numbers greater than twenty recorded on only four dates in the period, maximum 46 on 12 March 2006.

Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>
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Only one record – a bird appeared briefly at 0600 hrs on 10 March 1996.

2001-2006: One on 23 December 2002 was only the second record.

Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>
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At 05.45 hrs on 19 August 1956, one flew in from the south, stayed in the old pit for a half-hour then set off north-west minutes before 4 more flew across the pit, heading south-west.

Recorded six times in four years of the 1990's – all but one in spring; on 16 March, 14 May and the others between 4 and 9 April. The bird on 16 March was present south of the main bay for most of the day; the others, which included two groups of 7, were passing through to the east. The autumn record was of two birds on the west side on 9 July 2000.

2001-2006: A single bird on 30 June 2002 and one on 14 August 2004.

Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>
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In the 1950's, noted only in the years of maximum coverage. On 28 April 1957 there were 2 on the 'airfield' and 13 flew north-east over the new pit. Later in the year on 4th September 13 flew south-west over the area. A single bird was present in the old pit on 3 May 1958. Not mentioned by R and S Phillpott for 1984 – 1988.

Occurred in four years of the 1990's: 1 – 3 birds flew east on five dates ranging from 29 April to 25 May.

2001-2006: Two birds present on 1-2 May 2006.

Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>
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Single spring records (of 1-2 birds) in 1952 and 1961 were on 26 and 28 April respectively; an early autumn bird flew over on 18 July 1965. The species was regular as a spring migrant in the 1990's but only once in autumn – 1 on 27 August 1998. Spring records seem to occur in three distinct periods: 19-26 April; 30 April-10 May; and 25-29 May. Almost all were of 1-2 birds but 16 on 6 May 1995 and 12 on 27 April 1997.

2001-2006: Occurrences in spring kept within the stated 'periods'. 24 flying east on 10 May 2002 was the highest number recorded. 'Rare' autumn sightings on 1 & 12 August 2001, 10 July 2005 and 17 July 2006. Earliest ever noted on 13 April 2004.

Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>
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In the years 1950 – 1961 records (in four years) refer to passage birds with six sightings in spring and one in autumn. 1-2 on six occasions between 13 March and 28 April, and a flock of 24 flew west on 25 March 1958. 7 birds were present in the old pit on 21 August 1952.

There was one winter record of a single bird on 2 January 1957, however, all but one of D. Weaver's 1978 – 1983 records were of 1's or 2's in December/January, the other was of two on 1 April 1981. By contrast, over half of the 19 sightings in 1990's were between mid November and mid February, and five were between 9 and 21 March. The two summer records were on 14 June 1992 and 26 July 1993. Mostly single birds involved but up to 6.

2001-2006: Six birds present in the west field 8 – 11 May 2006.

Spotted Redshank

<i>Tringa erythropus</i>

Three 'early' records were of single birds present in the old pit: on 16 August 1953, 1-5 September 1957 and on 23 March 1960. One flew high to S.W. over the area on 2 September 1964. In 1989, 3 were present at the west pool on 28 August.

During the 1990's the birds did not stop. In spring single birds flew n.w. on 2 and 30 April and three on 14 April 1998. In autumn singles occurred on 11 August 1995 and 14 July 2000.

2001-2006: Single birds were present on 22 April, 12 August 2001 and 14 April 2002. it seems surprising that with so few records overall, the last two dates coincide with those in earlier years. Best year yet in 2003 – singles on 8 May, 22 & 27 June and 6 August. In 2004 singles on 20 April and 14 August. One overflying to SW on 30 October 2006 was latest date recorded.

Redshank

<i>Tringa totanus</i>

There were at least 6 or 7 pairs breeding in the whole area 1950 – 1953 but success was low (e.g. 1 chick fledged from 4 nests in the old pit 1951). Numbers dropped but still 2-4 pairs in 1958-1961 – the last year in which I was able to check adequately. Birds arrived at the breeding site between mid February and mid March. but moved away soon after the young fledged; the only autumn records were of 4 birds on 21 October 1956 and singles through September 1958. In 1950 a male paired with two females producing a clutch of c/7. D.Weaver recorded birds December to February 1978-1983 his highest figures being 30 on 23 January 1979 and 10 on 8 January 1982.

In the 1990's wintering birds present from late October to March or early April, often 1-3 but up to 7 especially in December (13 on 26 December 1998) and in the last three years there was a peak of 7-10 birds between 8 and 13 February, though the highest number – 17 – was on 14 March 1999. Records in April and early May presumably refer to the continental race but the intermittent presence of a bird through May and June, as in 1993, may suggest a nearby breeding pair. Post-breeding birds arrive mainly in late July – 24 on 21 July 1992 – but as early as 23 June (there is a KOS record of one on 22 June 1971). Autumn passage seems to occur mainly mid September to mid October with up to 3 birds involved.

2001-2006: In first three years peaks occurred in late January (11, 7 and 6) and in 2001 and 2002 also in early March (5).

Greenshank

<i>Tringa nebularia</i>

All birds in the 'early' years were seen in or over the old pit – on eight dates in four years. Four spring records were between 27 April and 2 May plus one on 4 June. The three autumn records fell between 20-29 August. In the 1980's, Dave Weaver recorded a late bird on 30 October 1981 and also had a one on 25 December 1980. There was one other winter record on the KOS cards – one on 19 February 1984. During the 1990's earliest dates were from 18 to 26 April; two-thirds of the 21 spring records were in May, most before the 15th. In autumn first appearances were in

July (8-17th); of 11 August records 8 were between 23rd and 31st. The latest was on 24 September 2000. 75% were single birds, the rest 2 or 3 except 5 on 4 September 2000.

2001-2006: The earliest dates in spring and autumn occurred on 16 April 2002. Autumn dates fell between 6 and 17 July; and of 14 August records eight were between 23rd & 30th, though not later than 8th in 2005 & 2006.

Green Sandpiper

<i>Tringa ochropus</i>

Recorded as a passage migrant in five of the 8 possible years of the 1950's. Occurred in spring from 5 to 24 April – 1-2 birds each time – and in autumn from 14 July to 9 September again 1-2 birds but up to 8 from 20 to 27 August 1952. Also 2 birds on 16/17 October 1957. Not known as a winter visitor but birds were present at that season on the nearby New Cut. This situation had changed at least by winter 1978/79 when D.Weaver provided records over the following five years with maxima of 5 in January 1978 and 6 on 22 February 1982. Five on 1st April 1981 were presumably passage birds.

Winter visitors in the 1990's were seen from the end October to third week March with 1-2, occasionally 3 birds being present. Passage birds occurred through April with a suggestion of peak numbers –5- early in the month. Latest date 28 April. The first return birds usually appeared in late June, from 25th, but one seen on 7 June 2000. Passage continues to mid October with August the peak month when 10, perhaps more, are present at one time. Numbers in July, greater than one, occurred only in 1999 and 2000 (conditions at the pit were then more attractive), when up to 6 seen both early and late in the month. The figures suggest a September peak in mid-month e.g. 13 on 13 September 2000.

2001-2006: One on 13 June 2002 was the second earliest 'return' bird. Largest number during the period was eight on 18 August 2005.

Wood Sandpiper

<i>Tringa glareola</i>

A total of 10 birds (max: 3 on any date) were recorded in five years between 1951 and 1961. Twice in spring – 3 May and 24 May and in autumn between 5 August and 9 September. Single date duration except in 1957 when one present from 29 August to 2 September.

In recent years single birds on 14 June 1992 and 10 August 1997. 2 on 29/30 August 2000 with one remaining to 31st.

2001-2006: One on 31 May 2001. Compared to previous records there was an increase in frequency in 2002 with three autumn dates and in 2004 at least four different birds on 11 dates from 17 July including one staying from 31 July to 7 August.

Common Sandpiper

<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>

Spring records during the first decade under review refer to the period 2 May – 24 May with a maximum of 8 birds in 1950 and 4 in 1951. Outside that period single birds were seen on 23 April 1957 and on 4 June 1960. In autumn early dates fall between 18 and 24 July and late dates from 14 to 22 September. The highest figure then was 6 in three different years. Until 1957 all were seen in the old pit. D.Weaver noted 'at least 8' on 7 May 1980.

Observations in the 1990's reveal first dates between 18 and 26 April, (23-25th in five of those years) and spring passage continued to as early as mid-May but in two years just into June: peak numbers occurred between 5 and 15 May; max: 13 on 9 May 2000. Return passage in July

started as early as the 1st and continued to October in six years and, exceptionally, one was present from 15 to 24 October 1994. Apparent peak numbers occur between end July and mid-August; and in second week September, with 4 to 10 birds involved.

2001-2006: A peak of 11 on 24 May 2001 was significantly later than the range of previous peaks. Last autumn bird in 2001 was on 25 October but in 2002 one seen intermittently between 8 November & 12 December. In 2005, the second earliest arrival date and the second earliest return date were on 19 April and 2 July respectively.

Turnstone

<i>Arenaria interpres</i>

A single bird was seen in the old pit on 13 May 1958 and one was present on 23 May 1965. A further four spring records of 1-2 birds occurred between 18 April and 2 May in 1993, 1994, and 1997. There was one other record of a singleton present 21-31 December 2000.

Mediterranean Gull

<i>Larus melanocephalus</i>

On 20 April 1958 an adult associating with circa 40 Black-headed gulls was apparently the only one in the county that year (though 4 or 5 had occurred in the previous year, these being the next reported since the very first for Kent in 1913). There have been single sightings of 1 or 2 birds in eight years since 1985; in January, February, April (twice), July (twice), August and November. In 1999 a remarkable series of sightings in July involved 7 on 6th; 4 on 16th and 18th; 5 on 24th and 6 on 25th.

2001-2006: Becoming a summer regular with one on single dates in July & August 2001 and present daily 8 July to 4 August 2002, with maximum 11 and two darvic marked juveniles having been ringed in Holland. In 2003 there were 136 bird days in the summer from 15 July to 13 August with a peak of 45. Again two darvic ringed birds both ringed as pullus two years previously, one in France the other in Belgium. Poorer numbers in 2004, maximum 5 on dates between 10 July & 5 August and in 2005 just one or two on three dates 28 July – 18 August plus singles on 18 March & 3 October. Only 2006 records were a juvenile on 20 July and a first year bird on 4 December.

