

City of London Breeding Bird Survey 2018

1. Introduction and executive summary

This is the fourth successive year of a comprehensive breeding bird survey covering the City of London and closely adjacent areas. As previously there has been a particular emphasis on collecting data concerning the breeding season population of Black Redstarts and other scarce species. The conservation status of Black Redstarts is now Red and the BTO/RSPB estimated breeding population in the entire UK is only 19 to 44 pairs. Based on 77 sightings during the 2018 survey period, six separate Black Redstart territories were resolved, with pairs of birds seen at three sites and immature birds seen with an adult male at another. There is strong evidence that there continues to be a stable population of breeding pairs in the City. This is clearly a significant population and any proposed disturbance or destruction of Black Redstart habitat in the City should be subject to full ecological impact surveys. Planners should ensure meaningful mitigation measures are in place before redevelopment begins.

Including all species found, this report is based on over 600 sightings made between March and August 2018; these were supplemented by the results of the annual nest box cleaning exercise that took place in September.

In total the 2018 Survey recorded:

- 51 species
- evidence of up to 27 species breeding in the City
- 77 sightings of Black Redstarts, the earliest on 9 March and the last in mid-September, providing evidence of at least six territories in the City
- An increase in sightings of House Sparrow on the City fringes
- significant numbers of migratory birds using City gardens as refuelling points

Table 1: Survey observations 2015 - 2018

	2015	2016	2017	2018
Total number of observations	626	623	703	616
Number of Black redstart observations	30	40	73	77
Total number of species observed	49	39	53	51
Species with evidence of breeding	28	27	29	28

Breeding bird surveys from 2015 to 2017 and rooftop surveys in 2004 and 2014 have established that there is a diverse range of breeding bird species in the City of London, including scarce Amber and Red listed species. This imposes a continuing responsibility on the City Planners to consider the needs of these species in both the Local Plan and in specific planning applications to ensure that the habitat of these scarce and rare breeding birds is maintained.

The weather during the breeding season in 2018 was challenging, with a mild winter followed by extremely cold, wet and windy periods, starting on 22 February and continuing throughout March. It is likely that conditions delayed breeding and probably increased mortality amongst small birds. The hot, dry summer may also have affected breeding.

2. Methodology

The methodology of the survey has changed as the birding team has evolved. During 2015 volunteers searched dedicated areas for Black Redstarts and other breeding birds. In time, other birders have joined in, posting sightings on social media, including the London Bird Club Wiki latest sightings page, but also Twitter and other media. Some observers work in the City and have views of particular roofscapes and this can be particularly helpful with certain species such as Black Redstarts. These observations are still supplemented by regular ground level walks throughout the survey period and by some roof top visits. Such searches can reach parts of the City that are not otherwise visited on a regular basis. Although all parts of the City were surveyed, the coverage was not as uniform as we would have liked and some areas did not receive sufficient coverage; in particular around the Temple Gardens. Members of the City Gardens team provided some useful sightings for which we are most grateful.

The purpose of the Survey is to establish the breeding season populations of a number of species. For many species that nest in inaccessible roof tops, such as Black Redstarts, Grey Wagtails and the gull species it is impossible to find definite proof of nesting, but other indications can be found such as gulls indulging in dive bombing activities; recently fledged young; adult birds collecting nest material or food for young. For some species the best indication of the locations of territories is from singing male birds, or in the case of some species such as the tits, the post-breeding season cleaning of nest boxes reveals more information on number of nests, and whether the breeding season was successful.

A number of observations were taken from the London Wiki. Quite rightly the website instructs its contributors not to post details of nesting by scarce breeding birds (those included in Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended). However, in the case of Black Redstarts in the City, reports of singing birds do not give away the locations of nesting birds and the rooftop areas where they may nest are not accessible to the general public. If there is a danger to these birds it is through normal rooftop activities by maintenance staff, or during construction works. In the event that a nest site should be found, measures would be taken by FoCG and the City Gardens team to protect such sites from disturbance and the LNHS/ RSPB would be informed immediately. Where nesting is suspected the exact location is not identified in case the site is used again in subsequent years.

All the observations were recorded on GiGL (Greenspace Information for Greater London) and are also available on the Friends of City Gardens website www.friendsofcitygardens.org.uk.

3. Biodiversity Action Plan target species and Birds of Conservation Concern

The current City of London BAP for 2016 - 2020 has four target bird species; House Sparrow, Black Redstart, Peregrine Falcon and Swift, chosen because they are exemplars of their ecological niches and highly adapted to the urban environment. It is also necessary to be aware of the 2015 updated list of Birds of Conservation Concern 4 (BoCC4) (Reference: <https://www.bto.org/science/monitoring/psob>).

The BoCC4 is an assessment of the 247 breeding species of UK, Channel and Isle of Man. Each species is assigned to one of three categories according to the current level of Conservation Concern. As a reminder, these categories are:

- *Red List: These species are either globally threatened, or there has been an historical population decline in UK during the period 1800–1995, or severe (at least 50%) decline in UK breeding population or UK breeding range over last 25 years, or longer-term period.*

- *Amber List: These are species with unfavourable conservation status in Europe, or species recovering from an historic population decline during 1800–1995 or suffering from a moderate (25-49%) decline in UK breeding population or contraction of UK breeding range over last 25 years, or the longer-term period. This category also includes rare breeders with 1–300 breeding pairs in UK and localised breeders with at least 50% of UK breeding or non-breeding population in 10 or fewer sites. Also, internationally important species where at least 20% of European breeding or non-breeding population is in the UK.*
- *The Green List includes all the species for which the above do not apply.*

This Survey shows that the avifauna of the City is surprisingly rich and includes a number of species which are on the red and amber lists, including; Mallard, Herring Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Kestrel, Grey Wagtail, Starling and Dunnock. In the case of Gull species, they seem to be thriving as a nesting species in the City. The City Gull populations are very hard to monitor because they too are nesting on rooftops and the increasing City population should be viewed positively, bearing in mind the decline in the more traditional nesting areas.

