

**A SURVEY OF THE BIRDS  
OF  
CLEEVE HILL COMMON**



**2023**

**By**

**ARTHUR BALL**

## **CLEEVE HILL BIRDS – 2023.**

I completed a total of 16 counts in 2023.

My coverage of the Common was over the same routes taken in previous years, as follows:

**Circuit 1.** Left from the Golf Clubhouse, along the boundary wall down to the Postlip end of the Common, and then in a clockwise direction to the “Washpool”. From there, up the valley onto the golfcourse, and back to the Clubhouse.

**Circuit 2.** Parking at the radio aerials overlooking Prestbury. From there, left along the boundary wall to the golfcourse, then in a clockwise route bordering Circuit 1, down to the wood at Postlip Warren and back to the aerials.

**Circuit 3.** Parking at the Whitehall carpark, and from there, along the boundary wall to the radio aerials (West Down), then right, bordering Circuit 2, down to the woods and back along the boundary wall to Whitehall.

## **HIGHLIGHTS FOR 2023**

The previous year had been the warmest on record but 2023 proved to be even hotter. It was declared the warmest year on record globally. It was also the wettest on record! March was surprisingly warm and dry but from then on, there was periods of torrential rain, which continued right up to the end of the year. This caused flooding in places that had never seen flooding before.

In addition to my monthly bird counts, I led four guided walks throughout the summer months for The Trust, RSPB Gloucester, Dursley Birdwatchers, and Cheltenham Bird Club. The Bird Club visit was very successful with good views of Ring Ouzels, Wheatears and Whinchats. We had some new members who were beginner birdwatchers with us and we had to stress that all guided walks are not always that successful!

The late Summer and early Autumn weather brought several storms from the south-west with up to gale force winds. This seemed to deter winter birds that were arriving in the north-east to head westwards. There were several reports of many Waxwings arriving on the East Coast but they did not seem to venture too far west this year. I did not see any locally this time. The extremely wet conditions continued and when I did my last bird-count of the year, the ground was so saturated, it made walking difficult in places and there were patches of standing water, which if almost unheard of on Cleeve Common.

## CLEEVE HILL BIRDS - 2023.

### Visit 1 (January 15/16th)

2023 began with extremely heavy, prolonged rain, causing localized flooding. Today promised to be dry so I decided to do my January count, although Sunday is not the best day to choose as there is bound to be a lot of the public on the Common by mid-morning. Although dry, it was only 4 degrees on arrival and it was not light enough to begin my walk until 0800. There was a stiff, very cold breeze from the north-west. There were few birds to be seen until I reached the bottom of Dry Bottom, where there were 7 Redwings finishing off the remaining hawthorn berries. A flock of 22 jackdaws were soaring over the Washpool Valley. I had been diagnosed Type-1 diabetic in late 2022 and I thought I was getting to grips with the four injections a day and the rest of the medication, but just before I reached the Heather Enclosure, I had a critical "low" alarm on my diabetic sensor which I wear on my arm. I could not risk going on, so headed back to the car, taking in some sweets and a cereal bar. This raised my blood-sugar level a little and by the time I got home it was at an acceptable level. I was obviously mentally ready to tackle the Common but not physically yet! By the time I returned to the carpark, it was jammed with cars. Some were even parked up the centre of the carpark, making it difficult for some people to get out! So, I decided to try to make the count over two days and the following day, I parked at the Westdown carpark and did the rest of the count from there. Wardens Wood was very quiet but I did find a pair of Marsh Tits in the area I have recorded them previously. It is the only site locally where I find Marsh Tits. Halfway up the Westdown strip, there was a flock of 12 Skylarks and 9 Yellowhammers, all feeding on the ground. When they were disturbed, they flew up into the bushes on the boundary wall. I tried to determine what they had been feeding on but it was not at all obvious. As soon as I moved on, they all returned to the same place to continue feeding. A pair of Stonechats and 4 Meadow Pipits were in the Heather Enclosure. There were few birds on the high ground. I guess the cold wind was keeping them down. On my way back down Westdown a noisy Raven was calling from one of the pylons and I put up a Brown Hare. The Westdown Carpark was also full of cars by the time I finished my walk.

Circuit 1, 15/01/23

Circuit 2, 16/01/23

Circuit 3, 16/01/23

Weather: Bright & sunny but with a very cold breeze from the north-west.

Time: 15<sup>th</sup> - 0800-1000/16<sup>th</sup> - 0810-1040

Buzzard (1)

Pheasant (3)

Woodpigeon (9)

Woodpigeon (7)

Woodpigeon (5)

Skylark (12)

Skylark (2)

Skylark (2)

Dunnock (1)

Wren (1)

Meadow Pipit (4)

Robin (2)

Dunnock (1)

Robin (2)

Blackbird (6)

Robin (6)

Stonechat (2)

Marsh Tit (2)

Blackbird (2)

Blackbird (4)

Magpie (2)

Redwing (7)

Magpie (3)

Rook (26)

Blue Tit (2)

Carrion Crow (4)

Carrion Crow (6)

Jackdaw (22)

Goldfinch (5)

Yellowhammer (4)

Carrion Crow (2)

Yellowhammer (2)

## CLEEVE HILL BIRDS - 2023.

### Visit 2 (February 12<sup>th</sup>)

After a period of extremely hard overnight frosts, today was milder with only a light wind from the South. I was joined today by a friend who is excellent at hearing and spotting birds, even from great distances. We started the walk at 0730, covered the whole Common and finished at 1140, by which time, all the carparks were jammed and there were hundreds of people, and dogs, on the Common. February counts are usually fairly quiet. A few Robins and Song Thrushes were singing, and later Skylarks were in the air. In the lane beyond the 1<sup>st</sup> golf green, 9 Linnets were in the top of a bush and a single Greenfinch was nearby. As we approached Dry Bottom, a large flock of noisy Jackdaws were soaring overhead. I counted 90 birds but there were probably more. Usually by February there is a lot of noise from the rookery down at Postlip, but this time, it was totally silent and no sign of any Rooks flying around the area. There were few birds up the Washpool Valley and behind the slope where the wild daffodils grow, there were 9 Meadow Pipits in a together in a bush, and a single Redwing. It is unusual to find a Redwing on its own but I think many of them have begun to move northwards. By then there were several Skylarks singing all over the Common. We found no birds in the Heather Enclosure. On the way down Westdown there were 2 Bullfinches and nearby were 14 Yellowhammers high in a tree. There was also a single Great Spotted Woodpecker just before we reached Warden's Wood. The wood was very quiet. On the way back up Westdown a Raven was soaring ahead of us and a Buzzard was in the valley below. Another was flying along the escarpment.