Little Gull

<i>Larus minutus</i>

Recorded in three years to 1990. In 1953, four arrived at the new pit on 29 March, one staying to 3 April; there were singles in the old pit on 5 November and 24 December 1957 and a first year bird was present at the west pool on 5 August 1986. Since 1990 there have been three single date records in August – 10th in 1992, 15th and 24th in 1999, and a 1st yr bird stayed from 10 to 17th December 2000.

2001-2006: Seen on 10 and 15 April, 9 November 2001; mid-October, 21 and 24 November 2002.

Black-headed Gull

<i>Larus ridibundus</i>

The years of the 1950's when most visits were made – 1951, 1952, 1957 and 1958 – were the only ones when there was a series of counts recorded. Present in January – March in the first two years with a maximum of 400 on 30 January 1951; up to 50 March/April and 10 increasing to 50 August – November 1957 but 300 or more on 20-23 September on the 'airfield' and at the new pit where many dead fish from the R.M. Canal had been dumped. In 1958, c.40 on 24 January, 30-50 from 9 to 20 April, maximum 2 in May.

During the 1990's numbers counted depended on time of day and, in winter, the temperature. Always more birds present p.m. as they gather before moving to the shore roost site. Peak daytime numbers in December-February were 200-400 but c.1000 on 7 January 1998 (in mild weather) and at least 2000 seeking shelter overnight on 14 February 1994 when an easterly gale produced a wind chill factor of -4 degrees Celsius. Numbers start dropping in March but up to 350 noted in evenings. April totals rarely above 20 though a remarkable 126 was counted on 16 April 1996. Generally less than 10 in May and June but post-breeding birds increase through July and August with peak daytime figures reaching 300. However, in 1999 top July figures were 360 and more than 700 were counted in 2000 when also the June peak was 34. These increases may be due to conditions at the pit where two tipping areas had been filled, levelled off and left relatively undisturbed.

2001-2006: A minimum of 400 present on 2 August 2005 and c.1000 were in the pit area and adjacent fields on 1 December 2006.

Common Gull

Larus canus

Perhaps it did not then frequent the pits but I have no references to this species in my 1950's notebooks.

In the 1990's, numbers at any time of the year were very small and mostly below 10 though significant increases occurred in cold spells when over 50 often present e.g. – at least 100 on 2 January 1995. The largest count was of 150 at dusk on 7 February 1996. May and June are the leanest months when at best 1 or 2 birds are present. However, D.Weaver reported 20 on 9 May 1980. Peak numbers in March and April was evident in most years and may reflect the spring up-channel movements. There seems to be two distinct periods in March: 3rd to 7th, 10-26 birds; and 15th to 21st, 7-10 birds. In April 11th to 26th: 8-25 birds.

2001-2006: 140 at dusk on 5 January was noteworthy.

Lesser Black-backed Gull

Larus fuscus

Old pit records in the years 1951-1960 were of extremely small numbers - less than 10 - in March, April, September and October; these are consistent with the periods of spring and autumn passage. There were also 2 in the new pit on 18 July 1965.

In the 1990's, recorded in all months with increases again reflecting the passage months but while these higher figures occur in March from mid-month, there is no obvious increase in April (except 34 on 15 April 2000), although in three years a rise was noted in mid-May. Noted as early as 1 July but more 'high' numbers occur in August than in any other autumn month with regular counts of up to 45, often in the last third of the month (and a remarkable count of 390 on 31 August 2000). September 'highs' – to 35 – seem to occur mostly from mid-month (though 88 on 6 September 1998). Increases have also been noted in November in six years – up to 26, and the highest count for that month was on 1st in 1995 when circa 100 present in the late afternoon.

2001-2006: 126 on 31 October 2001 ties in with previous 'November' increases and in 2003 a minimum of 90 moved south-west in small groups on 20 November.

Herring Gull

Larus argentatus

Perhaps not always noted in the 'early' years but there were records of small numbers – up to 25 – in the 1951 and 1952 winters, and to the end of April in the latter year. Present in September 1967, especially 20-23rd when c.200 were attracted by dead fish in the new pit. The only other

record that year was of 10 in the old pit on 17 November. c.10 were noted on single dates in January and April 1958 and 40 were present in the new pit on 31 May 1959.

Present year round during the 1990's with peak numbers occurring in late October and November – several counts of 100-180. Fewer, generally, December to March, though increases occur in cold weather e.g. 180 on 5 January 1997. An increase in some years at the end of April may reflect passage birds. Extremely few in most years in June and July but higher numbers at that time in the last two years may be associated with the increase and spread westward of breeding pairs. 172 counted on 19 June 2000 and 10-20 present in July. A pair nested on the west side in 1999 but the eggs were taken.

Yellow-legged Gull

<i>Larus michahellis</i>

There are three records of single adults – 29 November 1994, 9 August 1995 and 21 August 1997.

2001-2006: One on 11 December 2004.

Iceland Gull

<i>Larus glaucoides</i>

Dave Weaver recorded a first winter bird on 8 January 1982.

Glaucous Gull

<i>Larus hyperboreus</i>

There were single records in the last two years – an adult on 23 January 1999 and an immature on 19 March 2000, both on the west side.

2001-2006: A first winter bird was with a group of Herring Gulls on 24 November 2006.

Great Black-backed Gull

<i>Larus marinus</i>

The only reference in 1950's is to 50 on the 'airfield' on 5 November 1957 and this, with 1990's records is in keeping with the general status in the county in that the peak month is November. Although seen in all months in very small numbers, virtually all higher counts (15-35) have been from late October to December. In 1997, 30 were present on 26 September.

2001-2006: At least 70 moved south-west in 75 minutes on 20 November, initially arriving in the main bay then setting off in small groups with the previous species.

Kittiwake

<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>

In 1997, an immature was present in the main bay on 25 February and an adult there on 30 April. Another adult seen on 11 August 2000.

Sandwich Tern

<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>

The only record in the 1950's was of two in the old pit on 14 April 1958. Noted as seasonally regular by R and S Phillpott but no dates or numbers available. There are 8 records in 4 years of 1990's, mostly of single birds. In spring on 16 and 19 May; in autumn three of the sightings from 24 July to 6 September were between 18 and 23 August.

2001-2006: Occurred in 1's and 2's end July 2001 and intermittently end July to 2 September 2002 with unprecedented 83 on 18 August and 23 on following day. Recorded again in 2005 between 2 July and 18 August: maximum 21 birds.

Common Tern

<i>Sterna hirundo</i>

There were only two spring records in the 1950's – 4 in the new pit 19-27 May 1951 and one there on 20 April 1958. The main feature, which has been reflected in the 1990's, was the occurrence of large numbers resting on the 'airfield', close to the new pit in early August. Circa 200 were present 2-4 August 1951 and on 4 August 1952; at least 50 were seen there on 19 August 1953. Dave Weaver saw two birds on 9 May 1980 but made no later visits so whether they were the forerunners of the 1990's breeding stock cannot be ascertained. In 1984 10 in the west pool on 10 August may have been the remnants of a larger flock. The latest date for either pit was 18 September 1957. Spring arrivals in the 1990's were between 19 and 28 April but on 13 April 1996. A pair bred or attempted to on a small 'islet' in the long bay until 1998, managing to rear 1 or 2 chicks in some years despite the attentions of Crows and Cormorants (who used it as a loafing spot). Failed in 1996 and 1998 and probably in 1995. The failure in 1998 and the intermittent presence of birds in 1999 were probably due to the then increased number of Canada Geese trampling over the islet. In 2000 the birds were not seen after 21 May. Maximum number seen in spring was six but in autumn, in some years, as in 1950's there were sudden arrivals of post-breeding birds: 74 on 7-9 August 1992, 52 on 4-5 August 1994, 13 on 14 August 1997, 37 on 21-24 July 1995 and 23 on 23 July 2000. The first indications of 'fresh' birds were from early to mid-July. Last dates ranged from mid-August to 12 September.

2001-2006: Post-breeding figures in the main report are echoed by 10 at end July 2001 and 54 on 4 August 2002. Only other sighting was one on 25 April 2004.

Arctic Tern

<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>

Of six terns seen resting together on 5 August 1986, four were this species. Single birds also seen on 22 July 1995 and 8 August 1994.

2001-2006: One on 3 August 2001.

Little Tern

<i>Sterna albifrons</i>

Birds seen at either pit during the 1950's and to 1965 were from the nearby colony on Hythe Ranges. In 1951 birds gathered in the new pit with 10 present on 28 April and 25 on 10 May, though only 4 on following day. The only similar gatherings in subsequent years was in 1959 when 9 pairs indulged in fish flight/presentation display in the new pit on 10 May. Two other years deserve specific mention: in 1958 4 birds were at the old pit on 20 April, one carrying a fish (display?) two days later. A 'pair' was present on 3 May and 3 birds were fishing on 13 June. It is possible that a pair may have bred away from the ranges colony, but that is a thought in hindsight. In 1960 my only spring visits were confined to 4-19 June when a pair were displaying in the old pit on 6th and 3 birds were at the new pit on 19th. Six birds were seen resting on a small shingle 'islet' in the old pit on the only visit of the year – 18 July 1965.

Only two records in the 1990's – singles on 10 August 1991 and 22 July 1995.

Black Tern

<i>Chlidonias niger</i>

Recorded in 1990's only. Two birds on 1-2 June 1991 and 13 May 1993, and singles on 13 April and 1 September 1996. The April date was apparently the second earliest for the county.

2001-2006: An early autumn record on 14 July 2002, and three in evening of 24 July 2004.

Little Auk

Alle alle

A storm-blown bird was present in the long bay from 22 – 25 November 1996.

Stock Dove

Columba oenas

Strangely, I have no recollection but my notebook refers to this species being more numerous than Woodpigeon on the 'airfield' in summer and early autumn of 1951 – 1953. The numbers involved, of course, may have been very small at that time of year; there were, for instance, no mature trees bordering the A259 as there are today. The highest number noted in the relevant period was 12 in the old pit in late June 1953. The only subsequent notes are 'some' flying over on 5 and 19 August 1956 and 'a few' on 16 October 1957.

