

An Analysis of Staffordshire Bird Records 2005 – 2014 Other Species Nick Pomiankowski

1. Introduction

In 2003 we started the computerisation of bird records for Staffordshire and since that time have placed all records going back to 2000 into the county database.

The major change to record keeping occurred in 2006 when the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) introduced their national online bird recording system, BTO Birdtrack. This system allows anyone to record their bird sightings via the web and has resulted in a massive increase in the number of records we are able to obtain now. We have the ability to automatically extract Staffordshire data from Birdtrack, although some filtering and validation is required to ensure erroneous records are filtered out. This saves us the onerous task of manually keying in data.

Since there is now a considerable archive of bird records for the county, I have started analysing the data with the help of a free graphical software tool called QlikView. Previous documents looked at Waders, Warblers and Waterfowl. This final document brings together several different groups of selected species and the period covered is a ten year period from 2005 to 2014; whilst the volume of data for 2005 is not quite as comprehensive as later years, there is sufficient data to enable us to look at meaningful trends. Data for the years 2000 – 2004 is less comprehensive so has been omitted.

The numerical counts in the graphs are obtained as follows: Each sighting in the database either has a quantity or the bird is recorded as being “present”. If present, it is assigned a quantity of 1. The quantities are added together to produce a total. This does mean the total can include repeat sightings of the same bird on different dates although duplicate counts from different recorders have been removed. It would take much work to filter all duplicates out, but I doubt it would make much difference to the trends, just the overall numbers. Because of this, the total counts should not be seen as representing an actual total number of different birds – this would be a lower number. What remains meaningful however is the comparison of month against month and year against year.

There are three types of graph used as follows:

- a) Sighting Counts by Month. These are accumulated counts as described above broken down by month. These are used to show the relative frequencies of sightings during each month.
- b) Sightings by Year. These show the total counts broken down by the ten individual years examined. This is used to show population changes over the ten year period.

- c) Daily counts for a Month. In one or two cases, this chart shows a day by day breakdown of numbers during the month in question. This is used to show arrival times of spring migrants.

2. Acknowledgements

My thanks go to all recorders who have provided bird records for Staffordshire over the years, enabling this analysis to take place.

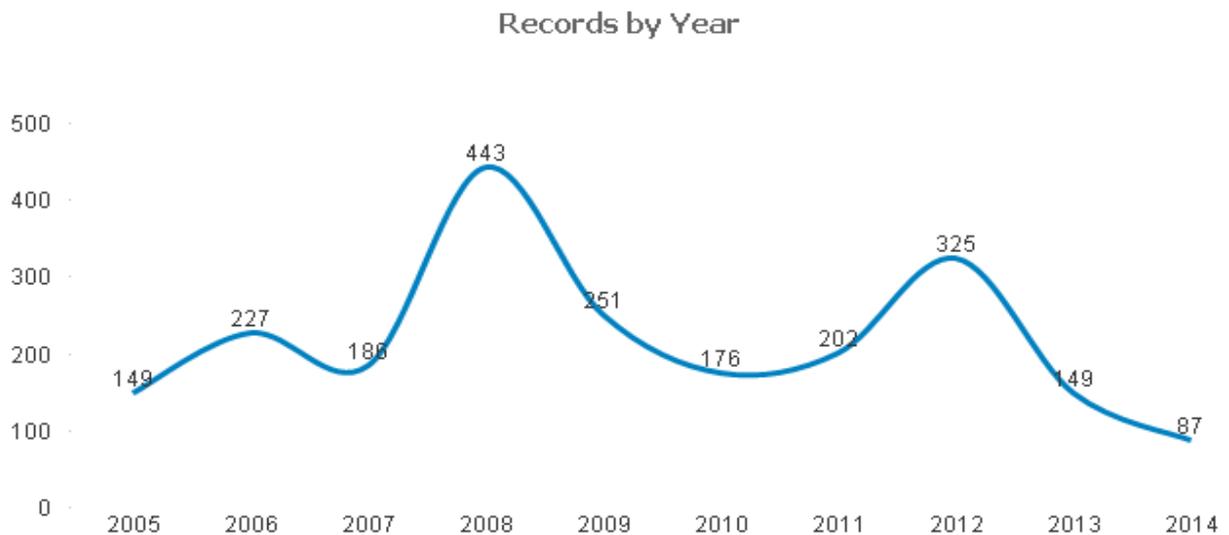
Thanks to all site report compilers and those who have assisted with data entry, particularly Mary Holley, Holly Sissons and Matthew Sissons.

Thanks to Craig Slawson at Staffordshire Ecological Records (Staffordshire Wildlife Trust) for funding our use of MapMate software for the county bird database and assisting with data validation.

All graphs were made using QlikView freeware.

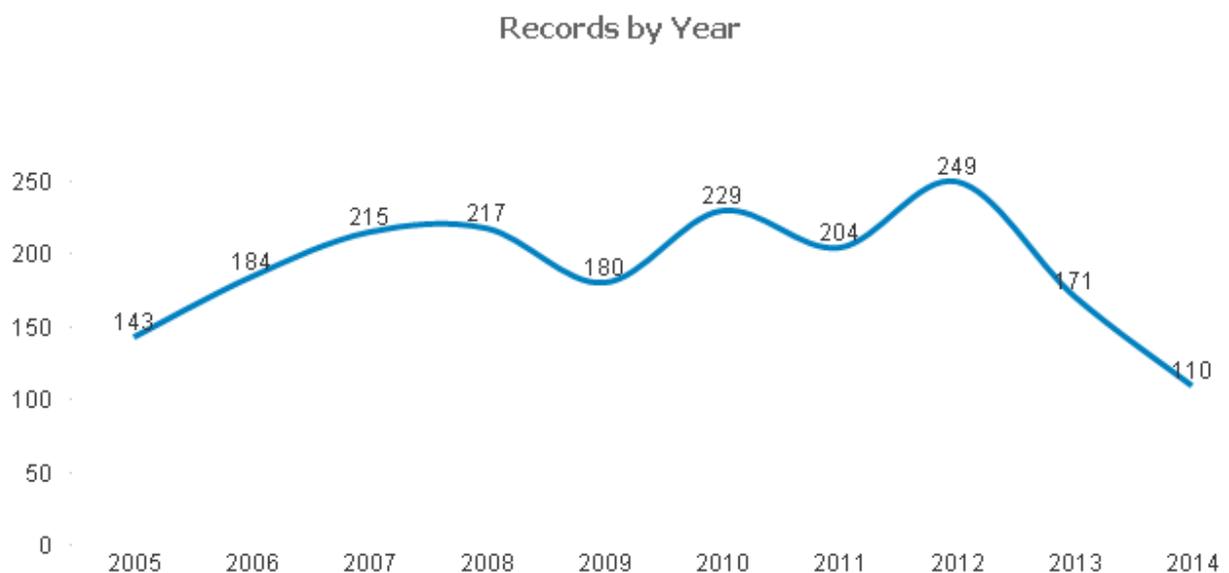
Barn Owl

The lifecycle of Barn Owls is linked to their prey availability, with peaks in 2008 and 2012. The worrying low counts from 2013 – 14 however, do present a cause for concern.