By the time we returned to the car, the temperature had reached a mild 9 degrees. We found no Stonechats and it was strange that there was no obvious activity at the Postlip rookery.

Circuit 1, 12/02/23

Circuit 2, 12/02/23

Circuit 3, 12/02/23

Weather: Overcast and grey all day but dry with a light wind from the south.

Time: 0730 - 1140

Buzzard (1)	Buzzard (1)	Woodpigeon (3)
Woodpigeon (22)	Woodpigeon (3)	Great Spotted Woodpecker (1)
Skylark (5)	Skylark (8)	Skylark (5)
Dunnock (1)	Meadow Pipit (9)	Meadow Pipit (3)
Robin (3)	Dunnock (1)	Robin (1)
Blackbird (1)	Robin (2)	Song Thrush (1)
Song Thrush (2)	Blackbird (5)	Magpie (1)
Mistle Thrush (1)	Redwing (1)	Carrion Crow (2)
Blue Tit (1)	Mistle Thrush (1)	Raven (1)
Great Tit (4)	Blue Tit (4)	Chaffinch (2)
Magpie (1)	Magpie (7)	Bullfinch (2)
Jackdaw (92)	Carrion Crow (2)	Yellowhammer (3)
Carrion Crow (3)	Chaffinch (2)	
Chaffinch (6)	Linnet (8)	
Greenfinch (1)		
Linnet (9)		

## CLEEVE HILL BIRDS – 2023

### Visit 3 (March 12<sup>th</sup>).

In the last few days there had heavy snow showers but they cleared fairly quickly. Today dawned clear and sunny so I decided to get a count in a clear window in a period of very variable weather. When I got to the Common, there was still snow in the hollows and sheltered spots and in the areas that the public used most it was very muddy, making walking very difficult and hazardous. There was a fairly stiff breeze from the South.

I began my walk at 0645, completed the whole Common, and finished at 1115. My car had been the first in the carpark on arrival but when I left I counted 44 cars present and more were arriving as I left.

The wind was keeping the small birds down, but some were beginning to sing. Robins and Song Thrushes were most obvious with a few Skylarks and Chaffinches. By now, there is usually lots of activity coming from the rookery down at Postlip, but there was no noise from that direction, so I wonder if the colony has moved or been wiped out? I saw no Rooks on the whole walk today. The Washpool Valley was very quiet apart from the usual flock of 51 Jackdaws soaring overhead. At the top of the valley, the daffodil patch was just coming into flower. In the small valley leading up to the Heather Enclosure, two male Goldcrests were singing from the hawthorns there. There were a few Meadow Pipits in the Enclosure and they were beginning to display, so Spring can't be far off now!

There were very few birds on the Westdown strip and Warden's Wood was also very quiet. I did find a pair of Marsh Tits again. This is the only place I have seen Marsh Tits for the last two or three years. A pair of Goldcrests were also present with the male singing constantly. As I left the Westdown carpark four Linnets were on the boundary wall and a pair of Red-legged Partridges were just over the wall.

Four Meadow Pipits were displaying close to the Aerials and as I walked towards the lone tree at the Memorial Wall, I had a very bizarre sighting. I could see something large and dark on the mown track up to the Wall. Before I could get close enough to take a photograph, it was spooked by a dog and took off. It was a CANADA GOOSE! I have no idea why it would land on the Common, but it took off and flew off towards the Malverns, so was obviously not injured. Cleeve Hill Common can turn up anything at any time so we shouldn't be surprised.

The gorse had gone very brown after a brief mini-heatwave in 2022 but I noticed today that it was all just coming into flower again. The temperature at the end of my visit was a comfortable 10c degrees.

Circuit1, 12/03/23

Circuit 2, 12/03/23

Circuit 3, 12/03/23

Weather: Bright & sunny with a light wind from the South.

Time: 0645-1115

Woodpigeon (16)  
Skylark (3)  
Meadow Pipit (3)  
Dunnock (1)  
Robin (4)  
Blackbird (3)  
Song Thrush (2)  
Goldcrest (2)  
Blue Tit (2)  
Magpie (2)  
Jackdaw (51)  
Carrion Crow (5)  
Chaffinch (6)  
Linnet (2)

**Canada Goose (1)**

Woodpigeon (8)  
Skylark (8)  
Meadow Pipit (4)  
Dunnock (1)  
Robin (3)  
Blackbird (3)  
Song Thrush (3)  
Goldcrest (2)  
Magpie (2)  
Carrion Crow (3)  
Yellowhammer (4)

Red-l Partridge (2)  
Woodpigeon (10)  
Skylark (5)  
Meadow Pipit (5)  
Dunnock (1)  
Robin (2)  
Blackbird (4)  
Song Thrush (2)  
Goldcrest (2)  
Marsh Tit (2)  
Magpie (1)  
Jackdaw (5)  
Carrion Crow (2)  
Chaffinch (4)  
Linnet (4)  
Yellowhammer (2)

## **CLEEVE HILL BIRDS - 2023.**

### **Visit 4 (April 9th)**

#### **(Annual Dursley Birdwatching Society guided walk)**

The April weather so far had been a combination of showers and sunny intervals with more than average rainfall. Today, we met at the Aerial Carpark and were greeted by fairly thick fog. The forecast was for a sunny day so we were hopeful that it would burn off fairly quickly. A party of 13 members turned up and we set out toward the Dewpond. A Ring Ouzel had been spotted over where one of the water troughs had been installed the day before so we were hopeful that the southerly winds might have brought some more in overnight. There was no sign of that bird but the fog slowly began to lift but it was still very cold. A few Skylarks were singing and one or two Meadow Pipits were active but there was not much more to be found early in the walk. When we got to the Heather Enclosure, I pointed out the cleared area which is often described as the “bonfire” area on the opposite side of the valley. I told the visitors that this seemed to be the favourite area of the Ring Ouzels last year. Almost immediately, one of the members, who had set up a telescope, pointed out four Ring Ouzels in that very area. After so many years leading an annual walk for this group without finding them, this was very rewarding. Everyone got to see the birds before we made our way over to that area. When we got there, two of the Ring Ouzels sat in the top of a tree for everyone to see. Once the sun came out there were Chiffchaffs, Willow Warblers, Wrens and Song Thrushes all singing and a couple of Stonechats showed themselves on top of the gorse. Overhead we had a Red Kite, a Kestrel and a Buzzard. I was hoping to find a Wheatear as they had been spotted passing through but we were unlucky. We finished the walk at around 1230. It had been one of the more successful meetings for this group and they all went home happy! The list of birds seen or heard by me is below but some members may have a slightly different list.