During the 1990's there are only six records in the first four months, notably 30 on 1 January 2000; most records are in the autumn and seem to fall into three periods : mid to end July; late August to late September and early November. Usually small – 1 to 3 – numbers involved but a flock of 60 flew west on 8 November 1998 and 25 in same direction on 9 November 2000.

2001-2006: At least 150 were with Woodpigeon on 4 November 2002 and 20 present on 2 December 2006.

Wood Pigeon

Columba palumbus

I have virtually no mention of this species in my early 1950's notebooks and from 1956 to 1962 only three significant references although there were very irregular records of 1-3 birds throughout. A minimum of 150 flew south-west in 45 mins from 05.30 on 19 August 1956; 60 were in one isolated hawthorn tree at the old pit on 17 January 1960 and regular westerly movement observed for at least two hours from dawn on 8 October 1961. During the 1990's, often only the more significant flocks were noted and these between November and early March. The largest number on the ground was 700 on 3 February 1991 on what is now the west pit, and during January/February 1995 feeding flocks of 1000-1500 birds overflowed to south-west each morning. The only comparison figures are for birds frequenting the trees adjacent to the A259: 17-25 January-March 1995; 25 January-March 1999 and 70 January-March 2000. Some westerly movement noted in late October-early November in some years but no large numbers. Several pairs nest in boundary trees and hedges.

2001-2006: A minimum of 1770 in flocks of 50 – 200 overflowed to west in 90 minutes on 4 November 2002.

Collared Dove

Streptopelia decaocto

The species was recorded in Hythe in 1960 but the first record for the pit was of 2 on 18 July 1965. During the 1990's 2's and 3's regularly seen flying over the site but no large gatherings noted.

2001-2006: Up to 60 came to feed on sweetcorn remains in the west field from mid-September to mid-October 2003.

Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>
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Summer records (from 27 June) in the first 15 years presumably refer to nearby breeding or post-breeding birds coming to the pits to feed, though 4 to 8 birds during May 1956 and 1958, and in June – to 13th in 1957, '58, and '60 more likely to have been migrants. Of two July records one in 1965 concerned some 30 birds flying south-west in two's and three's on 18th. Most regular in August and up to 20 occurred on four dates in 1952 and one in 1957.

During the 1990's there was only one May record and two in early June – all single birds. Present annually in July/August but as early as 19 June and as late as 7 September. Often only one bird but up to 4. The best year was 1999 when up to 4 seen regularly throughout July and August.

2001-2006: Singles on 10 dates in all, the most notable being 28 April and 4 May 2002 – the earliest recorded. Two birds present 20 July 2003 and one on 20 June 2006.

Ring-necked Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>
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One flew east over the site on 25 April 2000.

Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>
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In the three years of the 1950's in which the species was recorded, the first dates in April were 24th, 26th and 27th. In 1990's the first birds were seen at the pit (or heard in the distance) during the last third of April in most years, the earliest was on 14th in 2000. Most regularly seen at or over the pit from mid May to mid June presumably looking for hosts, although they seemed to be even more regular in the first four or five years of the decade despite an increase of one of the host species - Reed Warbler - in the last two or three years. Very few records in July and August, the latest being 9 August.

2001-2006: 18 April 2002 was the second earliest and 24 August 2001 the latest record.

Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>
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During 1950 – 1953 several were found dead under telegraph poles and wires on the north side of the old pit (roughly where the wind-surfers hut is today). One seen hunting over the 'airfield' at dawn on 25 March 1959. Reported by R and S Phillpott as occasionally seen 'close to the pit' during the years 1984-1988. In the 1990's one hunting at dawn on 11 July 1993 but not seen on any other date nor reported by anglers who camp overnight. In the winters 1994/95 – 1996/97 a bird, presumably the same one, roosted in the cement mixing plant at the works and (again presumably) was the one found moribund on Christmas day 1996. Another was already hunting in the area by 5 January 1997 and was seen until 21 March. The only other sighting was of one on 2 Feb 1999.

2001-2006: One on 27 October 2001 was the first for two and half years. One hunting at dawn 13 November 2004. In 2006 one seen in the evenings near the works from early April to mid May.

Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>
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One in an isolated Hawthorn at the old pit on 22 November 1959 was the only one seen in the 1950's. Reported by R and S Phillpott as occasionally seen 'close to the pit' during the years 1984-1988 but no specific dates given. According to the workmen, two pairs bred at the works in 1991 (one under a tarpaulin on the ground, the other in a dumper truck). A bird was seen near

the east fence on 5 February 1992, one occasionally on a lamp standard near the works entrance during July 1993, and one flushed from a conifer adjacent to the A259 on 5 March 2000.

2001-2006: Singles on 29 October 2001; 25 January and 15 September 2002, and 10 September 2006.

Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>
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2001-2006: One at dusk hunting over the north end of the main bay on 4 April 2003.

Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>
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There were three records of single birds 1956 – 1959 of which two referred to wintering birds – on 27 December and 29 March but the third – one over the ‘airfield’ on 17 June 1956 – lends belief to the possibility of nearby breeding. In the KOS cards there are records of two on 17 January 1970 and on 20 November 1974. Only one recent record: 1-2 hunting regularly between 17 November 1991 and 20 February 1992.

2001-2006: One flushed from a post on the north boundary on 25 September 2004, one hunting on 20 October 2004.

Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>
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First dates, where recorded in the 1950’s, fell between 26 April and 8 May (though “not until well into May” in 1952). The latest record in those years was 18 September 1957, the same date as in 1984. The only movement noted was on 21 June 1959 when 300 flew south-west in one hour. First dates through the 1990’s were similar: 24 April to 11 May, and the only significant feeding number in spring was c100 on 22 May 1996. West or south-westerly movement noted in June in some years with rates of 3-500/ hr. Last sightings often mid to late August and up to mid September but the very latest was on 8 November 1998.

Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
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There were two records in the 1950’s, both at the new pit – singles on 13 January 1951 and 5 April 1958. Later sightings (from KOS record cards) were on 18 November 1972, 11 November 1976 and 1 January 1986.

Annual during the 1990’s, most records occurring as scattered sightings from July to October. Also seen in December in three years, and April/May in four years. In 1995 and 1999 1 or 2 birds were seen regularly August to November.

2001-2006: One or two seen regularly in March 2002 (few previous records in that month) and on two dates in each of January & December 2005.

Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>
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A scattering of records of 1 or 2 birds (once 4) in the autumn and winter months of the 1950’s but only two in spring – 13 May 1958 and 1 April 1959. In the 1990’s a similar number observed most often from July to September but occurrences in most months in the last two years reflect a general increase.

2001-2006: The increase mentioned above was maintained.

Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopus major</i>
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Seen only in the last three years. All single birds – on 30 May and 11 September 1998; 4 November 1999; 9 and 19 October 2000.

2001-2006: Sightings continue to increase – seen on six dates in September/October 2001; on 15 & 20 May and four dates August – October 2002; irregularly on 14 dates mid-August to mid-November 2003. Singles on eight dates August – October 2004 with three birds in west hedge on 1 September. However on only three dates in 2005 and not recorded 2006.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopus minor</i>
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A most unexpected visitor was disturbed near the east fence on 3 February 1991.

Wood Lark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>
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One on the west side of the site on 5 March 2000 was the only record.

2001-2006: A second record on 24 October 2002.

Sky Lark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>
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Hardly ever noted during the 1950's, possibly because it was so common then. The only references to breeding birds were 3 pairs in the old pit spring and summer 1952 and 4 singing on the 'airfield' 23 March 1958. 50 on 10 October 1957 was the only 'large' number noted. Five singing birds were reported by Peter Wells on 8 June 1984 and in the 1990's breeding birds were recorded annually in the area between the pit and the A259 – two pairs, occasionally three were constant: two other pairs bred elsewhere on the site in some years. Numbers present in winter months generally 10-15 but greater numbers occurred during periods of cold snowy weather. e.g. 80 on 10th and 32 on 25th December 1995; 63 on 27 January 1996; c100 on 29 December 1996 and 200 on 1 January 1997. The last mentioned were mostly in cabbages on the west side (very cold weather).

Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>
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The only 'early' first date in the years 1950-1965 was 26 March 1960; the latest was 8 October 1961. There was also a record on the KOS cards of one on 25 March 1970. Significant numbers, bearing in mind the much smaller area in the 1950's, were noted in 1952: 80-100 on several dates April/May and in 1958: 'large numbers' 22 September. Several records fall between late spring migrants and the first autumn ones i.e. first week June to first week July which suggests in hindsight that a few pairs may have bred (the works area was never 'explored' in those years); one seen on 20 June 1987 adds further weight to the suggestion. However circa 100 on 6 June 1960 could not be explained in that way.

During the 1990's, arrivals or first dates were recorded between 19 March and 10 April, spring passage continuing to early May. Autumn birds, presumably dispersing juveniles, started to appear from 6 July and exceptionally early and amazing numbers of 2-3000 occurred on 22 July 1966; 900 on 31 July 1973; and 1000 on 16 July 2000 – in the evening on all dates – but more normal feeding flocks of 50-100 occur regularly in August. The only significant movement was on 30 August 1993 when birds passed at a rate of 3-5000/hr for the two hours the observer was present. Latest date seen was 15 October 1995. Breeding was suspected in 2000 when at least 2 and up to 20 present throughout June but no nests were found. (Four nest holes were

discovered in July 2001 in an area of the works not previously checked, one of which was being used).

2001-2006: The first recorded breeding occurred in 2001 – one pair; and there were two pairs in 2003. The latest autumn date was 29 October 2003.

Swallow

Hirundo rustica

Extremely sparse records in the 1950's and only referred to in four years. No 'arrival' dates noted but latish birds seen in mid to late October in three years. "Very many" on 22 September 1958 ties in datewise with the previous year when "huge numbers, many thousand" passed s.w. along and offshore on 23 September.

During the 1990's first dates ranged from 30 March to 13 April and passage occurred to third week May – max: 120 feeding birds on any date. A single pair bred each year at the works. Autumn movement noted from 6 August and large (for the site) numbers seen through to third week September – maximum 3-5000/hr; or even early October – 600/hr on 11 October 1998. The earliest date of significant autumn numbers was 24 July 1999 when at least 70 birds present. Last dates fall between 22 October and 17 November.