3.1 Summary of the City of London BAP species

Black Redstart

The 2018 Survey provides strong evidence of at least six Black Redstart territories, including observations of paired males at three of these locations, and juveniles seen at least one location. Identification of the six locations was supported by multiple sightings during the breeding period and are in accord with previous estimates (2015-2017) that the breeding population of Black Redstarts in the City remains in the range of five to ten pairs.

Set in the context of the UK breeding population, estimated by the RSPB to be between 19 to 44 pairs, these figures suggest that the City's birds represent as much as half of the breeding population in the UK. This estimate should be regarded with caution as the actual UK nesting numbers might be greater since breeding is difficult to prove (for instance around nuclear power stations at Dungeness and Sizewell). Nevertheless, it is clear that the City population is a significant part of the UK Black Redstart population and should be afforded all the necessary protections to preserve it at present levels.

This has important implications for planning and development since any disturbance to or demolition of current roof top habitats during the nesting season or at other times could be illegal as the species is protected by '*Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Schedule 1*' under which are birds which are protected by special penalties throughout the year.

House Sparrow

The results for this species since 2016 have been encouraging with two colonies maintained on the edge of the City and birds feeding regularly within the City. In 2018 House Sparrows have been seen regularly in the Barbican Wildlife garden and also feeding amongst the flower beds at Beech Gardens. These observations were mainly young birds during the post-nesting part of the season. For example, a gathering of 15 was observed on 24 June at Beech Gardens and a further 10 in Barbican Wildlife garden on the same date. This apparent expansion of the City population gives hope that they will spread to some of their former haunts.

Volunteers in the City have been providing enhanced feeding with high protein foods such as meal worms in the breeding season to improve chick and female mortality so it is hoped that this will help.

Peregrine Falcon

The Barbican nest site has been continuously used and monitored since the year 2000 by members of the London Peregrine Partnership (<http://london-peregrine-partnership.org.uk>). In 2015 the resident pair failed to breed, probably due to old age. The nest was taken over by a new pair that raised chicks in 2016, but they failed to fledge and although the new pair was still present and occupying the nest in 2017 and in 2018, they again failed to breed.

Common Swift

The fourth City of London BAP target species is the Common Swift, an Amber listed species that used to breed in the City and efforts are being made to bring them back with special swift nest boxes placed on a number of buildings. It is a declining species in general and is on the Amber list of conservation concern for this reason. During 2015 and 2016 they were largely absent (two in 2015 and one in 2016) but 2017 saw a dramatic increase in sightings with groups of up to 16 being observed. In 2018 this recovery seems to have continued with almost a constant presence over the St Paul's area from 24 June to 21 July and perhaps this reflects high flying insects above the City. There have been no reports relating to possible nesting in the City.

Other species of Conservation Concern

A number of scarce species are nesting in surrounding boroughs that have larger parks and gardens and these species may eventually move into the City. The observation of a Mistle Thrush at Finsbury Square on 1 April indicates that this species may soon join the City species. Other species nesting nearby could potentially also colonise such as Tawny Owl and House Martin, perhaps even Common Tern could move into the Barbican complex if suitable nesting rafts were to be provided. We need to be mindful of the needs of these species and perhaps consider habitat enhancements that could encourage them to join the other scarce breeding species that we already have in the City.

4. Breeding Birds

Out of the 51 species recorded during the survey period, there is evidence to suggest that up to 27 have nested in the City or attempted to do so. Although the survey team does not look for nests, evidence for breeding can be rather obvious, for example; gulls dive bombing, adult birds collecting nest material or food for young and of course cleaning nest boxes in autumn also provides hard evidence of nesting, be it only Great and Blue Tits.

4.1 Observations and evidence of breeding

Table 2 below summarises the results of over 600 separate observations over the period March to August 2018. Of the species listed in Table 2 there is compelling evidence that 16 bred in the City and further evidence that an additional 11 species also bred in the City in 2018. For example, for the two Falcon species, pairs and mating behaviour were observed, although there was no firm evidence of the existence of young. In the case of widely observed species such as Herring Gull, Feral Rock Dove and Wood Pigeon, it is also very likely that these species bred in the City, although there were no direct observations of young or juvenile birds. It is also likely that the number of pairs of these species is greater than shown below as only firm evidence of breeding behaviours as listed above has been accepted as proof.

Table 2: Observations and evidence of breeding

Species	Observations	Locations	Pairs seen	Proven breeding
Mallard	many	3	0	1
Kestrel	50	4	1	0
Peregrine	4	1	1	0
Moorhen	6	2	1	0
Coot	3	1	1	1
Lesser Black- backed Gull	Widespread	-	-	1
Herring Gull	Widespread	-	-	-
Feral Rock Dove	Widespread	-	-	-
Wood Pigeon	Widespread	-	-	-
Pied Wagtail	5	3	2	0
Grey Wagtail	2	1	1	0
Dunnock	16	9	3	1
Robin	20	12	1	2
Black Redstarts	77	16*	3	1
Blackbird	85	42	15	12
Goldcrest	1	1	1	1
Wren	20	10	0	0
Coal Tit	2	1	1	0
Great Tit	35	17	3	11
Blue Tit	55	25	5	12
Magpie	24	11	3	5
Jackdaw	3	3	1	0
Carrion Crow	33	24	10	5
Starling	17	5	3	At least 6 nests
House Sparrow	10	3	?	10 nests +
Goldfinch	53	31	3	5
Greenfinch	11	6	4	2

*These locations were resolved into 6 likely territories

4.2 Nest Box cleaning 26-28 Sept 2018

The number of nest boxes maintained by the City Garden team increased to 71 during the 2018 breeding season and spread through 27 locations (Table 3). These were cleaned at the end of September and the occupancy of the boxes recorded and a report prepared, which can be found on the FoCG website: <https://www.friendsofcitygardens.org.uk>. The report does not include all the nest boxes in the City as there are also nest boxes in private gardens, including the Temple Gardens and others on the rooftops of buildings with green roofs that are managed independently.