Red Kite	Buzzard	Kestrel	Woodpigeon
Skylark	Meadow Pipit	Pied Wagtail	Wren
Robin	Stonechat	Ring Ouzel	Blackbird
Song Thrush	Chiffchaff	Willow Warbler	Blue Tit
Great Tit	Magpie	Jackdaw	Rook
Carrion Crow	Raven	Yellowhammer	

## **CLEEVE HILL BIRDS - 2023.**

### **Visit 5 (April 12th)**

#### **(Annual RSPB guided walk)**

The April weather so far had been incredibly variable with twice the normal expected rainfall in recent weeks. Today turned out to be a really poor day for birdwatching on the Common. We arrived in rain and extremely high winds, which would of course, keep the small birds down and out of sight. I half expected the group to decide to abandon the walk but they all arrived and put on their waterproofs. So, 13 hardy RSPB members set out. The first part of the walk was directly into the wind and it was so strong it made walking against it very difficult.

I had led a walk on the Common for the Dursley Birdwatching Society three days earlier and we did get to see four Ring Ouzels. I had led that walk for them for many years without ever finding Ring Ouzels, so they all went home happy. It was very unlikely we would find any today, due to the shocking weather. When we reached the daffodil patch, while the party were admiring the flowers, someone spotted a Buzzard sitting on a nest in the trees behind the daffodil patch. In spite of the high wind, there were a few Skylarks taking to the air in between showers and one or two Willow Warblers and Chiffchaffs were singing. We saw a very low number of birds and after several showers, it developed into heavy rain for the last ten minutes or so of the walk. This hardy bunch were still cheerful at the end and one lady told me that she had seen areas of the Common that she had never been to, so that made it all worthwhile! The list of birds below are the ones seen or heard by me. Some members may have a slightly different list. Sadly, a pretty poor list but we have no control over the weather!

Woodpigeon	Jackdaw	Carrion Crow	Meadow Pipit
Chaffinch	Kestrel	Blackbird	Buzzard
Chiffchaff	Magpie	Wren	Willow Warbler
Robin	Duncock	Great Tit	Skylark
Pied Wagtail.			

## **CLEEVE HILL BIRDS - 2023.**

### **Visit 6 (April 15th)**

The April weather so far has been extremely wet with the odd sunny period. I intended doing this count yesterday but it rained almost all day. Saturdays are not the ideal day to do the counts but I made an early start to avoid the dog-walkers who would be turning up later. I began my walk at 0630, completed the whole Common and finished at 1040. The forecast for today was good with a rise in temperatures and some sunshine. When I arrived, the Common was shrouded in heavy mist, but by the time I reached the top of the Washpool Valley, the sun came out. In spite of this, the wind from the East was extremely cold and I was glad that I had taken gloves, which remained on for the whole walk! After so much recent rain, there were patches of standing water, which is quite unusual on the Common.

There had been Ring Ouzel sightings recently and a few Wheatears had also passed through so I was quite hopeful. I had a few surprises today. The first bird I heard singing was my first Spring Blackcap and when I reached the 1<sup>st</sup> golf green I could hear a lot of noise coming from the field behind. Suddenly, a flock of Linnets flew up into the bushes, all continuously chattering. I counted 54 but there may have been more. I usually find post-breeding flocks but this was the first I have seen in the Spring. Skylarks were singing all over the Common and Meadow Pipits had started to display. There were very few birds in the Washpool Valley and at the top, the daffodil patch was in full bloom. When I led an RSPB walk earlier in the week, a member pointed out a Buzzard sitting on a nest above the daffodils and it was still sitting there today. Several Willow Warblers and Chiffchaffs were singing and there were 2 Stonechats in the Heather Enclosure. A little further on, there were 2 male Ring Ouzels, which as usual, were very unapproachable! Another surprise was close to the Wontley Gate. In an open area were 4 Brown Hares. There appeared to be three males harassing a female, who kept turning around to box their ears. This also seems a bit late as you normally see this activity in March. A flock of 12 noisy Jackdaws were overhead. Warden's Wood had lots of birds singing. There were Willow Warblers, Chiffchaffs, Blackcaps, Chaffinches and Song Thrushes, all in roughly the same area. The paths were extremely muddy due to the recent continuous rains. As I left the Westdown carpark, there was a flock of 19 Yellowhammers feeding on the ground. Again, Springtime flocks are unusual.

As I approached the Aerials, I spotted the tawny coloured leucistic Rook that I have recorded for several years. I did not see it last month and thought it had probably died but it was back in its usual feeding area close to the Aerial carpark. This was the only Rook I saw today

As I crossed the golf course, 2 Wheatears were feeding on the 14<sup>th</sup> fairway and a single Lesser Black-backed Gull was on the 18<sup>th</sup> fairway.

Circuit 1, 15/04/23

Circuit 2, 15/04/23

Circuit 3, 15/04/23

Weather: Heavy mist at the start but sunny and bright later.

Time: 0630-1040.