2001-2006: Significantly earliest date was 18 March 2002. Large feeding numbers present on 22 September 2001 – c.1000 – and on 2 September 2003 when 500 to 1000 were hawking over the west bay in the evening.

House Martin

Delichon urbica

As with the other hirundines there are almost no references to the species in the 1950's. Earliest and latest dates at the old pit were 2 April and 21 October. First dates in the 1990's were between 10 and 28 April. No large numbers recorded in spring but in autumn 200 or more off-passage birds present on dates between late August and the first days of October. However, in 1985 Peter Wells noted c.300 hirundines – mostly this species – on 4th and 8th August. Last dates noted between 8 and 31 October.

Tree Pipit

Anthus trivialis

Only one record – a single bird on 31 August 1998.

2001-2006: One on 17 September 2002.

Meadow Pipit

Anthus campestris

Recorded irregularly each year during the 1950's in numbers usually less than 10 but 'many' were noted on the aerodrome on 20 October 1957 and 30 counted on 22 September 1958. The only certain reference to breeding was of a nest at the new pit in 1957 but an exasperating end of year comment in 1951, in that it was more numerous than Skylark on the 'airfield' may have meant breeding birds. In 1984, Peter Wells noted six birds displaying on 8 June.

Numbers of pairs breeding during the 1990's varied as the site changed through ballast extraction and back-filling and became more or less attractive but a reasonable comparison can be made between the years 1995 when 6 pairs bred and 2000 when certainly one pair and possibly two did. More often than not 10 or less counted but numbers can reach 20-30 in December/January. The only 'high' March figure was 32 on 24 March 1996. Autumn movement noted as early as 5 August but most regularly recorded in September and early October, though

small groups were moving east on 12 November 1999 and a peak of 20-30 had been noted in four years on 19-21 November. The greatest number of grounded birds was 65 on 4 October 1998.

2001-2006: c.50 present on 2 & 16 December 2006.

Rock Pipit

<i>Anthus petrosus</i>

Not noted in the 1950's. Few spring records in the 1990's: one present from 1st to 17th March 1996, and singles on 28 March and 1 April in 1999 and 2000 respectively. Of 17 autumn records, 10 occurred in the first half of October, and 3 in the first half of December. All singles except 2 on 11 November 1990 and 5 October 1997. The earliest was on 24 September 2000.

2001-2006: One on 18 March 2005 but the latest recorded spring passage birds occurred as singles on 8 & 13 April 2001; seen on six dates from 30 September in 2002, four of them in first half October.

Yellow Wagtail

<i>Motacilla flava</i>

Records through the 1950's refer only to spring and autumn migrants from 19 April to 9 May and 5 August to 18 September. However 1 or 2 were present on the 'airfield' throughout May 1958, though apparently not subsequently.

During the 1990's, the first arrivals were between 6 and 15 April, and passage birds occurred in small numbers to 9 May. In 1999 and 2000 1 possibly 2 pairs bred, though may have done so in earlier years of the decade when the area covered was less: a family was seen by Pat Miller on 29 July 1989, and there were single date sightings in July 1992, June 1993 and July 1997. Autumn migrants seen from 10 August but regular and constant from third week of the month. Latest dates occurred in the first week of October in six years. A reedbed roost in the works area was 'discovered' in 1994 which contained Pied and Yellow Wagtails, the latter present during August and September. Maxima for this species were 100 on 10 Sept. 1995; 40 on 26 August 1996; 48 on 15 Sept. 1996; 40 on 14 Sept. 1997. It was interesting to observe that that this species left the roost as a 'unit' before Pied Wagtails started their protracted exodus. The roost disbanded in 1998.

2001-2006: Notable arrival dates were 1 April 2001, 3 April 2002 and 28 March 2004.

Grey Wagtail

<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>

In the 1950's recorded in three years, the lone 1958 sighting being in January. Early migrants were seen in the old pit on 20th (3) and 27 August (2) in 1952. 5 flew south-west on 25 September 1960.

During the 1990's noted in January/February in three years but only regularly in one – 1996. Not seen later in spring. First autumn birds occurred between 27 August and 9 September in six years but most records were in October, 2000 being a particularly good year. No more than 2 birds seen at any one time.

2001-2006: Previously undetected spring passage indicated by singles on 2 April 2001 & 31 March 2002. In autumn up to 3 on 17 dates 2001; 10 dates 2002 (from 28 July); 26 dates in 2003 and singles on 9 dates 2004 with three on 31 December. Much poorer in 2005 – only seen in January and only one record in 2006.

Pied Wagtail**Motacilla alba**

Although nests were found in the 1950's – and nestlings ringed – the only notebook reference was of 10 at dusk on 17 November 1957 and 20 at dusk in the old pit on 28 December 1959. In view of the presence of an autumn/winter roost at the inner lagoon during the 1990's, it is tempting to think that a roost may have been established as early as that. The species features regularly in winter notes, (especially late afternoon) by others 1970 to 1984 though no counts over 11. The 'recent' roost was discovered in 1994 but broke up in 1998 due to disturbance and removal of some of the reeds. Peak numbers were – 1994: 125 on 9 October; 1995: 155 on 15 September and 180 on 15 October; 1996: 102 on 15 September 1997: 163 on 26 October and 140 on 1 November. One to three pairs nest annually.

2001-2006: The highest ever roost counts were 169 on 31 December 2001 and 281 on 21 November 2002. Only 40 counted on 24 December 2006.

White Wagtail *M. a. alba*

In 1957, 1958, and 1959, single males were present on 21 April, 22 April and 29 March respectively. Not seen annually in the 1990's but 8 records of 1-2 birds occurred between 14 March and 6 April (6 between 1-6 April); two birds stayed from 28 April to 4 May 1998, and singles were seen on 24 April and 2 May 1999. One autumn sighting – on 24 September 2000.

2001-2006: Seen on seven dates in spring 2001 – 2003 between 17 and 31 March.

Waxwing**Bombycilla garrulus**

In 1996, small numbers (6-14) appeared intermittently from 16 January to 8 April either in the trees bordering the A259 and close to the main entrance or along the east path.

Wren**Troglodytes troglodytes**

Almost all pre-1990's records are of one or two birds at the old pit between end September and the end of January. A minimum of 5 were seen on 8 October 1961. During the 1990's, 1-3 present in winter months and at least two pairs bred. 'Increases' to 4-6 birds have been noted in autumn from 9 October to 20 November and there is also some evidence to support the Lincolnshire 'theory' that numbers increase after bonfire night.

Dunnock**Prunella modularis**

In the late 1950's 1-3 birds were recorded intermittently at the old pit between the end of October and February; a pair in spring 1958 and two pairs in 1959 may have bred. Often ignored in 1990's but noted from 1995. Then, 2-3 pairs in spring, and in autumn peak counts of 9 On 9 October 1997, 13 on 16 October 1998 and 14 on 30 September 2000.

Robin**Erithacus rubecula**

Apart from 3 on 22 November 1959, 1950's records were of single birds between 8 September and 28 October 1957 and on 25 September and 31 October 1960. In the 1990's 1-3 were present December to February and one or two pairs hold territory in spring and presumably breed though no juveniles have been noticed.

There was no indication of any spring passage but autumn increases suggesting passage occurred mostly in October (7-10 birds), but also 12th – 17th September (8 birds) and 9th-13th November (7 birds) in 2000.

2001-2006: Peaks of 11 – 12 on 20 & 27 September and 21 October 2001; 19 on 13 October 2002 and 14 on 2 October 2003; 28 on 15 October and 33 on 30 October 2004. In 2005 largest number seen was eight on 4 November but there were very few October visits that year.

Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>
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One present and singing daily from 2 – 9 May 1999 at the southern end of the boundary hedge along the Botolph's Bridge road.

(White-spotted) Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica cyanecula</i>
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2001-2006: One seen and heard briefly on 17 March 2002 was almost certainly of this race.

Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochrurus</i>
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A single bird was at the old pit on 28 March 1958. Forty years later, one on the same date, and another on 9 April. In 1999 two were singing from the superstructure of the works machinery on 4 April, one staying to 16 May but failed to attract a mate. The only autumn record was of three birds on 30 October 1981.

Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>
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Three records in the 1950's and 1960's – singles at the old pit on 25 September 1957, 1 May 1960, and 10 October 1966. Dave Weaver found three along the northern boundary, near the railway line on 7 May 1980 and one was at the same place on 1 October 1995.

2001-2006: One on 22 September 2001. In 2004 one on 10th & two on 15 September.

Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>
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All birds recorded in four years of the 1950's were at the old pit in autumn, occurring from 4 August to 29 September and there is some indication of adherence to 22-24 August and 30-31 August. 1-4 birds were involved except for 11 on 23 September 1957. Three were noted on 25 – 30 August 1973. One of only two spring records was of 2 on 7 May 1980.

In the 1990's seen in all years except 1996 and 1999. Once in spring – on 25 May 1991 – and of 20 autumn records 6 occurred between 15 and 27 August and 7 between 13 and 18 September. There were October sightings in three years, the latest on 8 October 1995. Most records were of single birds, a few were of 3 or 4, and maxima were 7 on 18 September 1994 and 9 on 15 September 1991. There is possibly little significance to be drawn from a comparison of bird days for all 1950's autumn figures and all autumn 1990's figures: 1950's = 43; 1990's = 34.

2001-2006: Very few birds seen since the leasing farmer stopped growing cereal crops after 1998. Earliest date occurred in 2001 – on 28 April the latest were 13 October 2001, 12 October 2002 and 15 October 2004.

Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>
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One's and two's were seen irregularly through the winter months at either pit in most years of the 1950's. Extreme dates were 8 October and 19 March. In 1958 a male appeared at the new pit on 17 April, was joined by a female on 20th though not heard singing until 27th. A nest was eventually found just outside the area – on the edge of the ranges, opposite the current works entrance. During the 1990's 1-3 (very occasionally 4) birds were present in the winter months, extreme dates being 28 September and 26 April but mostly from 9 October to early January.