Little Owl

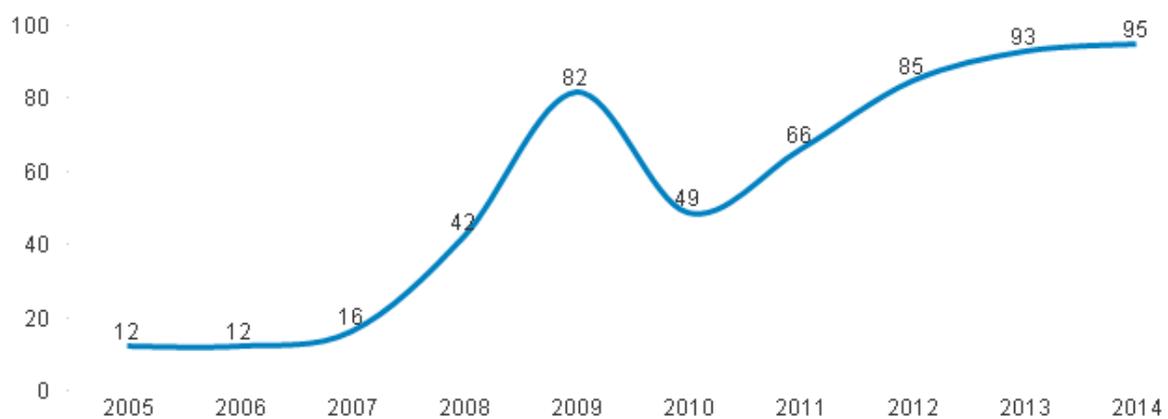
Numbers up until 2012 appeared to have been steady but the significant drop in numbers from 2013 onwards is a reflection of the downward trend nationally.



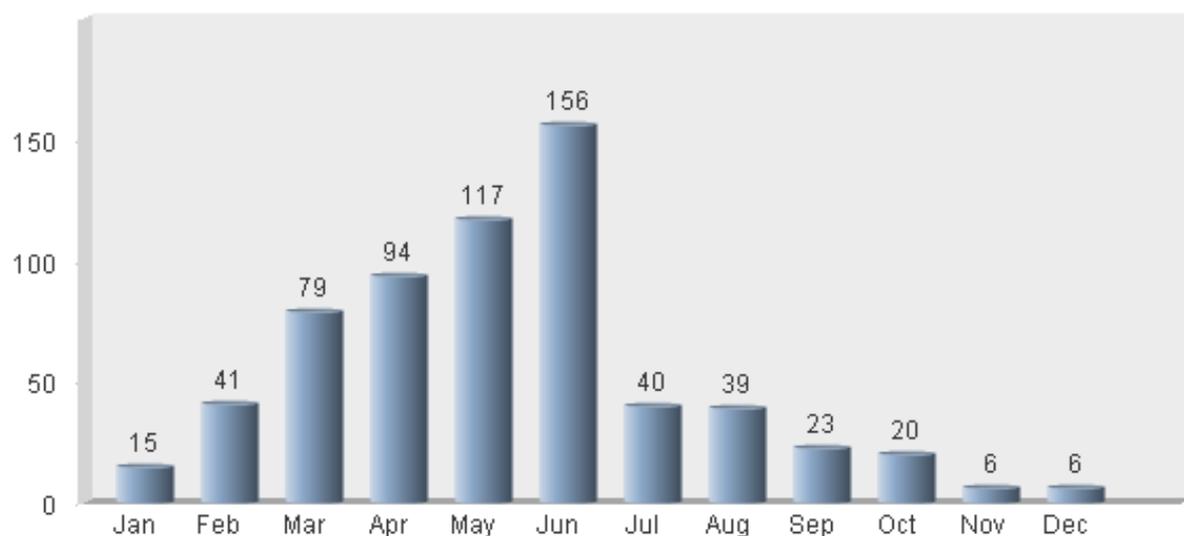
Red Kite

During the period shown, there has been a marked increase in numbers and in addition, pairs have also started breeding again in the county. The monthly distribution is interesting in that it displays a marked increase in numbers during spring and early summer, followed by a sharp drop from July onwards. This demonstrates that red kites are not sedentary here and is perhaps due to a late spring passage. Why a similar autumn passage is not observed is equally puzzling.