Buzzard (1)  
Lesser b-backed Gull (1)  
Woodpigeon (8)  
Skylark (10)  
Meadow Pipit (3)  
Wren (1)  
Dunnock (4)  
Robin (3)  
Wheatear (2)  
Blackbird (4)  
Song Thrush (2)  
Mistle Thrush (1)  
Blackcap (1)  
Chiffchaff (2)  
Willow Warbler (2)  
Blue Tit (2)  
Magpie (2)  
Jackdaw (6)  
Carrion Crow (10)  
Chaffinch (3)  
Linnet (54)

Buzzard (1)(On nest)  
Woodpigeon (4)  
Skylark (7)  
Meadow Pipit (7)  
Wren (2)  
Dunnock (2)  
Robin (3)  
Stonechat (2)  
Ring Ouzel (2)  
Blackbird (4)  
Song Thrush (2)  
Chiffchaff (3)  
Willow Warbler (7)  
Magpie (1)  
Jackdaw (12)  
Rook (1)(Leucistic)  
Carrion Crow (2)  
Chaffinch (2)  
Yellowhammer (2)

Buzzard (1)  
Pheasant (3)  
Woodpigeon (5)  
Skylark (10)  
Meadow Pipit (4)  
Wren (4)  
Dunnock (3)  
Robin (4)  
Blackbird (5)  
Song Thrush (2)  
Blackcap (2)  
Chiffchaff (3)  
Willow Warbler (5)  
Long-tailed Tit (2)  
Blue Tit (2)  
Magpie (3)  
Carrion Crow (4)  
Chaffinch (5)  
Linnet (2)  
Yellowhammer (19)

## **CLEEVE HILL BIRDS - 2023.**

### **Visit 7 (Apr 18th)**

#### **(Annual Spring walk for the Board of Conservators)**

There was a misty start to the day with a forecast of sunshine. Ring Ouzels had been seen each day for the last week so I was quite optimistic. That optimism

disappeared on arrival at the quarry carpark. There was a really strong, cold wind from the east, which was going to keep the small birds down.

Fifteen enthusiasts had booked the walk and Giles Alder, the Conservation Officer for the Cleeve Common Trust acted as sweeper at the back, to keep everyone up with the group.

Small birds were very hard to find and the wind was very strong on the high ground. A few Skylarks were singing, two Red Kites and two Ravens were overhead for a while. We stopped off to admire the wild daffodils and the Buzzard was still on the nest in the nearby trees. The open area above that is where I was hopeful of seeing a Ring Ouzel was completely empty. On the way down the hill, some of the group saw a distant flying Ring Ouzel but I missed it, and it was not seen again! Even the Heather Enclosure was quiet, with only the odd Meadow Pipit flitting in and out of the gorse. On the way down to the top of the Washpool Valley, we found a female Stonechat but it was the only one we saw and we didn't see a single Yellowhammer, which is unusual. There was a lot of dog-walkers all over the Common, along with the strong wind helped contribute to a very disappointing count, but the party appeared to have enjoyed the walk. The usual comment that I receive on these walks is that we had covered parts of the Common that most of them had not been to before, so that makes it all worthwhile.

My thanks to Giles for keeping us together and for a welcome coffee afterwards. Below is a list of the birds in the order we saw them

Skylark, Carrion Crow, Chaffinch, Red Kite, Kestrel, Lesser Black-backed Gull,

Blackbird, Raven, Chiffchaff, Buzzard, Willow Warbler, Meadow Pipit, Woodpigeon,

Ring Ouzel (not by me!), Magpie, Stonechat, Jackdaw, Coal Tit.

## CLEEVE HILL BIRDS - 2023.

Visit 7 (Apr 22<sup>nd</sup>)

(Spring walk for the Cheltenham Bird Club)

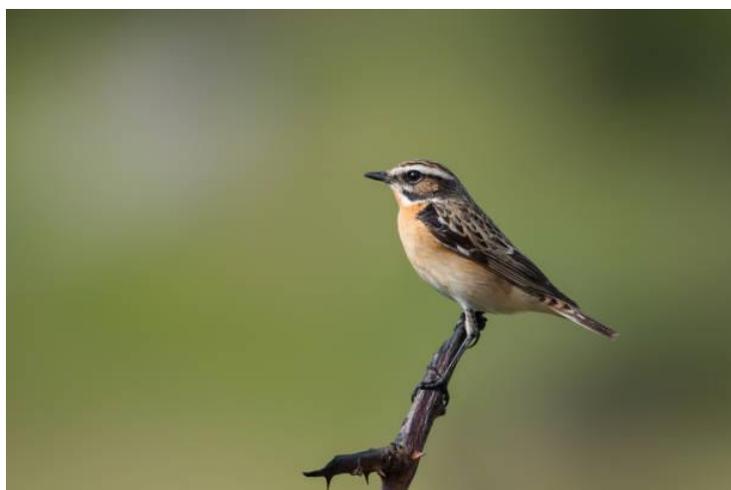
When I woke up today, I thought the walk would be a non-starter. The fog was so thick, I couldn't see the end of my Cul-de-sac! I expected it to be even worse on top of the hills, but by the time we met at the Westdown carpark, the fog had gone and the sun came out and although the wind was still cold, it was bright and clear. The bitterly cold wind that had been coming from the East for several days had swung around and was more from the South, so I was hopeful it would have brought in some passage migrants. There had been a few Ring Ouzels passing through in the last two weeks or so but not reported in the last couple of days.

Twelve members met and we began the walk at 0900. There were several Willow Warblers and Skylarks singing all over the Common. On the way up the Westdown strip, we saw Buzzard, Red Kite, Meadow Pipit and a Brown Hare. Just onto the main Common, we came across our first Wheatears. There were four feeding on the ground and nearby we were surprised to find two beautiful Winchats. When we reached the Heather Enclosure, I pointed out the open "bonfire" area, where the Ring Ouzels have been seen recently and immediately, a member with a telescope spotted two males. I had told the party earlier that you rarely see Wheatears in the trees and usually find them feeding on the ground. At the back of the Heather Enclosure, we found **eight** in the top of an ash tree! Nothing is ever certain in birdwatching! On the top, a Corn Bunting was singing from the top of the wall. A pair Ravens flew past and a single Goldfinch was singing from a treetop. We finished with a walk around Warden's Wood, where there were several Willow Warblers and a Blackcap singing, and on the way out of the wood someone pointed out a Goldcrest.

This was the fourth guided walk that I had led in the past two weeks and was by far the most successful, mainly because the easterly wind had moved around from the south.

A list of bird species seen in the order we found them:

Woodpigeon	Magpie	Pheasant	Blackbird
Carrion Crow	Skylark	Yellowhammer	Buzzard
Red Kite	Willow Warbler	Linnet	Meadow Pipit
Stonechat	Dunnock	Wheatear	Whinchat
Chiffchaff	Ring Ouzel	Song Thrush	Corn Bunting
Jackdaw	Goldfinch	Raven	Robin
Blackcap	Blue Tit	Chaffinch	Goldcrest



**WHINCHAT**

## **CLEEVE HILL BIRDS - 2023.**

### **Visit 8 (May 11th)**

So far May has had torrential showers, causing localised flooding and sunny intervals. Everywhere is saturated. There were lots of areas of standing water on the Common, which is quite unusual but indicates just how much rain has been in the last couple of weeks. Today promised to be sunny and dry, at least for the morning, so I made an early start, at 0640, completed the whole Common and finished at 1115.