2001-2006: In 2001 first autumn birds – 2 – on 26 September (the earliest yet) and 5 present 7 – 13 October. Up to four birds in November/December 2006.

Northern Wheatear

<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>

Few spring records in the 1950's, the most significant being a pair at the new pit on 15 March 1952 (joined by 3 males on 23rd), which stayed to July and presumably bred in the vicinity. A pair (plus 2 males) on the aerodrome on 5 May and a male near the new pit on 6 June 1960 may be indicative of nesting close by. Seen in autumn in all reportable years but by far the most protracted series of sightings was in 1957: ones and twos at the old pit on six August dates from 2nd, regular through September –peak 7 on 23rd – and last on 2 October. Birds were also present on the 'airfield' from 1 to 10 September, max: 30 on 1st. The only other large autumn number was of up to 20 in last week August 1951, again on the 'airfield'. D. Weaver recorded 4 on 7 May 1980. Not seen in all years of the 1990's but four spring records ranged between 17 and 24 April and six autumn ones between 14 August and 1 October, almost all single birds. The latest date by several weeks was of one on 5 November 1976.

2001-2006: Birds on 18 March 2001 and 17 March 2002 were the earliest in recent years

Ring Ouzel

<i>Turdus torquatus</i>

2001-2006: One on 20 October 2001 and another on 26 October 2003.

Blackbird

<i>Turdus merula</i>

At least one pair bred at the old pit 1956-1960. The only figures suggesting migrants were 15 on 2 October 1957 and 25 on 8 October 1961. During the 1990's at least three pairs nested in the 'greater' area. Higher 'migrant' numbers in autumn occurred between 9 and 29 October (max: count 12) and in mid-November (16). There were also up to 14 on 8 December 1996, 21 December 1997 and 26 December 1998.

2001-2006: Peak passage numbers 35 on 31 October 2002 and 23 on following day. 32 were counted on 22 October 2003. These recent higher peak numbers are due to regular checking of the west hedge – adjacent to Botolph's Bridge road. 11 on 12 December 2002; 10 on 14 December 2003, 11 on 31 December 2004 and 15 on 17 December 2006.

Fieldfare

<i>Turdus pilaris</i>

Only one winter record in the 1950's – 8 in the old pit on 24 January 1958. In March 1960 spring migrants appeared on 16th and 20 March – 2 and 4. Dave Weaver recorded 'large numbers' (no count) on 24 January 1979 and 200 mixed Redwing/Fieldfare on 23 December in the same year. During the 1990's most records refer to overflying birds in winter from mid-November to early February in very low numbers, occasionally to 10. In 1996 2-4 birds were present from 17 January to 4 February (45 on 21st), then 28 on 21 February. Obvious passage birds were seen in three of the years between 2 and 9 March and on 2 April 1993; in autumn also in three years, between 22 and 26 October.

Song Thrush

<i>Turdus philomelos</i>

Seems to have been a very irregular visitor to the old pit; seen on a regular basis only through 1957. Of the handful of records in other years, two are significant: minimum 20 on 29 September 1958, and 10 on 8 October 1961. Records remain irregular during the 1990's with no indication of autumn passage but highest numbers – up to 10 – persistently from mid-November to late January but especially in December. 20-25 were counted in late December 2000. A pair nested in 1995 and 1997.

2001-2006: Up to 21 in north field January 2001 & 12 during February. Extensive Ragwort growth covered the north field from 2003 thus becoming unattractive but eight were in the boundary 'hedge' on 1 December 2006. First (ever) proper indication of passage was 9 on 10 & 31 October 2002 and minimum 10 on 7 & 8 March 2005.

Redwing

<i>Turdus iliacus</i>

The only note in the early years is of one bird in the old pit on 24-26 January and two there on 30 November 1958. In the 1990's occurred during colder periods December – early February, often 10 or less but 50 on 17 January 1990, 80 in late December 1996 and 42 in late December 1998. There were 7 March and 7 October single figure records, the earliest being 7 October 1994 and the latest 27 March 1995.

2001-2006: Only records worth noting are 'many' heard at dawn on 28 October 2001 and 18 in the west hedge on 8 March 2005.

Mistle Thrush

<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>

A total of six records covers the years 1958-1961: 1 in January, 2 in spring (including juveniles in 1961), and the rest in late autumn with 6 on 29 September 1958 and 11 (8 on the 'airfield') on 22 November 1959. During the 1990's noted fairly regularly January to March and October to December but not, generally, in other months even though a pair nested in two years. Almost always 1-2 birds seen but 7 on 23 October 1995.

Cetti's Warbler

<i>Cettia cetti</i>

2001-2006: Single birds heard in the west hedge on 15 September 2003 and 25 April 2004. Singing by the Long Bay on 21 August and recorded on another 11 dates to mid-December. 2004. Two birds present on 20 October, 31 October – 2 November & 21 November. One calling on 23 February 2005 and one heard intermittently November – December 2006.

Sedge Warbler

<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>

Compared to Reed Warbler, this species was almost exclusively seen at the old pit during the 1950's, although notebooks contain very little reference to breeding, At best it would seem there were two pairs. Most notes are of birds in autumn, though in very small numbers, and last dates in three years were between 23 and 29 September.

The only reference by D. Weaver was of 6 birds on 7 May 1980. During the 1990's one pair bred annually at least from 1995. Arrival dates fall between 13 and 25 April and last dates between 8 and 18 September.

2001-2006: The 2001 arrival date equalled the previous earliest and the latest date for recent years is 27 September 2003. Three pairs bred in 2003 and five birds were singing through May/June 2004.

Marsh Warbler

Acrocephalus paulstris

2001-2006: One singing in the west hedge 2 – 5 June 2005.

Reed Warbler

Acrocephalus scirpaceus

The only reference in the early period was of 3 pairs in the reeds at south end of the old pit in July 1965 (and only one pair of Sedge Warbler). The lack of sightings may be due to observer negligence or, in the first years, inexperience of song, (though the species was recorded elsewhere). It may also reflect the increase in abundance of the species (and likewise the decrease of the previous species) between 1950's/1960's and the 1990's. Peter Wells recorded 3 singing birds on a survey in June 1984.

During 1990's singing birds counted in May/June increased through the decade though part of the increase was due to access to a greater part of the complex. However 5 in 1991-1995 did increase to 7 in approximately the same area towards the end of the decade. The totals in the 'greater' area in 1999 and 2000 was 13 pairs; a peak of 21 singing birds on 21 May 2000 presumably included off-passage birds. Arrivals were between 19 and 28 April and latest were seen in last week September and to 8 October.

2001-2006: Number of singing birds in spring 2001, on date comparable to 2000 (20 May) was 28 – increase of 7. 25 singing mid-June 2002 but even more on 28 May 2003 – 35. Only full count in 2004 was 29 singing on 23 May. 23 singing mid-June 2005.

[Hippolais Warbler

Hippolais sp.]

[2001-2006: A bird very briefly seen in the west hedge on 14 August 2002 was thought to be Melodious Warbler.]

Lesser Whitethroat

Sylvia curruca

Single birds singing at both pits from 11 to 25 May 1958 was the only reference in the early years. During the 1990's, most records refer to spring migrants. Arrivals noted between 22 April (2000) and 7 May (1995 and 1997); and the last birds between 21 and 26 May. Isolated instances of 4 singing birds on 9 June 1993 and 1 on 7 June 1996 do not necessarily suggest breeding though one singing throughout May 2000 might. Seven of ten autumn records fell between 21 and 30 August and the latest was 17 September 1992.

2001-2006: Singles on 10 and 13 April 2001 were remarkably early. A pair bred in 2001. Five birds present on 25 May 2006.

Common Whitethroat

Sylvia communis

Single birds were recorded at the old pit in first ten days of May 1956 and 1958 and also on 17 June in the former year. In 1957, two were present on 8 August and up to 5 on 4 dates from 30 August to 5 September.

During the 1990's at least one pair and possibly two or three have bred annually. First dates ranged from 16 April 1996 to 28 April 1999. Infrequently seen in autumn and then only 1-3 birds. Last dates between 27 August and 21 September.

2001-2006: One on 24 September 2002 was the latest recorded.

Garden Warbler

<i>Sylvia borin</i>

Remarkably, the earliest spring record was of two birds near the old pit on 21 April 1951 and the only other was on 18 May 1993.

In autumn in the 1990's, all but three occurred between 21 and 28 August, the others being on 6 and 7 August and 17 September. All single birds.

2001-2006: Singles on 28 and 30 April 2001. In three autumns occurred from 25 - 27 August (up to three) but as early as 16th. Latest date was 19 September 2004.

Blackcap

<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>

There are no records from the 1950's and indeed in the 1990's not before 1996 though this probably partly due to more attention being paid to the peripheral bushes around the whole site from that year. Singles noted on 15th, 22nd and 24th April in 1996, 1997 and 2000 respectively. In 1999 1 was singing in bushes bordering the A259 from 2 – 30 May with 2 on 4th and from the 21st. Only three autumn records – all in 1999: 1 on 29 September, 3 on 26 October and 1 on 17 November.

2001-2006: Earliest arrival date was 9 March 2002. Three together on 25 October 2001, singles on only two dates Sept/Oct 2002 but up to three on 5 dates Sept/Oct 2003. Singing throughout June 2002 and 2003.

Chiffchaff

<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>

The only records in the 1950's were of singles at the old pit on 30 March 1958 and 1 April 1959. In the 1990's 'arrival' dates fell between 18 and 22 March and the last in spring generally 19-22 April, though also on 12 May 1999 and 7 May 2000. One on 30 June 1999 seemed an odd date. In autumn, most regular from mid-September to mid-October but as early as 10 August in 1997. Often 2's and 3's; higher numbers were 7 on 1 October 1995, 8 on 12 October 1998, 15 on 12 September 2000 and 26 on 1 October 2000. Latest date was 9 November. Overwintering birds were seen on 6 January 1995 and between 26 December 1998 and 22 January 1999.

2001-2006: Two on 3 January 2001. Arrival dates 16 March 2001, 12 March 2002 and 2003 all earlier than previous dates. Autumn peak of 23 on 20 September 2001 and 22 on 16 September 2003; 38 on 25 September and 21 on 29 September 2004. Up to three birds present in December 2006, one on 15th considered to be of an 'eastern' form.