Twenty-five of the boxes had contained completed nests, which is the highest number since the nest box programme started. In addition, there were six partially completed nests which had been abandoned. The reasons for abandoning may include disturbance (including from other birds, such as Magpies), death of one or other of the pair, poor weather or availability of an alternative more attractive nest site. Blue Tits were found to have occupied 15 nest boxes whereas Great Tits occupied 10. The occupancy of the nest boxes seems to accord well with field observations of nesting pairs and detailed by the systematic list. In the case of Blue Tits, 12 of the 15 (80%) of the nest box nests correlated with observations from the Survey. In the case of Great Tits 5 out of 10 nests correlated (50%) perhaps signalling that they are less easy to find while nesting.

It is quite possible that there is now a surplus of nest boxes at certain localities where the natural territorial distances preclude the use of all the nest boxes available, but a surplus of potential nest sites can be a good thing, providing alternative sites in case of desertion, or for that matter

use by other species. As a case in point just outside the City a pair of House Sparrows have occupied a Great Tit nest box for the last two years.

Table 3: Occupancy of nest boxes 2015 - 2017 breeding seasons

	2018		2017		2016		2015	
	boxes	nests	boxes	nests	boxes	nests	boxes	nests
All Hallows by the Tower	1	1						
Barbican – Wildlife Garden	5	1	3	2	3	2	2	1
Barbican - Speed	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1
Barbican - St Giles	2	1	2	1	2	2	2	2
Barbican - Thomas More	7	3	7	4	7	3	7	1
Bunhill Fields	12	4	8	2	7	2	6	2
Church Entry	1	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cleary Garden	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	1
Finsbury Circus	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	1
Petticoat Square Garden	2	0	2	1	-	-	-	-
Portsoken	2	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
Postman's Park	3	1	4	0	3	1	3	1
St Andrew Holborn	2	1	1	0	-	-	-	-
St Anne and St Agnes	1	0	1	0	1	1	-	-
St Botolph without Bishopsgate	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	?
St Dunstan's in the East	5	1	5	2	5	2	6	0
St Olave's Hart Street	1	0	1	0	-	-	-	-
St Olave's Silver Street	1	1	1	1	1	1	-	-
St Mary Aldermanbury	2	1	2	1	2	2	1	1
St Mary Staining	1	1	1	1	1	1	-	-
St Michael Cornhill	1	0	1	0	1	0	-	-
St Paul's Cathedral	8	2	4	1	4	2	4	1
St Peter's Cornhill	1	0	1	0	1	0	-	-
Seething Lane	3	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Smithfield Rotunda	3	1	1	1	-	-	-	-
Total	71	25	53	23	45	23	41	12
Occupancy of checked boxes	35%		45%		51%		30%	

5. Migrant and regular visiting species

Interest in migrant birds in London continues to grow, and perhaps due to weather conditions, 2018 has generated some interesting sightings of both migrant birds and birds from nearby nesting areas. The gardens around St Paul's Cathedral seem to attract insectivorous migrants that often stay on into May, often singing loudly in the gardens. Nearby, the free to access rooftop of One New Change seems to be a particularly good place to sky watch for larger passing migrants as well as smaller migrants flying over the City. A number of experienced birders work in the City and their sightings are valuable.

Some species regularly visit the City, for instance there is now a breeding colony of Cormorants at Walthamstow Reservoir and these birds are regularly seen flying over the City to their feeding sites along the Thames and are regularly seen resting on the moorings at Customs House. Similarly, Egyptian Goose has become a regular nesting species in South London, at places such as Burgess Park in Southwark and they occasionally wander to the Thames, usually around Blackfriars. Other larger wildfowl occasionally do the same.

City gardens are clearly an important resource for migrating birds, providing cover and forage. This also highlights the need for green corridors to enable species to move between green spaces.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

Black Redstart population significant and maintained: This Survey confirmed the continuing presence of a significant population of Black Redstarts with six territories that probably related to breeding pairs. Successful nesting was confirmed at one of these locations and females were present at other locations as well. The current list of Birds of Conservation Concern estimates a total UK breeding population in the range of 19 to 44 pairs; the City therefore continues to provide home for a significant part of the UK's breeding population. Continued monitoring therefore seems vital and it is important that we continue to learn about the requirements for the conservation of this species in this particular urban habitat. The beneficial link between green roofs and Black Redstarts seems to be ever clearer from the survey results, but we should also seek to understand the importance of church spires and similar towers as singing posts. Although beyond the control of FoCG and the survey team, it has been gratifying to find out that at least one commercial green roof is being designed for as a foraging site for Black Redstarts and a Species Action Plan detailing features to include in green roofs has been prepared as guidance for developers.



A green roof designed for Biodiversity at 201 Bishopsgate (Photo: Charles Fentiman)

It is also vital that any change to the City's rooftop habitat through demolition of buildings and alterations to the rooftop spaces is carefully considered by the City Planning department to ensure that this important species continues to thrive. Detailed environmental impact studies should routinely be undertaken so that any adverse impacts can be offset before damage is done to potential nesting sites.