Plenty of birds were singing all over the Common. A pair of Red-legged Partridges were drinking at the Washpool and a single Swallow was flying low over the water. A male Redstart was in full song from the nearest hawthorn to pool. I have recorded Redstart on several occasions in the same territory. There was no sign of the Buzzard at the nest above the daffodils, so I do not know if it successfully bred there. The Heather Enclosure was very quiet. I only found a single male Stonechat and a few Meadow Pipits there, but in the bushes, just below was a Lesser Whitethroat, which I have never recorded on the Common before. They seem to be more numerous locally this year. Willow Warblers were singing all over the Common and I counted a total of 15 birds singing. A pair of Ravens and a Buzzard passed over the Heather Enclosure and two male Goldfinches were nearby.

When I reached Warden's Wood, there were Chiffchaffs, Blackcaps, Willow Warblers, Song Thrushes, Wrens singing and a Cuckoo was calling. On the way up the Westdown strip, I found 4 male Whitethroats singing at about twenty-yard intervals along the left-hand wall and a male Corn Bunting singing from his usual song-post beneath the power lines. It will be interesting to see how the disturbance affects this species once the removal of the pylons begins. Another Cuckoo was calling in the field next to the Aerial Carpark. Just before I returned to my car, a Stonechat, a pair of Linnets and a Whitethroat on the gorse and nearby a Garden Warbler was singing. They are another species that seem to be more numerous this year for some reason. They are not commonly seen on the Common. It had warmed up considerably by the time I returned to the carpark.

Circuit 1, 11/05/23

Circuit 2, 11/05/23

Circuit 3, 11/05/23

Weather: Sunny with a cold breeze from the west. Warmer later.

Time: 0640-1115.

Buzzard (1)  
Red-legged Partridge (2)  
Woodpigeon (10)  
Skylark (3)  
Swallow (1)  
Wren (3)  
Dunnock (1)  
Robin (5)  
Redstart (1)  
Stonechat (1)  
Blackbird (8)  
Song Thrush (1)  
Whitethroat (1)  
Garden Warbler (1)  
Blackcap (2)  
Willow Warbler (3)  
Blue Tit (2)  
Magpie (1)  
Jackdaw (12)  
Carrion Crow (6)  
Chaffinch (2)  
Goldfinch (2)  
Linnet (2)  
Yellowhammer (2)

Buzzard (1)  
Woodpigeon (5)  
Skylark (8)  
Meadow Pipit (10)  
Wren (3)  
Dunnock (1)  
Robin (4)  
Stonechat (1)  
Blackbird (3)  
Song Thrush (4)  
**Lesser Whitethroat (1)**  
Whitethroat (1)  
Blackcap (2)  
Chiffchaff (2)  
Willow Warbler (5)  
Jackdaw (12)  
Carrion Crow (5)  
Raven (2)  
Chaffinch (2)  
Goldfinch (2)  
Yellowhammer (2)

Woodpigeon (4)  
Skylark (6)  
Cuckoo (2)  
Meadow Pipit (6)  
Wren (1)  
Dunnock (1)  
Robin (2)  
Blackbird (5)  
Song Thrush (3)  
Whitethroat (4)  
Blackcap (2)  
Chiffchaff (5)  
Willow Warbler (7)  
Carrion Crow (4)  
Chaffinch (2)  
Goldfinch (2)  
Linnet (2)  
Yellowhammer (3)  
Corn Bunting (1)

## CLEEVE HILL BIRDS 2023

### Visit 9 (June 13<sup>h</sup>)

After an extremely wet May, the weather suddenly changed to very warm and sunny for the second half of the month which extended into June. Temperatures rose into high twenties and even reach 30 degrees in some places. Yesterday was very hot with widespread thunder storms and torrential showers, but today's temperature was tempered by a fresh breeze from the east. The ground was very hard and dry. I began my walk at 0700, completed the whole Common and finished at 1110. Last year, Swallows were very scarce and I only saw two individuals today, but as I began my walk, there were ten House Martins collecting mud from a puddle near the carpark entrance, which was a result of yesterday's thunder storm. Skylarks were still singing. I counted 25 birds. A pair of Stonechats were in the Heather Enclosure and a family group of 5 Ravens were soaring overhead. A Cuckoo was calling from nearby. Warden's Wood had Blackcap, Garden Warbler, Willow Warbler, Whitethroat and Chiffchaff all singing. Three more noisy Ravens were overhead. On the way back up the Westdown strip, I found a singing Corn Bunting on exactly the same branch of a hawthorn that I recorded him singing from for the last two years. I found four more singing males before I reached the gate into the main Common.

It has been another good year for wild flowers, especially buttercups and there must have been a hatch of blue butterflies because they were all over the Common. Sadly, I could not identify them as I struggle with the blue ones!



**STONECHAT**

Circuit 1, 13/06/23

Weather: Sunny & very warm, with a light easterly breeze.

Time: 0700 – 1110

(\* = Including young)

Woodpigeon (9)  
Green Woodpecker (1)  
Skylark (4)  
Swallow (1)  
House Martin (10)  
Meadow Pipit (4)  
Wren (2)  
Dunnock (2)  
Robin (2)  
Blackbird (4)  
Whitethroat (1)  
Garden Warbler (1)  
Blackcap (1)  
Chiffchaff (1)  
Blue Tit (7)\*  
Magpie (1)  
Jackdaw (13)\*  
Carrion Crow (8)\*  
Chaffinch (3)  
Goldfinch (7)\*  
Linnet (3)

Circuit 2, 13/06/23

Black-headed Gull (2)  
Woodpigeon (7)  
Skylark (5)  
Meadow Pipit (4)  
Wren (2)  
Dunnock (1)  
Robin (5)  
Stonechat (2)  
Blackbird (5)  
Song Thrush (2)  
Mistle Thrush (6)\*  
Whitethroat (2)  
Chiffchaff (2)  
Willow Warbler (4)  
Magpie (5)\*  
Jackdaw (5)  
Carrion Crow (10)\*  
Raven (5)\*  
Chaffinch (4)  
Goldfinch (6)\*  
Linnet (2)  
Yellowhammer (3)