Records by Year



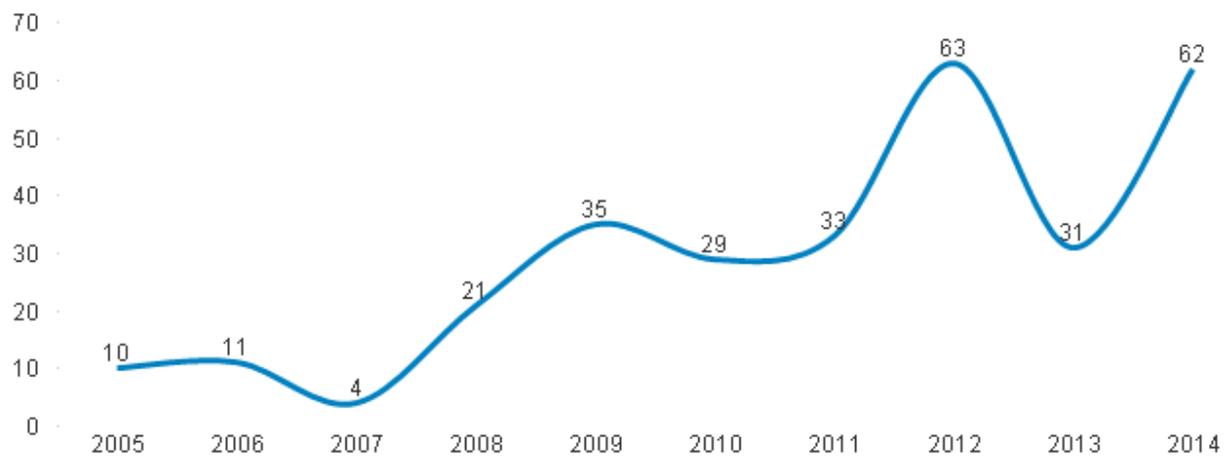
Records 2005 - 2014



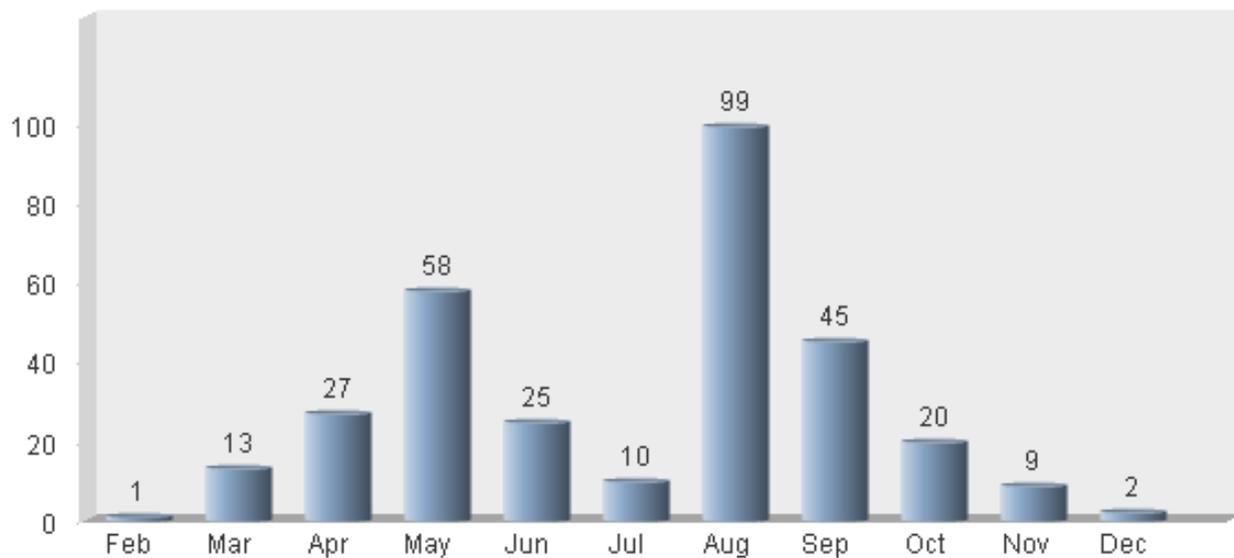
Marsh Harrier

Marsh Harriers do not breed in the county and are mainly observed on passage, with the peak months being May and August. Nevertheless, they have been seen in every month of the year other than January and the increasing annual counts reflect the increasing numbers nationally.

Records by Year



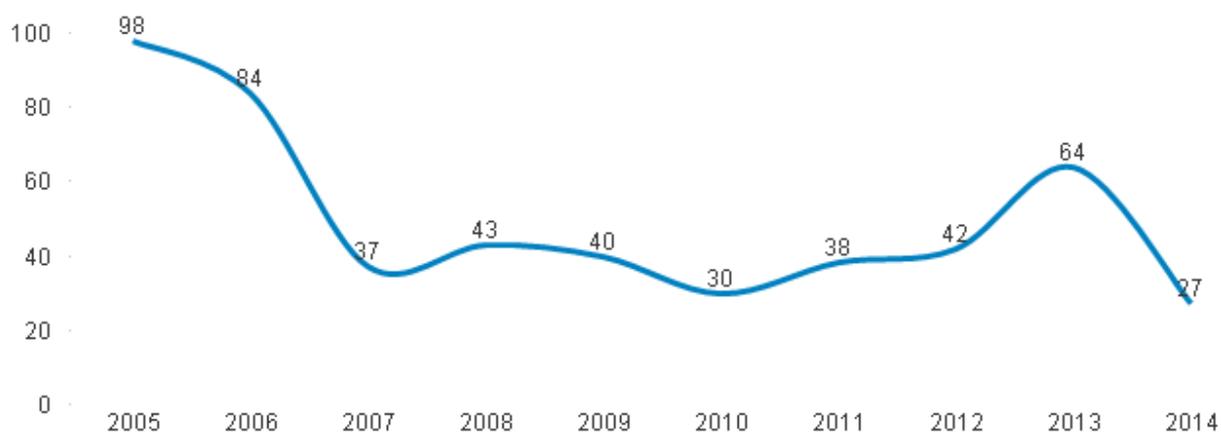
Records 2005 - 2014



Merlin

The annual counts appear to be quite steady from 2007 onwards, having dropped considerably from the first two years of the survey.

Records by Year



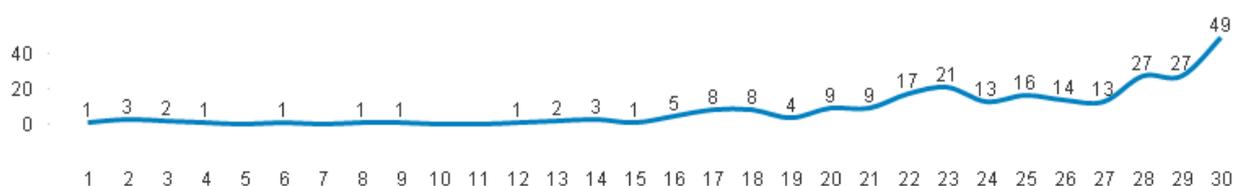
Hobby

Numbers appear to have increased steadily from 2005 until 2012 but dropped thereafter, although the reasons for this are not understood. Spring arrivals can be seen to really get going from the third week of April onwards, although early arrivals are spread throughout the month.