Willow Warbler

<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>

The only mention in the 1950's notes was of 4 at the old pit on 1 April 1959 and one on 3 April 1960. During the 1990's, first dates occurred between 3 and 15 April and not seen later in the spring than 27 April: Maximum 4.

Autumn birds occurred from as early as 23 July but more often from first week August, last noted on 1 October. There is a suggestion of two periods of peaks – 22-29 August and 12-19 September and up to 15 have been recorded in the former and 20 in the latter.

2001-2006: Most extreme first and last dates were 27 March 2001 and 12 October 2004 (but 31 March 2005 was earlyish). Autumn peak numbers were 9 in both 2001 and 2002; 14 on 15 August 2005 and a minimum of 30 on 25 August 2006.

Goldcrest

<i>Regulus regulus</i>

Present in conifers on the east side of the old pit in the first week of October 1957 and 1961 – maximum 6.

In the 1990's recorded as spring migrants in three years – up to 3 on dates between 14 and 19 March and on 2 April. Most autumn records were in October, often 1-3; maximum 11 on 21 October 2000, but to 13th November in 1994 and as early as 19 September in 1995. Presence in winter noted only in 1999, on 7 February and twice in December, and in 2000 – twice in December but as with other passerines this probably due to the more regular coverage of the hedge bordering the Botolph's Bridge road.

2001-2006: Early autumn dates similar to previous ones were 19 September 2002 and 18 September 2003. Highest number was 14 on 21 October 2001 – all in west hedge. Up to four present in first week of December 2006.

Firecrest

<i>Regulus ignicapillus</i>

Just one record – one seen and heard in the Botolph's Bridge road hedge on 5 April 2000.

2001-2006: The previous lone record is augmented by singles on 21 October 2001, 13 October 2002 and 21 October 2003. Two on 15 October & 2 November 2004.

Spotted Flycatcher

<i>Muscicapa striata</i>

Recorded only in the 1990's, once in spring – 1 on 15 May 1994 – and on 4 occasions in autumn. 2 on 18 September 1994, 2 or 3 on 27/29 August 1999 and 1 on 22 August 2000. All in the Botolph's Bridge road hedge.

2001-2006: Additional autumn records are one or two on 29 – 31 August and 22 September 2001; and singles on 10 September 2002, 16 September 2003 and 25 August 2006.

Pied Flycatcher

<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>

A single male at the old pit on 25 September 1957 is the only early record. One on 16 April 1981 reported on KOS record cards may refer to the pit area.

2001-2006: Remarkably a bird on 11 August 2002 was only the second recorded – and an early date generally for the species.

Bearded Tit

<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>

A single bird was seen briefly in the reeds at the south end of the main bay before flying off to s.w. at 07.30 on 12 November 1998.

2001-2006: Up to eight 28 October to 1 November 2001 and in 2006 two birds in the same place 21 November to 1 December, then 3 from 10th to 17th.

Long-tailed Tit

Aegithalos caudatus

Not recorded in the 1950's. Becoming increasingly regular during the 1990's – very scarce in autumn and /or January/February until 1996 when 1-3 birds intermittently seen throughout February and March. In 1999, 5 on 30 May preceded 12 – 23 regular from 4 August to 31 October and also twice in December. Again in 2000 small numbers were constant from 27 June to end October and 44 were counted on 6 July.

Marsh Tit

Parus palustris

One in the west boundary hedge on 26 October 1999.

Coal Tit

Parus ater

A marked passage in coastal localities occurred in 1957 from mid-September to late October and it was in this period that the only bird recorded in the 1950's was seen: one in the old pit on 10 October. Of the seven records in the 1990's, four (with up to 4 birds) occurred in October, the others, all of single birds were in July, August and November.

2001-2006: The first mid-winter record occurred on 29 January 2001 – a lone bird. One on 14 November 2004.

Blue Tit

Parus caeruleus

Recorded at the old pit in 1957, 1958 and 1959 but 1957 was the only year in which the species was seen regularly. In September there were two on 13th and five on 19th then 1-2 throughout October with seven on 4th and 5th and five on 25th. Although these were small numbers there was no really suitable habitat to attract the species and they did occur (with the exception of the first date) within the KOS reported period – 15 September to 27 October – when an exceptional influx took place. *In just one small patch of bushes within 100 yards of the pit, on the nearby Hythe Ranges, birds were noted from 25 September to 28 October with a minimum of 30 being present on 10 October.*

Seen on only four dates in the other two years, though a nest was found in a metal post adjacent to nearby gardens on 21 June 1959. In the 1990's often overlooked but noted most regularly in autumn. Family parties seen on 30 August 1997 and 25 August 2000. Maxima 9 on 18 September 1995 and 8 on 15 December 1996.

Great Tit

Parus major

Not recorded in the 1950's. During the 1990's seen regularly during the spring and December to February. No more than 3 birds seen at any time.

2001-2006: Regular autumn records since 2000, due to more attention paid to the west hedge, show highest numbers in second half of August.

Red-backed Shrike

Lanius collurio

A juvenile was present in the old pit on 8 August 1951.

The species was recorded as regularly breeding on the ranges before World War II, and used to nest in Hythe and Seabrook up to at least 1952 and it is quite possible that a pair still bred on the ranges in 1951.

Jay	Garrulus glandarius
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2001-2006: Two on 27 October 2002 flew off to north-east when disturbed. One on 15 October 2004.

Magpie	Pica pica
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During the 1950's, seen infrequently at the old pit in 1's and 2's except on 19 August 1956 when 6 together were probably a family party. On one of only two visits in 1983 – 18 October, 5 were seen. In the 1990's, 2-3 regularly in spring and 3-5 in autumn, though 5-7 in October 2000. Higher counts were 8 on 5 April 1996; 7 on 12 December 1999; 18 on 28 December 1997 and 20 on 24 February 2000. At least one pair breeds and numbers seem to be increasing towards the end of the decade despite dozens being 'controlled' (since 1998) on the nearby ranges.

2001-2006: 11 present during March 2002 but 17 on 16 September 2003.

Jackdaw	Corvus monedula
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Not noted in the 1950's. During the 1990's birds flying over tended to be ignored. The records as such seem to occur mainly in April/May and October/November when up to 10 present. Seen harassing nesting Oystercatcher in 2000. The highest count was 24 on 7 February 1999.

2001-2006: 24 were present on the east side on 4 August 2002 and 34 on 10 March 2005. Overflying birds from the corvid roost in nearby Lympne Woods rarely counted but c.150 in 1 December 2006 and c.250 on 24 December 2006.

Rook	Corvus frugilegus
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No reference in the 1950's and only occasionally recorded in the 1990's, mostly in November – January when up to 45 gather on one of the 'tip' areas. Occasionally seen February and once in May.

Carrion Crow	Corvus corone
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3–5 birds regularly seen, year round, during the 1990's and 7 counted on 27 April 1997. One or two pairs nest in the peripheral trees.

2001-2006: 15 present during March 2002 is an increase on previous highest.

Hooded Crow	Corvus corvix
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One seen on 12 January 1997.

Raven	Corvus corax
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A bird was watched flying south over the line of Botolph's Bridge road hedge, being mobbed by Crows and Jackdaws, on 2 May 1997.

Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
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Significant references in 1956 – 1960 are to birds in March. In 1958, 200 were on the 'airfield' on 23rd and 'many' moving east on 26th; 800 present on the 'airfield' on 20th. Virtually ignored during the 1990's although flocks of migrant or roosting birds were noticed. The only counts of grounded birds were in December/January in 1999 and 2000, when 100-130 were on the grassed backfill south of the main bay.

2001-2006: 132 birds using the 'wagtail' reed bed roost on 31 December 2004.

House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
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The only records in the 1950's were of flocks of juveniles in August 1958 and June 1960. 130 were present on the north side of the old pit on 4 August 1958 and more than 150 three weeks later.

Tended to be recorded during the 1990's from 1995 onward when significant flocks, mainly of juveniles from mid-July to end August, were encountered. Maxima were 230 in 1995, 45 in 1996 and 1999, and 60 in 2000. The only note in 1998 was of 70 on 20 September.

2001-2006: Numbers appear to be declining further, peak numbers being 33 on 30 July 2002 though a slightly encouraging minimum 60 on 7 September 2003. Not always counted in 2005 & 2006 but noted as being more regular in the latter year.

Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>
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1-2 were seen on single dates in April 1957 and 1958, and May 1958. Apart from 7 on 8 September 1958, all other records were of birds in October and November. Flocks numbering between 12 and 25 were present between 27 October and 25 November in three years and on 4 October 1957 small groups totalling 100 flew east across the area. The largest number in spring was 'minimum 30' on 27 March 1973 (KOS record cards).

During the 1990's the largest numbers were present in the winter months – December/January of 1995/96 and 1998/99 with maximum counts of 32 and 37 respectively. Apart from 13 on 5 September 1999 all other records were of 2-3 birds (once 6) on single dates in February – 2 years; March – 3 years; August – 2 years; October – 4 years and November – 2 years. The birds in winter frequented an area of rough weed-strewn ground and hawthorn hedge adjacent to the extreme n.w. corner of the site, flying in to feed or drink from time to time. This 'wild' area was cleared and levelled in late 1999 for Southern Water redevelopment.

2001-2006: Recorded on seven dates in October 2003 with 17 on 26th. Three on 17 October 2005 and four on 23 August 2006.

Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
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Of only three reports in the 1950's, two referred to visible migration in spring. 160 flew north-east parallel to the coastline in small flocks from 16.00 – 17.00 on 30 March 1958 and circa 200 on the same heading a.m. on 24 March 1960. During the 1990's the number recorded at any one time did not exceed 5 but birds were most frequently seen in October. Always a few in winter months but apart from two May records and one in August, not seen between March and October.

2001-2006: "At least" nine on 4 December 2005 would seem to be significant.

Brambling

<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>

A single male was present in the old pit on 4 November 1952.

In the 1990's, of the 10 records in six years, 7 occurred between 9 and 27 October, 2 others in November and 1 in December. Max: 10 flying s.w. on 24 October 1994.