Importance of other species: The annual surveys have shown that there are several other bird species in need of consideration. Several scarce bird species chose the City of London as their

nest site and they also need to be afforded some help to allow them to continue to live in the City and hopefully to be joined by others.

Grey Wagtail: is a species that has become habituated to urban environments and has been nesting in the City for many years, largely unnoticed.

House Sparrow: with two colonies on the edge of the City, House Sparrows appear to be holding on and new efforts are planned with further well-placed nest boxes and habitat enhancements. However, lawn areas are also important for adults to find invertebrates to feed to their chicks and suitable green spaces, such as around St Paul's Cathedral have the potential to attract new, more central nesting colonies. Sparrows are quite happy to be in the company of people, so some focussed actions should enable them to return to this former well known nesting location.

Gulls: although regarded by many as nuisance birds, the City continues to have substantial populations of Herring Gulls and Lesser Black-backed Gulls. These species are now on the Red and Amber lists of population concern owing to population reductions in non-urban parts of the UK. The City's rooftop environment is also important for these species and at the very least the breeding situation in the City should be established.

Greenfinch: after being absent for several years, Greenfinches seem to be re-establishing themselves in the City. At one time they were relatively common but the population crashed, probably through illness that drastically reduced numbers throughout the country.

Starling: progress is being made to understand the nesting population of Starlings in the City with nesting along the Thames at sites such as Blackfriars Bridge, Adelaide House and the Tower of London. A post- breeding gathering was also observed in St Paul's churchyard and Festival Gardens. This is another red listed species so these sites are important breeding areas and St Paul's is again an important location. Four specialised Starling nest boxes have been installed in St Paul's Churchyard. These boxes were not used in 2018 and it will be interesting to see whether they are occupied in 2019.

Birds in City fringes and potential habitat enhancements: a number of species were observed on City fringes and with minor enhancements to habitat, these may be encouraged to nest in the City. Suggested enhancements could include:

Thicker spiny or thorny shrubbery: For example, occasional sighting of Long-tailed Tit shows that they must breed nearby and it may be possible to encourage this species to nest in the City. Planting more thorny shrubbery, such as pyracantha, cotoneaster or ribes should help.

Multi-layer shrubbery: Birds need to be able to move from ground level to the tree canopy within an environment that is protected from predators and at the same time provides forage of berries and insects. A pair of Goldcrest has nested in the Temple gardens and a pair of Coal Tits appears to have bred nearby suggesting that the City can support smaller insectivorous birds. It would be a great asset to encourage some songbirds to stay to breed such as Blackcap that appear every April but have to move on to find suitable nest sites.

Green corridors: Birds need to be able to move safely from one green space to another protected from predators. Planting more street trees, or if ground conditions do not permit deep rooted species, planting hedges, such as those around Smithfield would greatly improve cover and link green spaces effectively.

Reducing disturbance: Migrant birds continue to be observed in the shrubbery of St Paul's Cathedral Churchyard, especially on the south side and this could lead to further species

colonising the City. This part of the Churchyard is not a thoroughfare, although visitors often mistakenly access it hoping it leads to an exit so there is excessive foot traffic along the path, causing disturbance. Better signage is recommended here to reduce the level of disturbance. In general, creating dense shrub beds and making sure there are quiet spaces for birds in all gardens is important.

Future Surveys: A further breeding bird survey is taking place 2019, and for this access will be sought to several rooftops in the City. This will help us to locate Black Redstarts but will be carried out carefully so as not disturb any breeding birds that may be discovered. Also, the exact locations of any such breeding sites will not be disclosed.

7. Acknowledgements

We are grateful to all those who contributed to this survey of City birds during the 2018 breeding season. In addition to those who reported their sighting directly to the survey team. We are also obliged to other individuals (*italics*) also contributed records via various social media channels such as the 'London Bird Club Wiki' website <http://londonbirders.wikia.com/wiki/LatestNews> and Twitter. We are grateful for all sightings however they are received.

Paul Beckett (PB)	Ken Murray (KJM)	<i>George Kalli (JK)</i>
Julie Bridgland (JB)	Frank Nugent (FN)	<i>Paul Hawkins (PH)</i>
David Bradnum (DBn)	Allison Parkes (AP)	<i>Jim Martin (JM)</i>
David Crowley (DC)	Nick Senior (NS)	<i>Peter Massini (PM)</i>
Matt Evans (ME)	Gehan de Silva (GdS)	<i>Andrew Peel (AP)</i>
Charles Fentiman (CHF)	<i>D Bates (DB)</i>	<i>Saffia Rawat (SR)</i>
Dusty Gedge (DG)	<i>Reuben Braddock (RB)</i>	<i>Jason Reynolds(JR)</i>
Nic Guerra (NG)	<i>Hugh Bradshaw (HB)</i>	<i>G Sawtell (GT)</i>
Richard Hack (RH)	<i>Ian Bradshaw (IB)</i>	<i>Tom Smith (TS)</i>
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Kate Jenrick (KJ)	<i>A Casey (AC)</i>	<i>Steve Younger (SY)</i>
Stephen Leaman (SL)	<i>Mark Fairless (MF)</i>	

We would also like to thank the many other individuals who have helped, including the companies and organisations that have provided access to their green rooftops during the survey period, including the access provided for the Open Garden Squares Weekend on 9 and 10 June (<http://www.opensquares.org>), as well as for the specific purpose of the Survey. These were: Eversheds Sutherland, Nomura International plc and 201 Broadgate, Broadgate City of London. Access to these green roofs has been very valuable from the point of view of assessing the Black Redstart population and it is hoped that future bird surveys will be able to make more use of these roofs.