Records by Year

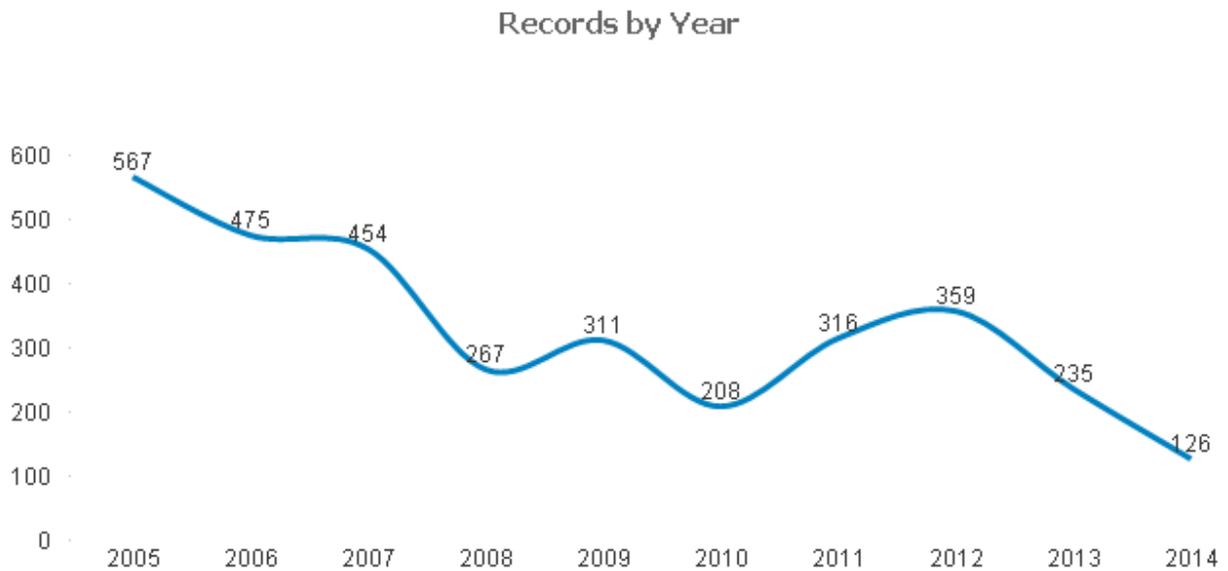


April Records 2005 - 2014



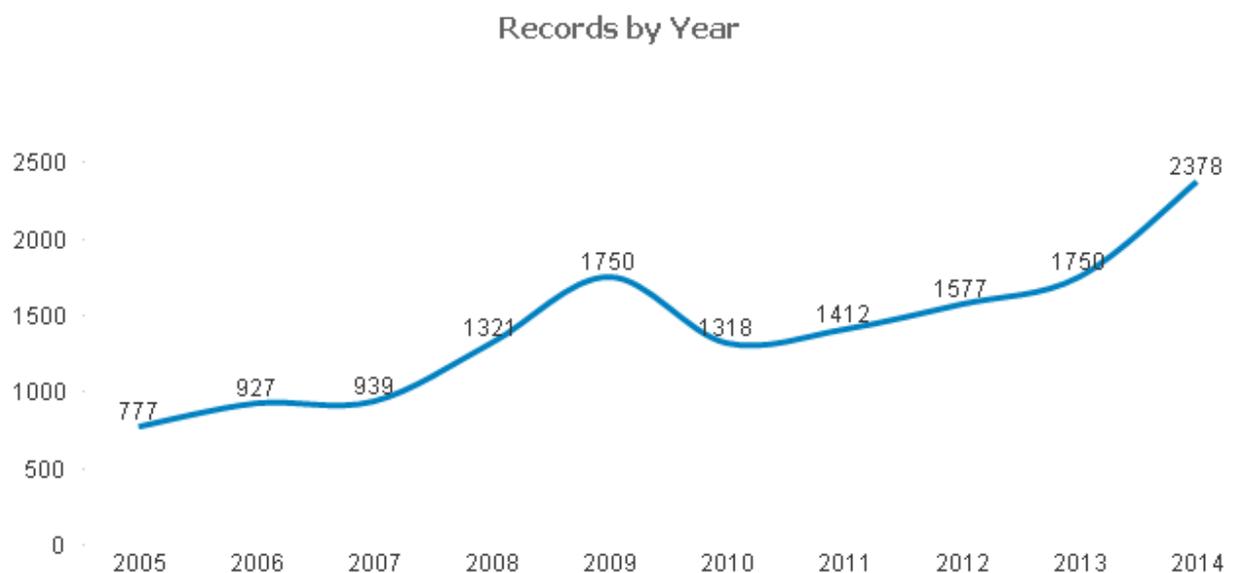
Grey Partridge

The annual counts speak for themselves – a sharp decline in numbers matches the severe decline nationally.



Stock Dove

Without the chart, it is unlikely that the steadily increasing numbers would have been noticed.



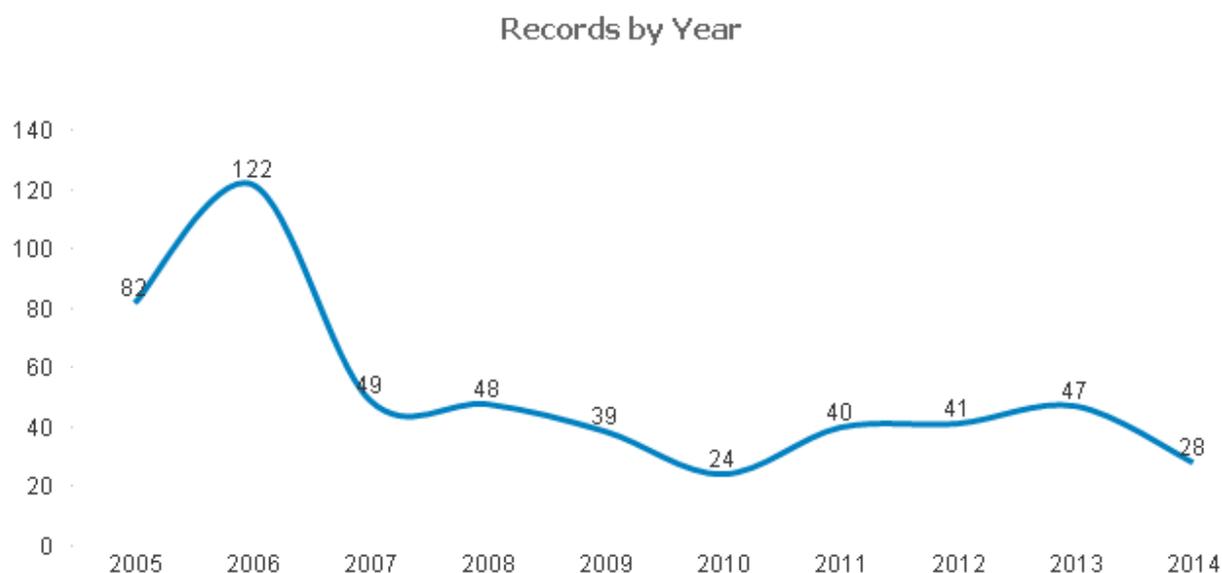
Cuckoo

Despite a well documented decline in numbers nationally, numbers in Staffordshire appear to have remained steady throughout the survey period.