Circuit 3, 13/06/23

Buzzard (1)  
Woodpigeon (5)  
Skylark (16)  
Swallow (1)  
Meadow Pipit (8)  
Pied Wagtail (1)  
Wren (5)  
Dunnock (2)  
Robin (4)  
Blackbird (5)  
Song Thrush (2)  
Whitethroat (3)  
Garden Warbler (1)  
Blackcap (1)  
Chiffchaff (7)  
Willow Warbler (6)  
Great Tit (5)\*  
Magpie (3)  
Jackdaw (21)\*  
Rook (39)\*  
Carrion Crow (8)  
Raven (3)  
Chaffinch (8)  
Linnet (5)\*  
Yellowhammer (8)  
Corn Bunting (5)

## CLEEVE HILL BIRDS - 2023.

### Visit 10 (July 13<sup>th</sup>)

So far, July has been very hot but in the last week or so, there have been torrential showers. They have been very localised and only last a few minutes but sometimes have left some local flooding. The forecast for today was the possibility of the odd shower but the rest of the week had more rain forecast. So, I decided to take a chance and go prepared for the odd downpour! I began my walk at 0630, completed the whole Common and finished at 1100. As I left the carpark, there were 16 House Martins and 2 Swallows flying around the Clubhouse. Most of the small birds had just about finished their breeding and for the first part of the walk, there was hardly any birdsong. The only birds singing were Robin, Song Thrush and Wren. There were no birds around the Washpool and the only birds I recorded up the whole length of the Washpool Valley were a flock of 41 (possibly more) Jackdaws, high overhead. When I reached the open "bonfire" area, I found a pair of Redstarts in a hawthorn and a family of 6 Linnets, with the adults still feeding recently fledged chicks. There was a pair of Stonechats and a few Meadow Pipits in the Heather Enclosure. Once I had passed the Heather Enclosure. Warden's Wood was almost silent but I found the usual 2 Corn Buntings on the Westdown Strip in their usual favourite hawthorns. As I left Westdown, back onto the main Common, another pair of Stonechats were in the nearby gorse, and the usual flock of Rooks were close to the aerals. Today I only counted 16. As I climbed the final track toward the carpark, there was another pair of Stonechats in the gorse beside the path. This is where I saw my first Stonechats many years ago but I have not seen them in that area for a few years. Young Carrion Crows were chasing parent birds all over the Common, begging for food when they were quite capable of feeding themselves. There were lots of Marbled White butterflies all over the Common. The rain started as I drove home!

Circuit 1, 13/07/23

Circuit 2, 13/07/23

Circuit 3, 13/07/23

Weather: Sunny with a brisk breeze from the Southwest.

Time: 0630 - 1100

(\* = Including young)

Woodpigeon (5)

Woodpigeon (7)

Woodpigeon (4)

Skylark (4)

Skylark (4)

Skylark (12)

Meadow Pipit (7)

Meadow Pipit (7)

Swallow (2)

Wren (2)

Wren (2)

Meadow Pipit (5)

Robin (2)

Robin (2)

Wren (2)

Redstart (2)

Redstart (2)

Robin (1)

Stonechat (2)

Stonechat (2)

Stonechat (2)

Dunnock (1)

Dunnock (1)

Dunnock (1)

Blackbird (4)

Blackbird (4)

Blackbird (6)

Chiffchaff (2)

Magpie (2)

Song Thrush (5)

Willow Warbler (2)

Rook (16)

Whitethroat (2)

Magpie (2)

Carrion Crow (8)\*

Blackcap (2)

Rook (16)

Chaffinch (2)

Blue Tit (2)

Carrion Crow (8)\*

Linnet (6)\*

Great Tit (6)\*

Chaffinch (2)

Yellowhammer (5)

Carrion Crow (4)\*

Linnet (2)

Linnet (4)

Goldfinch (7)\*

Yellowhammer (8)

Corn Bunting (3)

## CLEEVE HILL BIRDS - 2023.

### Visit 11 (August 12<sup>th</sup>)

July had been the wettest on record, with localised, very heavy showers and sunny periods in between. There was a brisk, cool breeze from the southwest and rain was forecast later. It was raining when I got up, so I couldn't start my walk until 0640. I completed the whole Common and finished at 1050. Normally, August and September counts are always the lowest each year, and today was no exception. Most birds have finished breeding and have become silent. A pair of Swallows were flying around the Clubhouse but the local House Martins appear to have departed already. There were very few birds to be heard until I reached the Washpool and a large flock of Jackdaws were soaring overhead. They were very active and I made several attempts to count them. I made it 84 but there were possibly more than that. There were small parties of Goldfinches feeding on thistle seeds and there were 2 Stonechats in the Heather Enclosure. Nearby was a juvenile Buzzard in a hawthorn, constantly calling for food. Warden's Wood, was totally silent. The only birds I found there were 2 Wrens, 2 Chaffinches and a single Blackbird. As I left the wood, a Red Kite was soaring nearby. On the way back toward the Dewpond I put up a half-grown Brown Hare leveret but there were no birds around the pool. 22 Rooks were near the aerals and 2 Ravens were high overhead. By the time I returned to the carpark the sun was beginning to shine and the temperature was rising. This had been the usual very quiet August count.

Circuit 1, 12/08/23

Circuit 2, 12/08/23

Circuit 3, 12/08/23

Weather: Overcast but brightening later.

Time: 0640 – 1050.

(\* = including young)

Woodpigeon (6)

Skylark (2)

Swallow (2)

Meadow Pipit (2)

Wren (3)

Dunnock (1)

Robin (2)

Blackbird (3)

Mistle Thrush (9)\*

Blue Tit (1)

Magpie (2)

Jackdaw (84)

Carrion Crow (5)

Raven (2)

Chaffinch (2)

Goldfinch (10)\*

Linnet (8)

Buzzard (2)\*

Woodpigeon (4)

Skylark (2)

Meadow Pipit (4)

Wren (3)

Robin (4)

Stonechat (2)

Blackbird (4)

Magpie (3)

Rook (22)

Carrion Crow (2)

Raven (2)

Goldfinch (6)\*

Linnet (3)

Yellowhammer (4)

Red Kite (1)

Woodpigeon (3)

Skylark (2)

Meadow Pipit (6)

Wren (2)

Robin (2)

Blackbird (4)

Blue Tit (2)

Magpie (1)

Carrion Crow (4)

Chaffinch (2)

Linnet (4)

Goldfinch (7)\*

Yellowhammer (2)

## **CLEEVE HILL BIRDS - 2023.**

### **Visit 12. (September 15<sup>th</sup>)**

So far, September has been a mixture of hot sunny days and heavy showers.