8. References

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Appendix 1: Systematic List

Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis*

Regularly seen flying to and from the Thames, presumably from the nesting colony at Walthamstow reservoirs. Individuals seen on mooring posts opposite Customs House with a high count of 23 on 12 February and subsequently individuals recorded 14 March, 6 April, 12 April and 1 May (CHF, RH).

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

One soaring above Saint Paul's on 4 May (KJM).

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca*

Singles recorded on Thames at Blackfriars bridge on four occasions between 6 April and 24 May including two present on 26 April (RH).

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Probably severely under recorded and are usually present at the main sites, such as the Barbican lakes where there was a female with three fairly recent chicks on 24 June (CHF). Occasionally seen along the Thames, especially at Blackfriars old bridge (RH). A notable sighting this year was of two males in the small ornamental pond at the Junction of Aldermanbury and Gresham Street on 2 May (SR).

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

This species is a national rarity. One was reported from Leadenhall Building heading SW at approx. 09.30 on 24 April. We have no details yet but it was posted by the 'Rare Birds' websites and will be assessed by the LNHS and National Rare Bird Panels.

Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

The only record this year was the remains of a partly decomposed juvenile bird found in Barbican Wildlife garden on 21 September (*per* SH).

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

Two reports received, both from the rooftop of One New Change, one on 6 April heading North West (NS) and two there 12.30 am on 8 July, circling and also heading NW (FN).

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

This year the nest on the Barbican continued to be occupied by the new pair that had taken over the nest in 2016. Several sightings were reported during the breeding season, mainly distant sightings, perched near the nest, but one sighting over Middlesex Street on 22 June may relate to these nesting birds or others that are nesting in other boroughs of London. We understand from FoCG that this year the pair failed to breed probably related to the immaturity of this pair (SH).

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

This year the well-established nest at the City of London police station in Wood Street was occupied by the male bird from 12 January and joined by a female on 12 February and mating was observed on 23 February. The pair were seen almost daily through to the end of March, frequently having tussles with neighbouring Carrion Crows. On 27 March the nest was visited by an additional male that was seen off by the resident pair and mating was again observed on 3 April and the pair continued to be seen until 12 April, however the nest was noticed to be abandoned after this date (PB). Interestingly a male was present at the nest box from 21 August and seems likely to be the original male of the pair. On 12 April a pair of very vocal kestrels appeared at St Paul's Cathedral with the female calling loudly and the male performing a

winnowing display flight on the north side of the Cathedral (CHF). In 2017 the Wood Street pair also abandoned their nest and subsequently a pair nested successfully at St Paul's, however this sighting was not followed by further sightings at St Paul's.

Other sightings included a male in display flight over Fetter Lane on 14 March, and one occasionally seen at Middle Temple Gardens during May and June. On 19 June it was photographed and seen to swoop down and take a mouse (KJ).

Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

A pair were present by the Barbican main lake, on the east side during April, and solitary bird was seen on 24 June on the West side of the lake where it was accepting food from a resident. One was also noted on 12 April by the St Giles Cripplegate lake but no young reported this year from either lake (CHF). One was present on the lawns of Bunhill Fields on 25 January (CHF).

Common Coot *Fulica atra*

A pair was present on the east side of Thomas More community gardens on 1 and 12 May and on 24 June a juvenile was seen on the main lake there being fed by both parents (CHF).

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

One flying up river level with St Paul's on 17 August at 13.00 (IB *per London Wiki Birder*).

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

This species is included for completeness since it is a common species along the Thames in winter and inland in areas such as around the Barbican, but they appear to leave early in spring and not return until well into the autumn. Frequent sightings along the Thames in winter, such as 7 at Blackfriars Bridge on 12 February (CHF), but a tight migrating flock of 20 travelling fast downstream on 1 April is less usual. A group of between 20 on 17 July at Millennium Bridge area perhaps representing wandering non breeding birds (RH).

Common Gull *Larus canus*

Four adults present at Blackfriars Beach on 5 April (DB *per London Wiki Birder*)

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

Away from the Thames this was the most frequently encountered gull species and regularly seen scavenging for scraps at crowded locations. One sighting involved two feeding on a freshly dead Woodpigeon on the pavement at 7 Canon Street. Another was seen trying to tear open a plastic bag pulled from a waste bin by the entrance to the Smithfield Rotunda. Widespread nesting in the City is suspected but only two definite breeding records, at St Paul's Cathedral on 24 June, at least 3 whining and begging young and young calling for food atop a roof at 77-78 Chancery Lane on 17 July (CHF, FN, RH).

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

As in previous years they were frequently encountered along the Thames but are known to be nesting in the City, mainly along the Thames and are frequently seen during the nesting season around St Paul's Cathedral. In the winter one was encountered on 25 January, feeding on worms at the Barbican on the lawn of Thomas More garden. The only proven nesting was on the art gallery roof at Guildhall with the adult apparently standing guard on 19 May (CHF) and two juveniles calling from the roof on 16 July (RH). With this species being on the BoCC4 Red List all such sightings of proven nesting are significant although many more are likely to be nesting in the City.

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*

A third-calendar year bird at Blackfriars Bridge on 6 April (NS) and two first-calendar year birds at Southwark bridge on 17 July (NS). Last year was the first time this species was recorded in the

City. This species is the southern counterpart of the Herring Gull, common around the Mediterranean, and they disperse in late summer and can be relatively common in the Thames estuary.

Tern sp. *Sterna*

A flock of around 20 Common Terns (possibly Arctic) flying up river over Tower Bridge around 13:30 on 21 September (PM *per London Wiki Birder*).