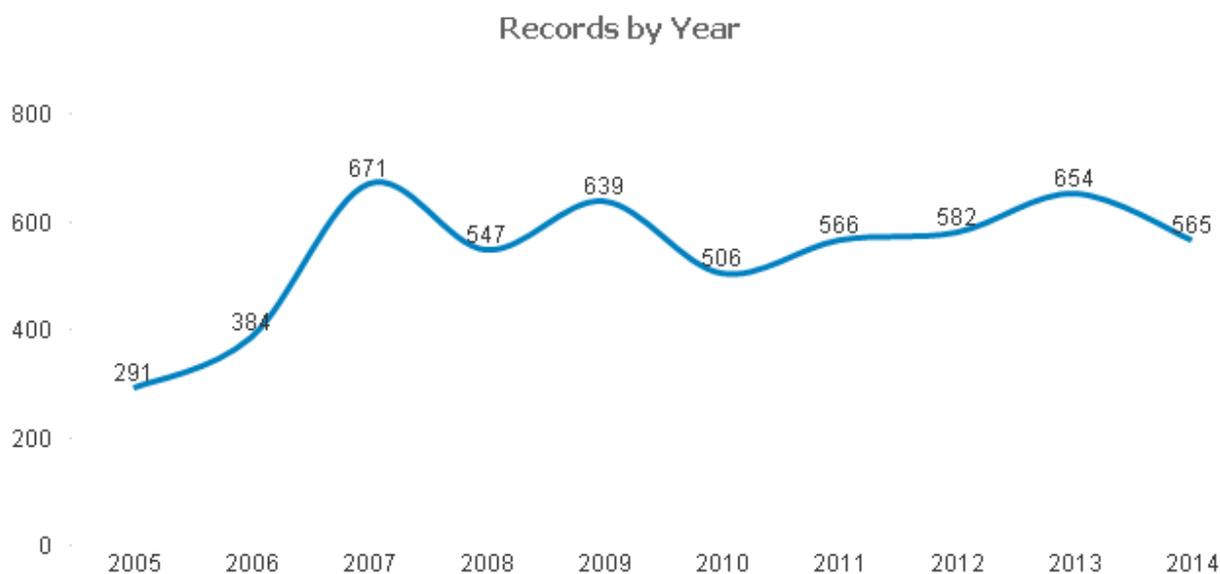
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker

Despite the national decline, numbers, albeit low, appear to have held steady from 2007 until 2013. It remains to be seen if the drop in 2014 is a “blip” or the start of a further decline.



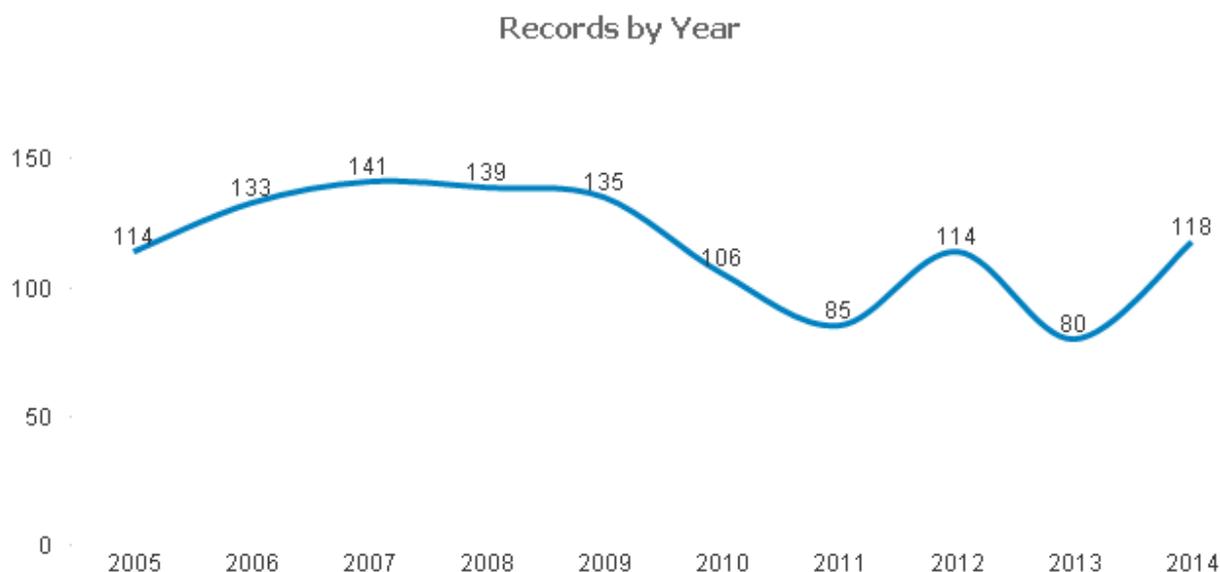
Willow Tit

Whilst the national picture is one of general decline, Staffordshire remains a stronghold for this species and it appears to be holding steady throughout the survey period.