I started my walk at 0700, completed the whole Common and finished at 1100. The day started dull and grey but by the time I reached the top of the Washpool Valley, the sun had cleared the horizon and the temperature quickly rose to about 20 degrees.

September counts are always the lowest of the year, and today was no different. Most birds had fallen silent, making some species difficult to find. The only birdsong to be heard was that of Robins.

As I began my walk, a Buzzard was soaring over the carpark but there were few birds to be found. Two Chiffchaffs were in hawthorns close to the 1<sup>st</sup> golf green and I had recorded eight Robins singing by the time I reached the Washpool. In the beeches nearby was a Nuthatch, a Wren and a single Blue Tit. There is usually a large flock of Jackdaws soaring above the Washpool Valley but I think, for the first time ever, I saw none. A noisy Raven flew across the valley but it remained very quiet. In the trees above where the daffodils grow were another three Chiffchaffs. All the Chiffchaffs so far had only been giving out the "wheet" contact call, but one of these birds was still in full "Chiff-chaff" song, which is unusual for September. In the small valley leading up to the Heather Enclosure were another 3 Chiffchaffs and 2 Swallows were flying low over the rough grass. Three Magpies were in the Heather Enclosure and 5 Meadow Pipits were on the fence. The only other bird I saw there was a single male Stonechat. Several had been reported a few days earlier but must have been passage birds moving through the area. Two Skylarks were nearby. Wardens Wood was also very quiet with 5 Robins, 3 Blue Tits, 2 Great Tits and a Coal Tit being the only birds I saw there. In the carpark as I left the wood, a Pied Wagtail was in the carpark. Eight Goldfinches were feeding on thistle seeds and 7 Linnets flew onto the wall from the neighbouring field. There were hardly any birds on the Westdown strip but once I returned to the main Common there were a few more birds. The usual flock of Rooks were within sight of the Aerial Carpark. I counted 81 but there could well have been a few more. 14 of them were perched on the fence around the Dewpond. Four Meadow Pipits were bathing in the pond as I passed. Nearby were 27 Jackdaws. As I approached the golf course, there were 7 Swallows and 11 House Martins flying up and down the valley. On the 9<sup>th</sup> fairway, there were 4 Wheatears and 6 Meadow Pipits. By the time I finished my walk the temperature had risen to about 19 degrees.

Circuit 1, 15/09/23

Circuit 2, 15/09/23

Circuit 3, 15/09/23

Weather: Overcast and grey but warm and sunny later.

Time: 0700 – 1100

Buzzard (1)  
Woodpigeon (8)  
Skylark (3)  
Meadow Pipit (6)  
Swallow (7)  
House Martin (11)  
Wren (1)  
Dunnock (1)  
Robin (8)  
Wheatear (4)  
Blackbird (1)  
Chiffchaff (3)  
Blue Tit (1)  
Nuthatch (1)  
Magpie (3)  
Jackdaw (2)  
Carrion Crow (4)  
Raven (1)

Woodpigeon (6)  
Skylark (4)  
Meadow Pipit (12)  
Swallow (2)  
Dunnock (1)  
Robin (5)  
Stonechat (1)  
Blackbird (1)  
Chiffchaff (6)  
Coal Tit (1)  
Blue Tit (3)  
Great Tit (2)  
Magpie (8)  
Jackdaw (27)  
Rook (81+)  
Carrion Crow (4)

Woodpigeon (5)  
Skylark (2)  
Meadow Pipit (8)  
Wren (2)  
Dunnock (1)  
Robin (6)  
Blackbird (1)  
Chiffchaff (2)  
Blue Tit (4)  
Magpie (2)  
Jackdaw (8)  
Carrion Crow (2)  
Goldfinch (8)  
Linnet (7)  
Yellowhammer (2)

## CLEEVE HILL BIRDS - 2023.

### Visit 13. (October 14th)

Up to now, the weather in October had been warmer than average for the first third of the month, then it turned very wet and suddenly extremely cold! I not only needed a warm fleece on today but regretted not taking gloves with me! There had an overnight frost, the first of the autumn. It did not become light enough to begin my walk until 0730. I completed the whole Common and finished at 1140. The temperature at the start of my walk was only 3 degrees and by the end it had only risen to 10 degrees. Previously this month, the overnight temperatures had been around 16-18 degrees!

As usual for October, there were not that many birds to be found. There were Robins singing all over the Common. They appear to have had a good breeding year and are everywhere. There were very few birds to be found until I reached the Washpool Valley, and the usual flock of Jackdaws were soaring overhead. At the top of the valley, 7 Goldfinches were in a hawthorn. The only birds in the Heather Enclosure were a single male Stonechat, 2 Dunnocks and 3 Carrion Crows. In the gorse above the Heather Enclosure were 7 Blackbirds. Wardens Wood was almost silent, apart from more Robins. There was a pair of Marsh Tits in the same area of the wood that I have recorded them previously. It is the only site I have seen Marsh Tits in recent years. On the way back up Westdown, 4 Linnets were around the cattle crush but I found no other birds until I went through the gate back onto the main Common. In the nearby gorse were 2 Stonechats, 3 Carrion Crows and 2 Magpies. The usual flock of Rooks were close to Aerial Carpark but only 18 birds visible. There were 4 Yellowhammers, 3 Skylarks and 6 Linnets on the golf course and 2 noisy Ravens were overheard. When I reached the depression where a Greenkeepers Shed had been demolished, I found a rabbit with the advanced stages of Myxomatosis. I had not seen this for many years. I waited until no golfers or dog walkers could see me and I despatched the poor creature. If there is one, there is bound to be many more around. I informed the staff at the Trust to keep an eye out for them. I was hoping that the recent stormy weather would have brought down some Ring Ouzels to the Common but I found none today.