Feral Rock Dove *Columba livia*

This species is a common and widespread breeding species in the City.

Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*

This species is a common and widespread breeding species in the City. Only specific records of proven nesting are listed: Barbican, Thomas More Garden West side, two fledglings perched with one adult nearby on 1 April (CHF). Finsbury Circus two juveniles on 21 July (RH).

Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittaculla krameri*

Two in Temple Gardens in the morning on 17 May (ME).

Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*

At New Change, one over high heading SW at 08:10 on 1 November (NS). There was a stronger than usual passage of this species throughout the UK during the autumn.

Common Swift *Apus apus*

After some years of being largely absent, 2017 saw a welcome return of this species and this trend seems to have continued in 2018 with the almost constant presence of Swifts from 24 June to 21 July (FN, CHF, RH). In addition to these birds there was an exceptionally early record for the species of two flying past the Leadenhall Building on 19 April, *per Birdguides*. The first ones are normally at the very end of April/early May.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopus major*

One seen calling on an aerial on buildings in Temple Gardens at about 08.00 on 29 August (ME).

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

Only two records compared with twelve records in 2017, so clearly a poor year for this species. Both sightings were at St Botolph without Bishopsgate on 20 and 22 April (KJM).

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

An adult male watched approaching from some distance and flew overhead at One New Change heading North at 12.45 on 25 April (KJM).

Pied Wagtail *Motacilla Alba*

Five records from four locations between 8 June and 24 July, including a pair seen twice at Guildhall (FN, NS) and a pair present "all day" feeding on the green roofs of Cannon St Station and the Nomura building on 8 June (FN). A pair was also seen by the same observer in June on the rooftop of Nomura in 2017.

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

19 reports came from 10 locations, usually singing males defending territories, but this species is certainly under reported. Being difficult to spot most records related to singing males located at: St Paul's Churchyard/25 Cannon St gardens (KM, CHF), St Ann & Agnes churchyard (KJM, CHF), Postman Park, Barbican – Thomas More garden, Beech Gardens and Brandon Mews. Nearby there was also a singing bird at Salters Hall, St Alphage Gardens and Barbican Wildlife garden. The Temple Gardens area held at least two territories (CHF).

Dunnoek *Prunella modularis*

16 reports came from nine locations and mostly related to singing birds in likely breeding sites and three of the locations held pairs of birds; at St Paul's Churchyard (KM), Museum of London Rotunda (CHF) and St Botolph without Bishopsgate. At one further locality (Barbican) where singing had been noted in June a disused nest was found in the autumn containing an unhatched egg, (NG).

Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

20 reports came from 12 locations and mostly related to singing birds in likely breeding sites as follows: Inner Temple Gardens (RH, CHF), Middle Temple Garden – a juvenile on a lawn 17 July (KJ, CHF), Kings Bench Walk (CHF), two territories at St Paul's NE Side (KM, RH, CHF); St Mary Aldermanbury (KM, CHF), Bunhill Field Burial Grounds at least two singing males in April and a juvenile seen under a feeder in June (CHF), St Botolph without Bishopsgate Gardens (KM); Barbican at Thomas More garden (CHF), Barbican Wildlife garden (CHF). Most of the above were noted on multiple occasions but it seems likely that there were others hidden away, not singing during monitoring visits.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*

As in 2017 was a late start in terms of Black Redstarts sightings, although there was an intriguing early sighting of an adult male on 9 March at Guildhall where they are regularly seen during the summer, recorded by a birder who works at Guildhall. There were no further sightings at this site until the main spring arrival. It would appear that the March individual was there for a day only, perhaps making a visit from a nearby wintering site. The spring arrival proper started with a singing bird on the dome of St Paul's cathedral on 8 May, the Guildhall area on 14 May and Bank of England area on 15 May. For the remainder of May these areas seemed to represent the territories with singing birds recorded by various observers at each general site. Reports of more than one bird from both Guildhall and the Eversheds roof indicated that pairings had taken place and possibly two territories relatively close by. By the end of May singing was regularly being heard from around St Mary-le-Bow Church. Birds were regularly recorded in these areas including sightings of full adult males singing, grey singing birds and females.

Other territories came to light later in the breeding season as detailed below and as in previous years the main song period was in June and extending to late July.

Only six territories with singing males were identified compared with nine in 2017, however this year paired males were confirmed in two locations, also a male with a female, or immature in another, plus a male with two immature type plumage birds (one could have been a female) at another location. A female was seen to repeatedly go to a what the observer felt might be a nesting site corresponding to one of the above mentioned pairs.

Post breeding records included one reported on the London Stock Exchange (near St Paul's) and a juvenile reported at Finsbury Square between 4 to 15 September. None reported subsequently.

St Lawrence Jewry, Guildhall and surroundings

This seems to relate to one of the 2017 birds. Last year the usual song posts were used by a grey, immature bird. This year descriptions fit with that bird having matured and developed pale wing flashes. Although this cannot be definitely identified as the same bird, all observers that have seen both birds concur that this is the same male. This bird seems to have ranged widely from the Guildhall roof top over to Eversheds and as far afield as Saddlers' Hall, Gutter Lane where it has been seen in territorial tussle with the St Paul's male. A female was noted on at least six occasions. On 9 June a female was seen repeatedly going to a likely nest location. Observations from staff at Eversheds and other observers suggest there may have been a territory boundary on the southern edge – relative to a bird regularly singing at St Mary at Bow.

On 24 August singing was noted from separate birds at this location and the Guildhall rooftop, confirming at least two territories. (CHF, DG, FN, GK, PB, NS, JB, SL).