Marsh Tit

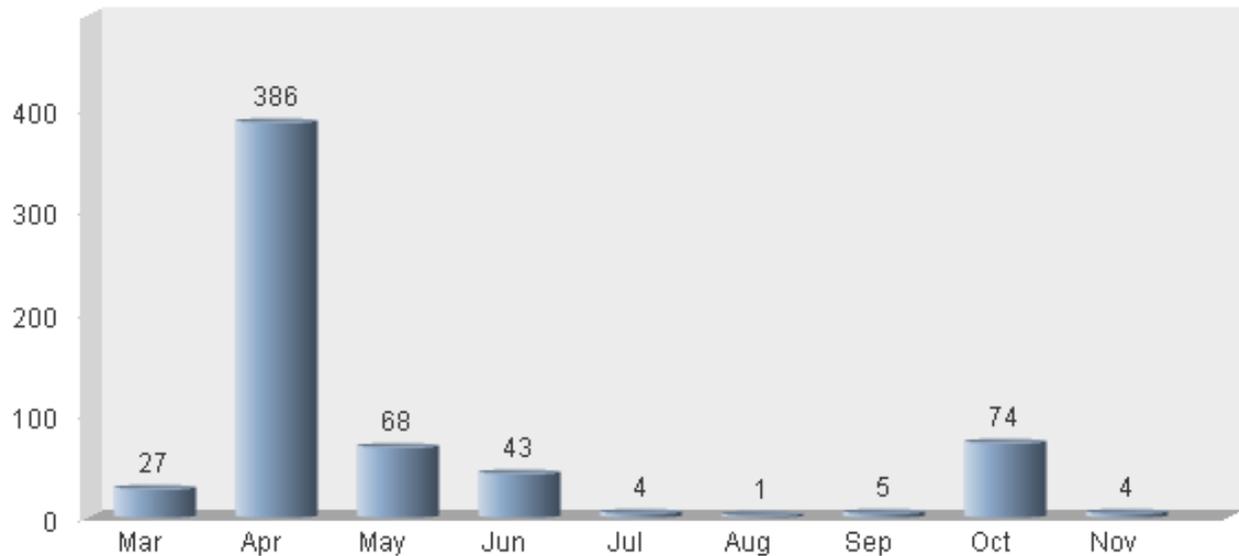
The annual counts show that Marsh Tit is less common than Willow Tit in the county, but also point to a steady population level.



Ring Ouzel

This is primarily a spring passage bird with a much lower presence during autumn migration. The major arrivals are in April and in the autumn, in October.

Records 2005 - 2014



Spotted Flycatcher

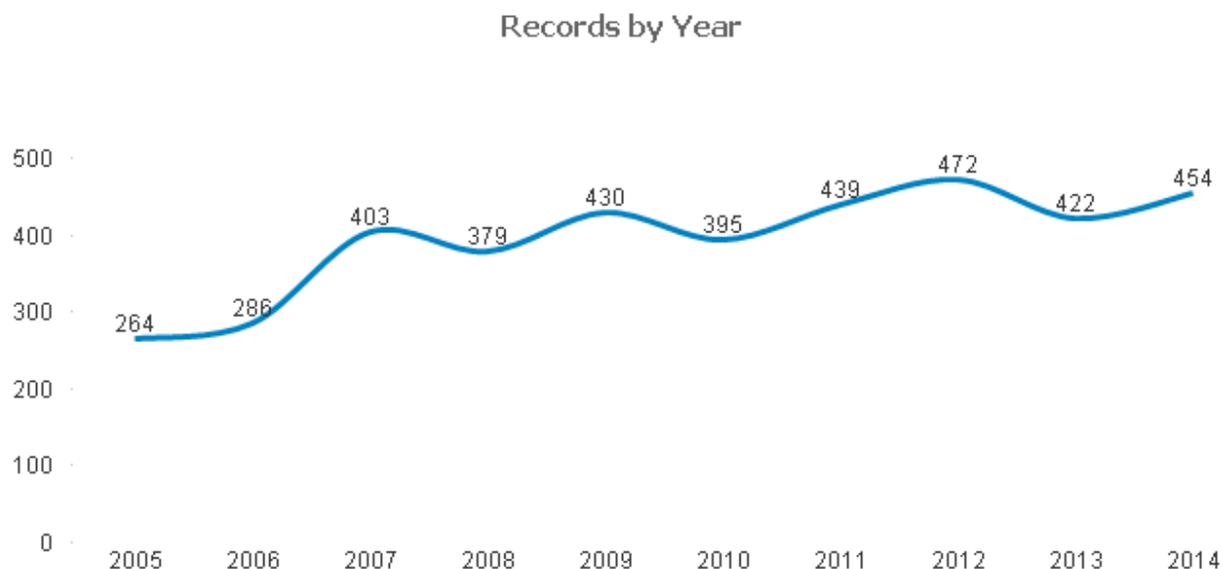
Numbers have remained steady throughout the survey period, despite a national decline and perhaps even show a bit of a recovery in recent years.

Records by Year



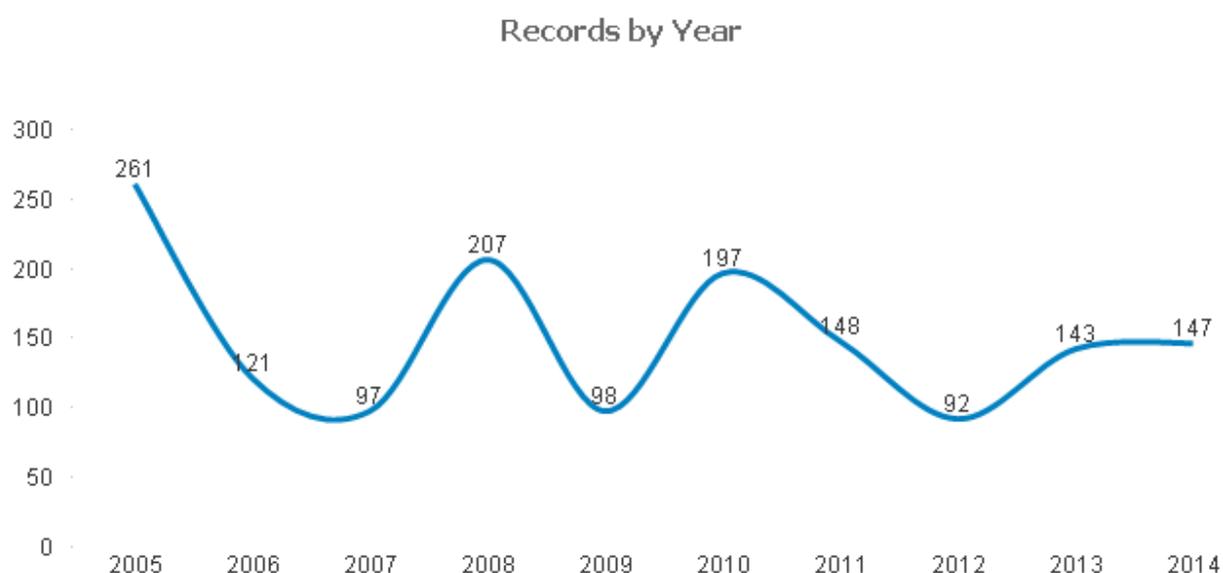
Redstart

The annual counts show a slightly increasing number of birds in the county over the survey period.