Circuit 1, 14/10/23

Circuit 2, 14/10/23

Circuit 3, 14/10/23

Weather: Suddenly extremely cold with an overnight frost. Sunny later.

0735 – 1120

Woodpigeon (8)  
Skylark (3)  
Meadow Pipit (3)  
Dunnock (1)  
Robin (8)  
Blackbird (8)  
Blue Tit (2)  
Magpie (4)  
Jackdaw (17)  
Carrion Crow (3)  
Chaffinch (2)  
Goldfinch (7)  
Linnet (6)  
Yellowhammer (4)

Woodpigeon (4)  
Dunnock (2)  
Robin (6)  
Stonechat (1)  
Blackbird (7)  
Magpie (3)  
Rook (18)  
Carrion Crow (6)  
Linnet (4)  
Yellowhammer (3)

Woodpigeon (6)  
G. Spotted Woodpecker (1)  
Skylark (2)  
Meadow Pipit (2)  
Dunnock (2)  
Robin (6)  
Stonechat (2)  
Blackbird (3)  
Marsh Tit (2)  
Magpie (2)  
Carrion Crow (2)  
Raven (2)  
Linnet (4)  
Yellowhammer (2)

## CLEEVE HILL BIRDS - 2023.

### Visit 14 (November 17<sup>th</sup>)

The November weather continued to be unusual with far more rain than normal, resulting in widespread flooding across the Country, but with bright sunny days in between. It also remained very mild for November. This month's count was a little later than usual as I had been abroad until the 12<sup>th</sup>. It was a dry day with sunny intervals but there was a very cold breeze, making me regret not taking gloves for the first time this season! The temperature at the start of my walk was only 3 degrees.

I began my walk at 0830, completed the whole Common and finished at 1230. The arrival of the winter birds from the north had been delayed by several storms coming from the south-west. I suspect most of the passage birds had flown down the eastern side of England on their way south. I had seen very few northern arrivals so far and was pleased to find a lot of Redwings in the hawthorns in the bottom of Dry Bottom. I counted 32 but there was probably more. There was a constant passage overhead of Carrion Crows. These also totalled 32, and a pair of Ravens and a Buzzard were over the Washpool Valley. In the open area above the Valley were another flock of 46 Redwings plus a single Fieldfare. There were hardly any birds to be found in the Heather Enclosure. Warden's Wood was very muddy as usual for this time of year and there were few birds to be found there. A Red Kite was overhead and as I left the wood, a Buzzard passed by. On the way back up the Westdown strip, there were several small groups of Skylarks, all heading southwards totalling 78, and a flock of 27 Linnets. Not far from the aerial carpark, there was the usual flock of 13 Rooks, and the famous "Tawny" Rook flew overhead. There were no birds to be found on the golf course, which was unusual.

The temperature had risen to a mild 16 degrees by the end of my walk.

Circuit 1, 17/11/23

Circuit 2, 17/11/23

Circuit 3, 17/11/23

Weather: Grey misty start with a cold south-westerly breeze. Sunny and bright later.

Time: 0830 - 1230

Buzzard (1)  
Woodpigeon (6)  
Skylark (1)  
Wren (1)  
Dunnock (1)  
Robin (1)  
Blackbird (6)  
Song Thrush (3)  
Redwing (32+)  
Blue Tit (1)  
Magpie (7)  
Jackdaw (7)  
Carrion Crow (32)  
Raven (2)  
Chaffinch (2)

Woodpigeon (9)  
Skylark (2)  
Robin (2)  
Blackbird (4)  
Song Thrush (1)  
Fieldfare (1)  
Redwing (46)  
Magpie (2)  
Carrion Crow (8)

Red Kite (1)  
Buzzard (1)  
Woodpigeon (3)  
Skylark (78+)  
Wren (1)  
Robin (2)  
Blackbird (2)  
Fieldfare (7)  
Redwing (3)  
Magpie (3)  
Jackdaw (13)  
Rook (14)  
Carrion Crow (7)  
Chaffinch (1)  
Yellowhammer (3)

## CLEEVE HILL BIRDS – 2023.

### Visit 15 (11<sup>th</sup> December).

The 2023 weather all year has been strange and December was no different. The first two days of the month had hard overnight frosts, and then it became extremely wet. The ground was already waterlogged but there was more to come. Today promised to be a dry window in the wet weather, so I took advantage of it. The day began very dark, grey and overcast, with a cold wind from the southwest. It was not become light enough to begin my walk until 0755, I completed the whole Common and finished earlier than usual, at 1110, due to the lack of birds. The temperature when I parked the car was 8 degrees and strangely, was still at 8 when I returned to the car. December counts are usually low but today was exceptionally so. There were flocks of Redwings and fewer Fieldfares feeding on hawthorn berries, with a few Blackbirds. The Redwings were very active and difficult to get an accurate count. There were no small birds to be found all across the Common. I found none at all in the Heather Enclosure, even though I walked around the whole area. The only small birds I did find were 5 Linnets on the high ground above the Heather Enclosure. When I reached the Wontley Gate, I decided to go to Warden's Wood via Wontley Farm, to see if the small birds had moved off the Common and onto neighbouring farmland, but I found no birds between the Wontley Gate and Wardens Wood. A circuit of the Wood also found no small birds. The Westdown Strip was equally quiet and this was turning out to be the lowest count in my 24 years of recording on the Common. Locally, Robins appear to have had a really successful year and they seem to be everywhere, but I only found one Robin on my walk, and it was not until I crossed the golf course that I found my only Skylark. Even Woodpigeons were almost absent! A peculiar end to a peculiar year!

Circuit 1, 11/12/23

Circuit 2, 11/12/23

Circuit 3, 11/12/23

Time: 0755 – 1110.

Weather: Grey and overcast all day with a brisk wind from the West.

Woodpigeon (2)

Skylark (1)

Dunnock (1)

Blackbird (14)

Redwing (33+)

Fieldfare (10)

Magpie (2)

Jackdaw (26)

Rook (47)

Carrion Crow (4)

Raven (2)

Woodpigeon (1)

Blackbird (11)

Redwing (73+)

Fieldfare (21)

Carrion Crow (2)

Woodpigeon (2)

Blackbird (11)

Robin (1)

Redwing (37+)

Fieldfare (11)

Jay (2)

Jackdaw (12)

Rook (32)

Carrion Crow (7)

Raven (2)

Linnet (5)