St Paul's Cathedral and St Mary-le-Bow Church and surrounds

A full breeding plumaged adult male was regularly seen singing at Saint Paul's Cathedral from 8 May, often singing from the NW Spire. From the 24 May singing was also noted from St Mary-le-Bow on several occasions and this bird would be glimpsed flying over to the southern end of the Eversheds roof. This bird was not well enough seen for the plumage to be described, but it seems likely to have been the St Paul's adult male. A female was observed flying over One New Change, in the direction of Saint Paul's Cathedral, so probably from St Mary-le-Bow, which is close by. There were no observations indicating simultaneous singing from St Paul's and St Mary-le-Bow so it seems likely that this was part of the same territory, including St Vedast Church where singing also took place. The female was observed on at least three occasions, although one observer indicated seeing the pair together on more than one occasion. (JW, IB, NS, SW, FN, KJM, CHF, GdS, PH, JM, SL).

Bank of England

For the past few years this had been a regular locality with birds recorded from one of the inner courtyards, but they were absent in 2017 (DBn). In 2018 one was heard independently within the Bank complex by two observers in the afternoon of 15 May. It was heard again by a third observer on 16 May. One was again heard, this time from a central courtyard on 30 May but no sightings subsequently from within the Bank. However, one was heard singing from outside the Bank on 9 June and again on 24 July. The Bank has two inner courtyards and these are not readily viewable, even by the bank staff looking out for Black Redstarts. (DBn, TK, FN, MB). Three further reports seem likely to relate to the Bank territory, these were at the King Street/Cheapside junction on 28 June, Tower of St Michael Cornhill 9 June, Mansion House 18 June and Queen Victoria Street on Bloomberg building on 22 June and the King Street/Cheapside junction on 28 June. (SL, PH, CHF).

Farringdon Station

Just outside the City one was reported singing at the Station on 12 June and seen on adjacent rooftops and even seen on one of the platforms. However, despite searches it was not refound but one was reported there again on 22 June. This general area had a Black Redstart present in 2016 and 2017, but with the local infrastructure they be particularly hard to find in the area between Smithfield market and Farringdon. (JR, GS)

St Brides / Tudor Street

A male and female/immature was seen at St Brides Church/Fleet Street on 1 July and snatches of song were heard from Tudor Street, near the Crowne Plaza Hotel on 17 July. (ME, AP).

Exchange Square

The first report here was on 3 July when a pristine adult male Black Redstart was seen flycatching on the UBS building in the evening. Subsequently it was seen and heard there by the same observer on 7 and 8 July. It was also seen frequenting a patch of grass by Liverpool Street Station on 13 July and on 14 July it was singing very well and loudly from the top of a roof, and on 15 July it appears to have been challenged by another male and the two appeared in a high speed chase around the rooftops when the interloper flew off and disappeared to the East. This bird was not as bright as the fully adult male and it was felt by the observer that this was perhaps an unmated less mature bird – perhaps from the Spitalfields market/Devonshire Square area for which often has Black Redstarts but none reported in 2018. The next day the adult male was seen and photographed at ground level with two individuals with female type plumage, which

suggestions the birds were either an adult male with a female and one young or male with two young. (NF, PA).

Redwing *Turdus iliacus*

One was seen in Postman's Park on 27 January (SH) and another in the Temple Gardens on 4 December (ME).

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*

One was just outside the City on the southern end of Finsbury Square on 1 April looking settled after being chased by a nesting Carrion Crow (CHF).

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*

Five were present at the Bunhill Fields Burial site on 27 January (SH).

Blackbird *Turdus merula*

85 reports came from at least 42 locations and almost certainly most relate to breeding birds. Pairs were seen at 13 of the sites and proof of nesting came from 11 sites (CHF).

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*

One was present in St Paul's Churchyard on 4 May (KJM).

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

Present at St Paul's Churchyard from 11 April to 3 May with at least three singing males and a female seen on 25 April to 1 May (IB, RH, JW, KJM, CHF). One singing in the Gardens at 25 Cannon Street on 12 and 22 April may have related to the St Paul's birds (KJM, CHF). A female present at St Botolph without Bishopsgate on 12 April and a male there on 22 April (KJM).

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

One was present at Fortune Park on 5 April (TS *per London Wiki Birder*).

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus tohilus*

One was present, singing in the rain at St Paul's Churchyard on the 30 April (JW *per Twitter*).

Goldcrest *Regulus*

Following on from last year's occurrence at Inner Temple Gardens, a pair was reported to be feeding young on 8 June (*per London Wiki Birder* HB). Although not in the City, one was also reported at Lincoln's Inn Fields on 6 April (AC *per London Wiki Birder*).

Coal Tit *Parus ater*

Two observed at Inner Temple Gardens on 6 April, including one singing near and one flew into a yew tree from the direction of Kings Bench Walk on 1 May (RH). This is a previous breeding locality, including in 2017.

Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*

Again, an increase in the number of reports compared to the previous year with 40 records coming from 23 locations, many of the sightings related to pairs, often corresponding to occupied nest boxes. In addition, three nest boxes showed evidence of occupancy by Blue Tits. Definitely occupied nest boxes and sightings of juveniles were as follows, including results of the nest box cleaning exercise in September (FoCG): Barbican occupied nests were at Thomas More Garden (CHF, SH), Barbican Speed House (SH), Barbican Wildlife garden (SH). There was an occupied nest box at St Botolph without Bishopsgate (KJM, SH), at Bunhill Fields birds recorded during the breeding season and two nest boxes had been used (SH).