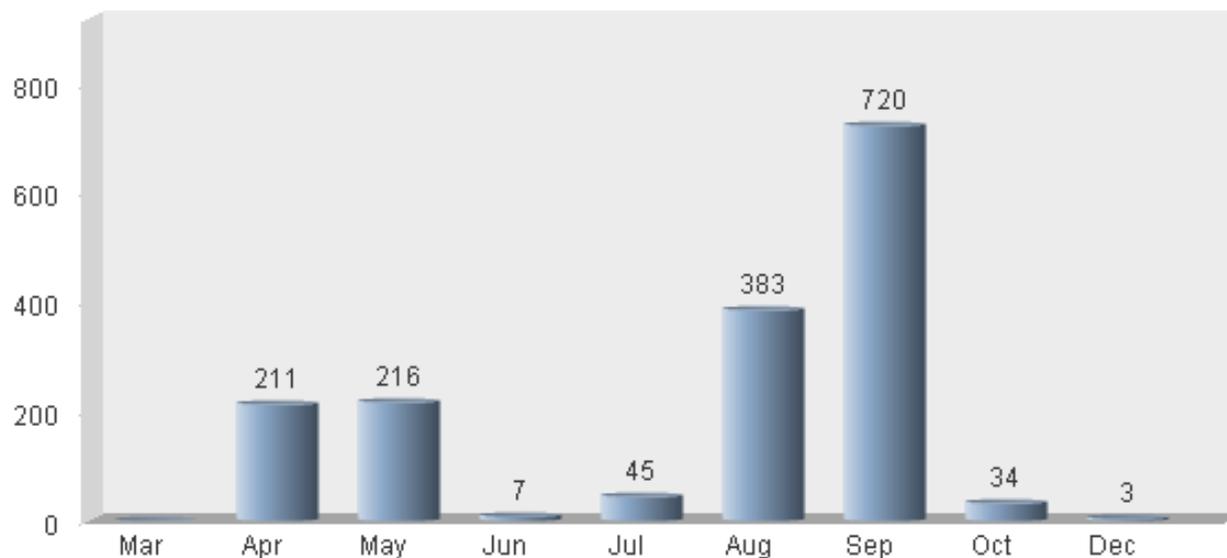


Whinchat

The annual counts vary quite widely from year to year and probably reflect the numbers of autumn passage birds passing through the county on their way south from their breeding grounds. As shown in the monthly counts, the best months to see this bird are August and September, along with a smaller spring passage in April and May. The December count is not an error; a bird blind in one eye did actually survive three days here one winter.



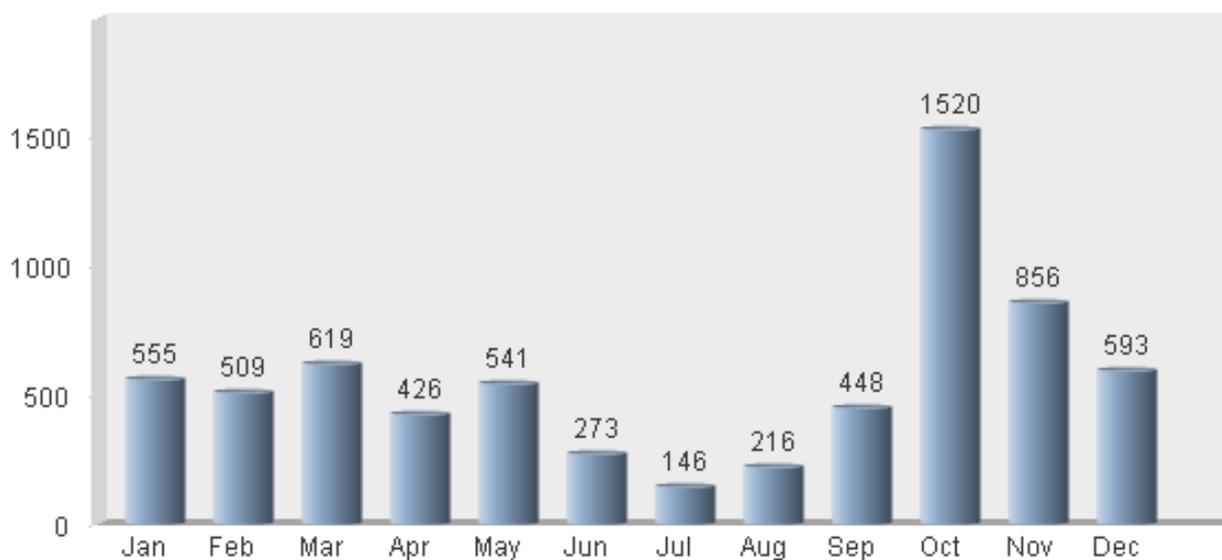
Records 2005 - 2014



Stonechat

Birds are resident on the North Staffordshire Moors and Cannock Chase, but as can be seen from the monthly breakdown, a significant influx occurs during October - November, when birds pass through the county on autumn migration. Birds also winter here so long as the conditions are not icy or snowbound.