2001-2006: Earliest autumn record was on 25 September 2001; the first ever spring record was of a male on 22 March 2002 and the second on 28 March 2004.

Greenfinch

<i>Carduelis chloris</i>

Noted only, and very occasionally, in the winter months in the late 1950's. Highest count was 30 on 19 January 1958, feeding on a pile of spent hops. In the 1990's, 1-2 pairs probably bred in the gardens adjacent to the east side of the area and commuted to pit-side trees. Migrant or feeding flocks recorded on 17 November 1993 – c100; 27 November 1994 – c50; and 28 September 1998 – c30. The only spring number of note was 18 on 14 April 1998.

2001-2006: An unusual winter record of 30 on 22 January 2003.

Goldfinch

<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>

Almost all the few records from the 1950's refer to small numbers – max: 10 – in autumn from 10 August to 31 October though in 1958 very small numbers were seen at the old pit from May to September. In the 1990's small numbers – less than 10 – in March/April in six years may have been migrants as also two records in May. Apart from 4-6 birds appearing in July 1999 and 2000, autumn records were from 9 August to 22 October with flocks of 200 on 8 October 1995; 'many' on 19 August 1997; 70 on 7 October 1998 and 60 on 29 September 1999. Last date was 4 November.

Siskin

<i>Carduelis spinus</i>

Not recorded in all years of the 1990's but in 1993, 1994 and 1997-2000. Only twice in spring – 1 on 14 March 1993 and heard on 30 March 1997. Occurred in October of each year mentioned but in the two 'good' years, 1994 and 1997 noted from 23 September and 14 September respectively. Birds were often heard and not seen but when detected were in flocks of up to 20. In 45 minutes on 21 September 1997 a total of 60 flew east or north-east. Recorded in November – up to 24th – in three years and there were December occurrences in 1993, 1994, and 1999. 16 flew north on 12 December 1993 and 8 were in trees near the Beach Bank caravan site on the 25th; birds were heard on 24 December 1994 and 20 flew north on 31 December 1998.

2001-2006: Two seen in the west hedge on 6 January 2001. Previous spring records doubled by 2 on 28 April 2001; one on 23 March 2002. The second earliest autumn record was on 19 September 2001. No overflying migrants seen or heard in 2004, 2005 and 2006.

Linnet

<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>

Recorded breeding in the 1950's was confined to the old pit – 2-4 pairs annually though recorded as numerous with 30 pairs on 22 April 1958, presumably not all in the old pit. Flocks occurred in August e.g. 3-400 on north side of the pit on 2 August 1957 and 'many' noted moving west on 19 August 1956. Present in mid-January in two years. During the 1990's probably 4-6 pairs breed

on the whole site. Birds are mostly absent November to January (though 13 on 1 January 2000), the first birds appearing 10-17 February and in some years not until March. Becoming more regular and numerous in March e.g. from 5th in 1993 and 26th in 1996. However, the only significant spring count was 80 on 18 April 1997. Autumn flocks occurred from late August through to early/mid-October but 30 on 6 August 2000 and 60 on 3 November 1995. Peak numbers varied from 40 to 200.

2001-2006: 61 on 10 August 2005 was the second earliest autumn flock. A group of 12 on 2 December 2006 was noteworthy.

Twite

<i>Carduelis flavirostris</i>

A group of three birds was seen at the new pit on 23 March 1960 and there were five records of migrants during the 1990's – 3 in October and 1 each in February and March, 1 or 2 birds each time except for a group of 7 on 27 October 1994.

Lesser Redpoll

<i>Carduelis flammea</i>

Except for those in 1997, passage migrants occurred from 9 October to 23 November in 1's and 2's, occasionally 4. There was a protracted and regular migration in 1997 from 21 September to 1 November with 14 on 26 October and minimum 20 on the last day. Also three records of single birds in late December/early January.

2001-2006: Birds not recorded at this time of year before were one on 7 May 2001 and three on 2 September 2002. Passage in 2002 continued to 23 November. Not recorded in 2006, though very few October visits that year.

Bullfinch

<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>

One in the old pit on 3 August 1957 was the only 1950's record. During the 1990's recorded at least once annually to 1997 – in January, March, May, July and August. 1 or 2 birds on each occasion except on 20 August 1991 and 26 August 1997 when family parties were present on the east boundary bordering private gardens. Hawthorn and Blackthorn in some of these were thinned extensively in 1998 and Rosebay Willowherb – a Bullfinch favourite – was cleared.

2001-2006: Sightings only in the winter period – singles on 3 January 2001, 9 January 2002 and 5 March 2003.

Hawfinch

<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>

2001-2006: Remarkably this unexpected species occurred twice in 2002 – on 25 November and 5 December.

Lapland Bunting

<i>Calciarius lapponicus</i>

There were two records of single birds in the 1990's, on 6 December 1995 and 16 November 1999.

2001-2006: One flew west on 16 December 2006.

Snow Bunting	<i>Plectrophenax nivalis</i>
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Three birds were present at the new pit on 23 March 1960 and a single bird was disturbed south of the main bay on 20 December 1998.

Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>
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Breeding is suggested by the presence of two pairs at the old pit in spring and summer 1952, one pair for the same period 1953 and a pair in June 1958. 'Several' pairs were noted along the Botolph's Bridge road hedge in spring 1952. Most other records were of small numbers, less than 10 in October and November but a flock of c70 on 12 January 1958 was interesting. During the 1990's seen from the last few days of October to mid-January (and also on 26 February 1995), often in periods of colder weather. The Hawthorn copse at the north end of the long bay and bushes in the extreme n.w. corner of the site seem to be most favoured.

2001-2006: Only seen on two dates in October 2002 (just two birds) and up to three on three dates in December 2006.

Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>
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Figures suggest 1-2 pairs breeding at the old pit during the 1950's and at least a further 3 in the 'airfield' dykes. In 1957 six pairs were noted in the area now covered by the pit site. During the 1990's the breeding number has maintained at 2 pairs, though at least 1 or 2 more singing males in some years. Peak counts (of migrants?) which were all in the last week September or first week October, appear to have dropped over the decade e.g. 22 on 24 September 1994, 12 on 6 October 1996, 10 on 4 October 1998. No increase was noted in 2000.

2001-2006: Autumn passage period extended to 18 October. Peaks of 17 in 2001, 15 in 2002 and 13 in 2004. Surprisingly 10 flew out of the wagtail roost on 30 December 2003.

Corn Bunting	<i>Militaria calandra</i>
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In 1952, one was present at the old pit on 20 August. Ignorance of the call and song was the possible reason why others were not recorded in the 1950's, though one was noted as singing just outside the area on 21 April 1957. In the KOS record cards there is a reference to 14 at 'West Hythe' on 5 January 1963 but the exact location cannot be established. Some observers in the past have used that locality when referring to the gravel pit.

During the 1990's at least one pair bred (two singing) in 1991 in the area now covered by the west pit and one was singing there on 7 April 1994. Other spring records occurred in 1992, 1994, and 1996 between 30 January and 27 February including counts of 5 and 7 plus a single bird on 3 April. Autumn records were of 1-2 birds in November 1990, 1994, 1995 and 1997.

2001-2006: The first for some years – a single bird – seen on 11 and 12 May 2002.

TABLES

The following tables help to illustrate the distribution and changes in the principal species occurring at the site. They have been extended to 2004. Table 1 indicates more than anything else the exceptional winters of 1995/96 and 1996/97:

Year	Number of birddays	Number of visits	Birddays average	Total no. of species	Pochard birddays	Average	Tufted birddays	Average	Pochard/ Tufted ratio
1991/92	151	28	5	12	23	0.8	99	3.5	1 : 4
1992/93	410	41	10	12	85	2.1	168	4.1	1 : 2
1993/94	161	52	3	10	18	0.3	96	1.8	1 : 5
1994/95	108	82	1	9	7	0.1	46	0.6	
1995/96	2,326	113	21	16	670	5.9	666	5.9	1 : 1
1996/97	566	42	13	13	91	2.2	141	3.4	2 : 3
1997/98	282	35	8	9	33	0.9	165	4.7	1 : 5
1998/99	38	52	1	12	3	0.1	38	0.7	1 : 12
1999/00	140	55	3	9	29	0.5	74	1.3	2 : 5
2000/01	286	66	4	10	65	1.0	101	1.5	2 : 3
2001/02	229	81	3	12	40	0.5	29	0.4	4 : 3
2002/03	562	66	9	14	116	1.8	108	1.6	1 : 1
2003/04	144	67	2	13	15	0.2	28	0.4	1 : 2

Table 1: Winter (Oct/Mar) duck numbers, excluding Mallard, at Palmarsh Gravel Pit

Table 2 shows the decline of Mallard numbers over the period. The bailiff started shooting in 2001:

Year	Oct – Mar				Nov – Feb		
	birddays	no. visits	average		birddays	no. visits	average
1991/92	1,324	27	49		1,084	17	64
1992/93	2,045	40	51		1,603	27	59
1993/94	2,376	51	47		1,942	27	72
1994/95	4,684	83	56		3,962	57	70
1995/96	3,419	109	31		2,711	72	38
1996/97	1,095	42	26		808	23	35
1997/98	1,106	35	32		815	24	34
1998/99	1,149	45	26		872	32	27
1999/00	2,146	60	36		1,472	34	43
2000/01	2,654	63	42		2,115	38	56
2001/02	1,790	76	24		1,242	44	28
2002/03	592	66	9		224	41	5
2003/04	264	67	4		153	35	4

Table 2: Winter bird days for Mallard at Palmarsh Gravel Pit

Table 3 shows that, with the exception of Wigeon & Pochard, the overall average for the represented species in each of the two years is the same or very close:

	Oct		Nov		Dec		Jan		Feb		Mar		Total	
1995/96	No. of days	Avg no.	No. of days	Avg no.	No. of days	Avg no.	No. of days	Avg no.	No. of days	Avg no.	No. of days	Avg no.	No. of days	Avg no.
Wigeon	1	3	1	1	5	2.5	3	2	6	46	1	1	17	23
Gadwall	1	1	--	--	13	8	5	4	5	6	1	3	25	6
Teal	1	2	1	2	13	7	6	9	6	3	1	39	28	7
Pintail	--	--	--	--	2	1	2	1	2	1	1	4	7	2
Shoveler	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	3	8	3	5	4	18	3
Pochard	1	2	6	7	12	6	11	15	20	21	4	`	54	13
Tufted	--	--	6	2	11	5	4	25	23	19	16	3	60	11
Goosander	--	--	--	--	--	--	1	2	--	--	--	--	1	2
Merganser	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	16	2.5	8	2	24	2
Smew	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	15	3	2	1	17	3
1996/97	No. of days	Avg no.	No. of days	Avg no.	No. of days	Avg no.	No. of days	Avg no.	No. of days	Avg no.	No. of days	Avg no.	No. of days	Avg no.
Wigeon	--	--	--	--	3	15	1	118	--	--	--	--	4	
Gadwall	--	--	2	1	8	9	2	4	1	2	--	--	13	
Teal	--	--	--	--	1	5	2	13	2	1	--	--	5	
Pintail	--	--	--	--	--	--	1	2	--	--	--	--	1	
Shoveler	--	--	--	--	5	3	1	6	--	--	--	--	6	
Pochard	--	--	--	--	4	13	3	7	3	2	4	2	14	
Tufted	--	-	2	3	4	10	5	13	1	1	1	1	13	
Goosander	--	--	--	--	3	2	1	2	--	--	--	--	4	
Merganser	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	1	1	7	1	8	
Smew	--	--	--	--	1	2	2	2	-	--	--	--	3	

Table 3: Presence of selected duck species at Palmarsh Gravel Pit

In the previous table February/March were much busier in 1995/96 than in 1996/.97. This is further illustrated in Table 4:

		More than									
Year	Month	2 sp.	3 sp.	4 sp.	5 sp.	6 sp.	7 sp.	8 sp.	9 sp.	10 sp.	
1995/96	Oct	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
	Nov	6	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
16	Dec	18	12	7	3	1	-	-	-	-	
species	Jan	8	6	4	4	4	2	-	-	-	
in all	Feb	24	23	15	8	5	3	1	-	-	
	Mar	16	10	4	2	-	-	-	-	-	
Year	Month	2 sp.	3 sp.	4 sp.	5 sp.	6 sp.	7 sp.	8 sp.	9 sp.	10 sp.	
1996/97	Oct	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
	Nov	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
13	Dec	7	5	4	4	1	-	-	-	-	
species	Jan	3	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	
in all	Feb	3	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	
	Mar	4	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	

Table 4: Number of days on which presence of multiple duck species at Palmarsh Gravel Pit 1995 - 1997

Pochard and Tufted Duck are the two earliest species to appear at the onset of colder weather. Table 5 provides details of the 1995/96 winter:

Year	Pochard			Tufted Duck			Pochard/ Tufted ratio
	birddays	no. visits	average	birddays	no. visits	average	
1991/92	3	17	0.2	--	--	--	--
1992/93	40	14	2.9	12	14	0.9	3.0 : 1
1993/94	71	22	3.2	62	22	2.8	1.1 : 1
1994/95	132	14	9.4	102	14	7.3	1.4 : 1
1995/96	420	25	16.8	439	25	17.6	1.0 : 1
1996/97	4	21	0.2	51	21	2.4	0.1 : 1

Table 5: Bird days and ratios of Pochard & Tufted Duck 1995/96 at Palmarsh Gravel Pit

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Avocet							18/3		4/4	3/4	22/4	29/3		28/3
LR Plover	28/ 4	3/4	11/5	13/4	2/4	23/3	31/3		18/4	2/4	3/4	16/3	29/3	18/3
Black-t. Godwit	6/4	3/4				16/3				9/4				
Spotted Redshank								14/4		2/4	22/4	13/4	8/5	20/4
Green- shank	28/4	4/5	18/4	20/4	10/4		23/4	17/5	23/5	26/4	23/4	16/4	22/4	25/4
Whimbrel	21/4	4/5		19/4		21/4	27/4	26/4	17/4	30/4	20/4	4/5	17/4	13/4
Common Sandpiper	24/4	23/4	25/4	19/4		24/4	24/4		18/4	21/4	18/4	28/4	25/4	16/4
Common Tern	28/4	29/4	20/4	22/4	21/4	13/4			28/4	28/4	10/5			25/4

Table 6: Spring arrival dates of selected waders and terns at Palmarsh Gravel Pit

The most regular wader species in spring or autumn are Green and Common Sandpiper. In 1999 during the shingle extraction process on the west bay, part was left as a shallow or exposed area which proved attractive to waders and is well shown in the table below. Table 7 gives bird days for both species:

Year	Spring					Autumn			
	Common	Peak	Green	Peak		Common	Peak	Green	Peak
1952	--	--	--	--		11	--	21	--
1957	--	--	--	--		32	--	--	--
1991	12	10/5	3	24/4		18	31/7	8	15/9
1992	11	20/5	--	--		28	9/8	4	--
1993	15	10/5	1	--		28	2/8	6	22/9
1994	10	15/5	1	--		19	1/8	8	--
1995	21	11-14/5	2	14/4		21	--	7	
1996	10	19/5	1	--		19	11/8	11	18/8
1997	7	--	3	--		41	28/8	20	--
1998	--	--	--	--		44	11/8	7	--
1999	10	16/5	9	4/4		69	4/8	112	3/8 & 5/9
2000	51	5/5	17	3/4		70	27/8	86	--
2001	40	13/5	9	22/4		78	9/8	55	10/8
2002	31	16/5	10	14/4		69	10/8	96	30/7 & 1/9
2003	--	--	--	--		104	18/7	98	27/7

Table 7: Bird days for Green and Common Sandpipers in the 1990s at Palmarsh Gravel Pit

These figures can be shown alternatively as daily averages in table 8:

Year	Species	April	May	June	July	August	September
1991	Green	1	nil	N/A	N/A	1	N/A
	Common	1	2	N/A	N/A	1.5	N/A
1992	Green	nil	nil	N/A	1	1	
	Common	2	2	N/A	1.7	1.5	N/A
1993	Green	1	nil	N/A	1	1	N/A
	Common	1	2.1	N/A	1.6	1.6	N/A
1994	Green	nil	nil	N/A	1	1	1
	Common	1	2	N/A	1	1.4	1
1995	Green	1	nil	N/A	1	nil	1
	Common	1.2	2.1	N/A	1.3	1.2	1
1996	Green	1	nil	N/A	nil	2.5	1
	Common	1	2.2	N/A	1.5	2.3	1.3
1997	Green	3 (1 date)	nil	N/A	nil	1.2	2
	Common	1	1.3	N/A	1.7	2.4	1.6
1998	Green	nil	N/A	N/A	N/A	1	1.2
	Common	2 (1 date)	N/A	N/A	N/A	2.2	2.2
1999	Green	2.6	N/A	N/A	2.8	3	3
	Common	2	N/A	N/A	2.3	2	1.3
2000	Green	1.9	nil	2.7	2.3	2	2.2
	Common	1.6	5.4	nil	2.2	2.2	1.6
2001	Green	1	nil	1	1.2	1.5	1
	Common	1.1	4.4	nil	2.4	2.6	1.1
2002	Green	1	nil	.7	2.7	2.9	1.9
	Common	2	2.4	nil	2.3	2.2	1.4
2003	Green	1.5	nil	1.6	2.1	1.8	2
	Common	nil	1	nil	2.8	2.4	2.3

Table 8: Daily average per month for Green and Common Sandpipers

The number of wader species recorded each month March to September during the 1950s and from 1991 is shown in table 9. It is worth noting that the August 1952 and September 1957 figures compare very favourably with those in the 1990s given that there were far fewer visits and that they were all recorded in the 'old pit', a fraction of the current size.

Year	March	April	May	June	July	August	September
1951	4	4	3				
1952	4	4	5			10	
1953	4	4	4				
1956	4					9	8
1957	6	9	6		4	6	11
1958	6	10	8				
1959			5	3	4		
1991	7	6	8	2	2	6	3
1992	4	8	7	2	7	6	5
1993	5	6	8	3	7	5	
1994	7	8	7	5	7	8	5
1995	6	9	8	3	7	5	7
1996	12	10	4	3	6	4	4
1997	9	7	7		4	7	5
1998	5	4	4		3	7	8
1999	6	6	7	7	9	10	6
2000	8	16	12	7	13	12	11
2001	8	15	12	11	9	12	7
2002	12	10	12	6	9	12	13
2003	8	11	8	7	12	14	9
2004	9	15	6	4	13	14	9
Highest number	12	16	12	11	13	14	13
Average since 1991	7.6	9.3	7.8	4.3	7.8	8.7	7
Average since 1999	8.5	12.0	9.5	7.0	10.8	12.3	9.1

Table 9: Number of wader species per month in 1950s and from 1991

The regularity of species occurrence over the years is shown in the final table:

Species	March	April	May	June	July	August	September
Oystercatcher	10	9	10	11	10	6	3
Avocet	2	3		1		1	1
Little Ringed Plover	10	11	9	8	12	8	3
Ringed Plover	1	5	10	6	5	7	3
Golden Plover	2	3			1	3	4
Grey Plover	2	1	6				
Lapwing	13	7	5	9	12	13	13
Little Stint			1		1		3
Temminck's Stint			2				
Knot				1			
Curlew Sandpiper							2
Dunlin	7	6	8	2	7	10	10
Ruff			1			1	1
Jack Snipe	9	3					
Common Snipe	13	7	3		1	5	8
Woodcock	1						
Black-tailed Godwit	1	3	2	1	2		
Bar-tailed Godwit		1	3				
Whimbrel		8	5		1	2	
Curlew	5	6	2	3	2	1	1
Spotted Redshank		4	1	1		3	
Redshank	13	8	6	5	7	9	7
Greenshank		9	10	1	8	9	7
Green Sandpiper	9	9		6	11	12	11
Wood Sandpiper			1	1	1	2	
Common Sandpiper		13	12	4	13	13	12
Turnstone			2			2	
Black-winged Stilt							1
TOTAL species	15	19	20	15	16	18	17
TOTAL spring	25						
TOTAL autumn					22		

Table 10: Number of years (1991 – 2003) in which species recorded in each month