At St Paul's a nest hole in the Masonry of the church was again used for the third year in succession (KJM, RH, CHF), Also at St Paul's an occupied nest to the NE side of the churchyard

(SH) with two adults seen feeding young in a yew tree in April (RH). Similarly, a nest box at St Mary Staining, Oat Lane was had been occupied with visits from adults (KM, SH). St Dunstan in the East (SH), Finsbury Circus at least one pair seen during the breeding season and nest box was found to have been used (CHF, SH). Adults seen feeding along Noble Street (RH, CHF) may have related to this nest, but the cleaning also confirmed the use of a used nest box at St Olave's, Silver Street (SH). Smithfield Rotunda also held Blue Tits confirmed by the nest box survey (SH) and a further used nest boxes in Cleary Garden.

Great Tit *Parus major*

26 records were received from 15 locations and, in addition to the sightings, proof of nesting as follows: No observation concerned the masonry nest at the Chartered Insurance Institute at 20 Aldermanbury (KJM, CHF). In addition to observations of a well grown juvenile on 24 June at Bunhill Fields (CHF) two nest boxes there were found to have been used (SH). Individuals were regularly seen and heard around the Temple Gardens but no proof of nesting, St Paul's Churchyard regular sightings (RH, CHF, KJM) matched a nest box that had been used (SH). Nest boxes were found to have been occupied in Barbican Wildlife garden (FoCG nest box cleaning report). In Barbican - Thomas More garden two nest boxes had been used (SH) and one well grown juvenile was observed in June (CHF). A nest box in Cleary Gardens was being tended by two adults on 19 May (CHF) and confirmed by the nest box cleaning in September (SH). A pair was seen at St Ann Blackfriars on 12 April, close to a nest box there (not FOCG) and perhaps related to a pair seen nearby at Waithman Street/Apothecary Street during 2017. The nest box cleaning survey also reported used nest boxes at Barbican - St Giles terrace/Barber Surgeons, Seething Lane, All Hallows and St Andrews Holborn (SH.)

Magpie *Pica pica*

A recovery of number of sightings with 24 compared to 16 during 2017, coming from 11 locations and five active nests found (CHF). Juvenile birds were seen at two locations, at St Paul's Churchyard on 1 May (RH), and another Barbican Wildlife garden on 24 July (CHF).

Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*

This species seems to be colonising, but it may just be one pair moving around the northern part of the City. Two seen flying over Guildhall on 21 May (NS) and two flying low over the Eversheds roof on 9 June (FN) and one seen briefly at Barbican, Beech gardens also on 9 June (CHF), but this is close enough to be one of the same individuals exploring.

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*

This species roams widely in the City and are frequently encountered and perhaps as a result of familiarity they can be overlooked. 33 sightings were reported from 22 locations and at least seven active nests located and pairs seen at other locations. This species builds bulky nests in tall trees it has been fairly easy to identify occupied nests before the trees develop their leaves (CHF, RH).

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

A marked decrease of sightings down to 17 but this is at least in part of fewer observer visits to key areas. Records were logged from five locations which seem to include both breeding areas as well as post- breeding gathering areas. Efforts to locate breeding colonies seem to be paying off with nesting colonies along the Thames at Blackfriars Bridge (RH) with activity observed between 1 May and 19 May at least (RH, CHF), King William Street on the side masonry of Adelaide House (CHF). Although odd birds were seen at St Paul's during March and April. the beginning of the post-nesting gathering there started at the end of May with four there on 24

June (CHF) after which numbers built to a peak of 30-50 on 16 July rising to between 60-100 on 21 July (RH) with a fairly even mix of adults and juveniles.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

The colony adjacent to the Barbican, Breton House at the southern end of Golden Lane seems to be doing very well. They are regularly present in Fortune park and still come to feed at the wildlife garden at Breton House which is within the City. However, a sighting of two individuals at the Barbican Wildlife garden on 28 February (AP) seems to have developed into a regular feeding location for the sparrows. A count of 12 in Fortune Park on 1 May did not seem excessive and there were approximately equal numbers of males and females (CHF). By 14 May they had become regular at Barbican Wildlife garden with a comment that they were now regularly feeding in the meadow (AP). A count of 10+ there on 24 June and also present on that date at the more usual locations at Breton house and Bowater House.



Female House Sparrow feeding in the Fann Street Wildlife Park (Photo by Allison Parkes)

The further spread (at least for feeding purposes) was heralded by one watched taking seeds from euphorbias in Beech Gardens on 15 June (SH), and other residents reported seeing sparrows “all over Beech Gardens” (Per SH). This was confirmed on 24 June when 15+ immatures were observed feeding in Beech Gardens and a further group of 10+ in the Barbican Wildlife garden consisting of mainly immatures but some adults also (CHF). This is an exciting development as perhaps it indicates a spread back into the City.

The Tower of London colony continued but only two reports, with four chirruping from the roof space of the Gift Shop on the 12 February and two there on 12 April.

Greenfinch *Chloris chloris*

The return of this species to the City was consolidated with 11 reports, coming from six locations with a juvenile on the ground with two adults at St Paul's Churchyard on 13 May (KM) and a nesting pair in the vicinity of St Mary Aldermanbury on 24 June (NS), may relate to an earlier sighting at Guildhall on 17 May (PB).

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

With 53 records from 31 locations and making allowance for less observer coverage the sightings suggest that the population is being maintained. Definite breeding records included a fallen used nest found St Pauls/Haz crossing N side on 24 June under a small ornamental tree (CHF). A pair at a 2017 nest site but nest could not be found at St Botolph without Bishopsgate on 22 April (KM). Adult with at least one juvenile at Broadgate on 8 July (FN). Despite their colourfulness they can be very hard to see and most sightings result from the call or song being heard first.