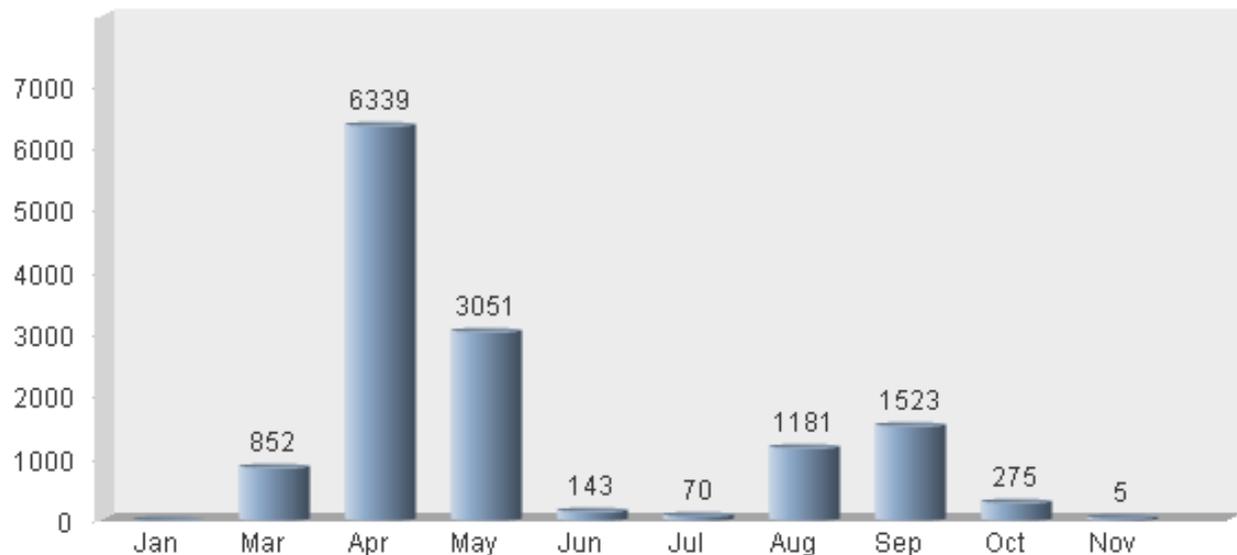
Records 2005 - 2014



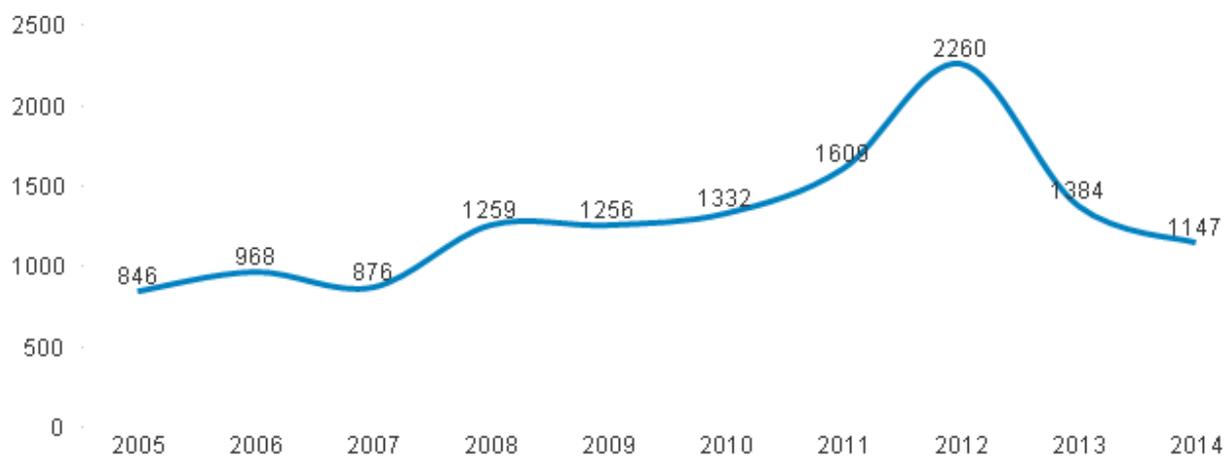
Wheatear

Wheatears are primarily spring passage birds, with a much smaller presence during autumn passage. Numbers of passage birds appear to have grown strongly from 2006 – 2012 but dropped off thereafter. The reasons for this are not obvious but are probably due to prevailing weather patterns or changes to suitable habitat.

Records 2005 - 2014



Records by Year



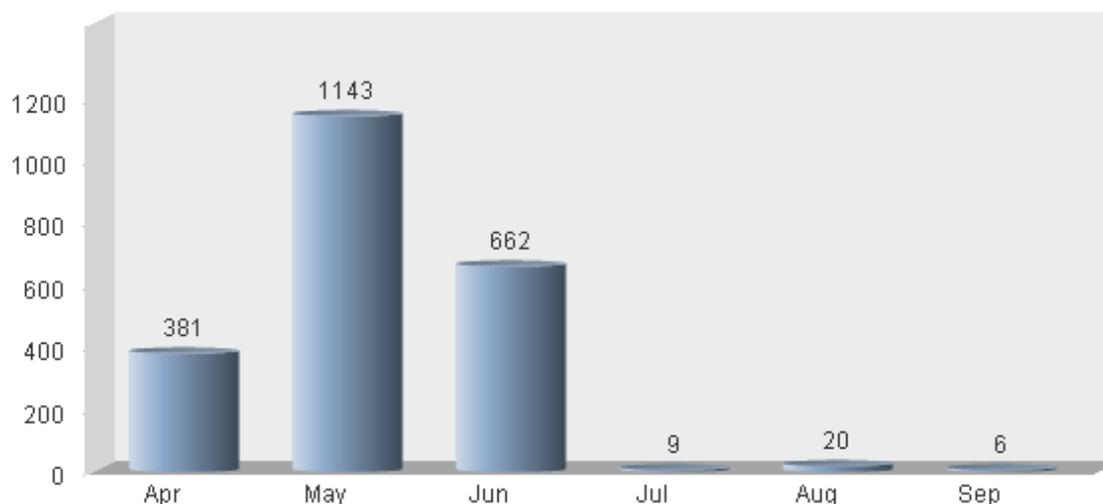
Pied Flycatcher

The annual counts show a worrying decline in numbers and it is probably now no longer breeding on Cannock Chase, a site which regularly held pairs every year. The remaining stronghold for summering birds is the North Staffordshire Moorland. Birds are seen most often in May and June with a few autumn passage birds occurring sometimes into September. Spring passage starts in earnest from mid-April onwards.

Records by Year



Records 2005 - 2014



April Records 2005 - 2014



Tree Sparrow

Numbers in the second half of the survey period are lower than the first and probably reflect a decline in numbers, mirroring the national situation.



Yellowhammer

Numbers in 2010 – 2012 were well below those in other years and are probably due to wintering birds moving elsewhere during the very cold winters of that time. Even allowing for this, numbers do appear to be in decline, mirroring the national picture.



Corn Bunting

Numbers show a gradual decline throughout the period other than a remarkable spike in 2009. This was caused by a wintering flock of up to 80 birds, which appeared at a number of sites in the east of the county in January. This increase was short lived and does not have appeared to have affected the downward trend.

