

## Mapping Bedfordshire's Birds

This was last done between 1988 and 1992 and with the rapid changes now known to take place within bird populations it's time to map them again. This can seem a daunting exercise at first but there's a period of five years in which to track down the more elusive species and it does give a real boost to one's birdwatching to know that every record counts. To make things easier the county is divided into tetrads (2 by 2 kilometre squares) and the birds can be assigned to three main categories: possible, probable and certain breeders depending on the appropriate evidence. For possible breeding status only the presence of a bird in possible nesting habitat is required if this is in the breeding season. Most, but not all, sightings will fall into this category at first. The challenge then becomes to up their status from possible to probable to certain. For probable breeding status birds singing on more than one date, or displaying, or nest-building or visiting a nest-site, will do. This is trickier than it sounds, or rather than the bird sounds, because singing birds can often use more than one song post or sing not at all on one's next visit - Lesser Whitethroats, for example, seem to choose a different hedgerow every time! For confirmed breeding, eggs or eggshells or recently fledged young will do - but again one has to be careful, especially near the edges of tetrads, as birds move around.

Easiest, of course, are the birds on one's home patch, and the grounds of Turvey Abbey make an excellent start. All the commoner species are present with the exception now of a few such as House Sparrow and Spotted Flycatcher. We are also privileged to be within the 'territories' of such exciting birds as Buzzard, Hobby and Sparrowhawk and there can't be many places where one can sit out in the garden and watch these birds displaying. This also makes for some interesting liturgies - those moments of deep silence for which we are noted are really only there so I can listen to the birds.

Br. John

