

Nature Notes

by
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NATURE NOTES

Preface by Mr David Pike, Headmaster of Harthill School

March 1976

Now that Spring is just around the corner and as the weather begins to improve, no doubt many of you will be going on the traditional and attractive walks of Harthill. One of the most beautiful and interesting walks is around the Harthill Ponds, and a feature of this walk is the abundance of natural life that can be seen, especially in Spring.

I have recently obtained a booklet called Sheffield Bird Report 1974 issued by the Sheffield Bird Study Group. In this book is an article on Harthill which refers to the Preliminary Results of an Ornithological Survey of Harthill Reservoirs. Briefly, what has happened is that the ponds, have been recognised by the S.B.S.G. as an area of ornithological potential' and a group of dedicated bird watchers have observed and recorded the number of species seen on or around the ponds during the year, starting in March 1973. The survey itself is due to end in February of this year, and the final report should be due out in 1977.

What is staggering to a layman such as myself, is the amazing number of 97 different species of bird seen around the ponds during this time. Many of these birds are those that can be seen at more or less any time, I refer of course to house-sparrow, blackbird, thrush, crow and waterhen, familiar fowl to nearly all of us. However a goodly number on this list comprise birds which only very few are privileged to see around Harthill and fewer still to identify. Birds such as oystercatcher, turnstone, dunlin and great crested grebe have been seen at various times.

A fact which was brought home to me recently, occurred during a walk with Mr. Bill Clarke who has been very active in the compilation of this study.

While walking with him around the ponds one day, I was amazed to find that all those birds that I had labelled sparrow, were in fact - reed bunting or immature goldfinches, and that 'duck' was only a blanket name covering a great many species from garganey to goldeneye, mallard to merganser which can only be identified through patience and the aid of a pair of binoculars. Still, 97 species is good going in my opinion and it is hoped that this number will be bettered by the time of the Final Report of Sheffield Bird Study Groups magazine is issued.

NATURE NOTES

by W. Clark

April 1976

All common garden birds have a regular supply of food which is either thrown out for them, or they will follow a gardener and snap up any grubs or worms which are turned up with the spade. They will also eat many harmful insects. This of course, during the warm weather.

Winter time is a different thing altogether when many of the smaller birds die in the severe cold.

Hard frosts and snow prevent them finding their diet of seeds and grubs in the fields and woods. This is when they visit our gardens to take advantage of the scraps of food which are available.

A well stocked bird table will encourage such birds as the tit family, greenfinch, chaffinch and bullfinch. All these birds are most colourful and many people derive much pleasure in watching them just for the colour they produce.

The male chaffinch is one of the prettiest coloured of all British birds in his plumage of slateblue head, brown back, lovely pink breast, white wing bars and white tail feathers which show up distinctively when in flight. The female is a dull bird in comparison being of Olive Brown with white wing bars.

The male's song is a mixture of notes ending with a flourishing effect, and can be heard quite clearly ringing through the quiet of a wood in spring and summer.

Wild bird food can be obtained from any pet shop.

May 1976

Many of our visiting birds have arrived from Africa, Asia, etc., to breed here. On April 11th four Sandmartins were seen on the first pond, on the 15th three Swallows were seen on the third pond, and on April 20th the Willow Warbler was seen and heard on the first pond. These aren't the earliest by any means as Chiff Chaff and Willow Warbler have been reported in other areas as have other visitors, but as we are concerned with Harthill and its surrounding woods and fields it is interesting to see and hear these birds in our locality.

Both Chiff Chaff and Willow Warbler are almost identical in appearance and only an experienced observer can tell them apart in their plumage of olive above and buffish white underneath. Their songs are the best way of identifying them.

The Chiff Chaff sings a two note song almost continually from a high vantage point and it cannot be mistaken for any other bird song. It will sometimes vary its two notes to "Chiff-chiff" or "Chaff-chiff", but whichever way it puts the notes it uses them to identify itself.

The Willow Warbler is a different songster altogether, and its beautiful clear song makes it a great favourite among many people as its familiar sound can be heard in any wood or copse. Both birds are four and a half inches long and when the trees are in full leaf they are difficult to see as they blend very well with the greenery, but patience can be rewarded in the case of the Willow Warbler and on more than one occasion have been observed at a very short distance of no more than two yards, this being achieved by imitation of its call notes.

It is noticeable too that many wild plants and flowers are in bloom. Wood anemone, lesser Celendine, Coltsfoot, Sweet Violet common Dog Violet, Marsh Marigold etc., and are now scattered all over the countryside, and soon the woods will be carpeted with Bluebells.

June 1976

The Curlew flew in from the west and dropped in on the east side of the second pond, apparently to feed. Due to human disturbance it stayed no more than 5 minutes and flew off in a northerly direction. This happens with many of our visitors, so anyone who likes to see such birds as Curlews, Sanderling, Redshank, Dunlin, Little ringed plover will have to make frequent visits to the ponds and with the aid of suitable binoculars, they might be able to view these wading birds of which the Curlew is the largest. During its brief stay, the Curlew presented a delightful picture, and in the bright sunlight its long curved beak was clearly visible, and its brown streaked and patterned plumage stood out very prominently. Mainly a bird of coast and moorland, the Curlew has visited the ponds on more than one occasion.

Animal life is abundant on all three ponds, water voles can be seen regularly feeding on the fresh green shoots of water plants, and can be approached to within a few yards with care. Its habit of diving under water can be observed if the water is clear and one was seen to dive five times and each time it appeared with a green shoot, then on its tiny landing stage of vegetation on the reeds it fed the shoot into its mouth with its fingers like claws, while it sat on its haunches. After each shoot it gave itself a wash and brush up before diving again.

There has been a good show of Blackthorn this year, and all over the countryside bushes were covered with flowers. Blackthorn flowers appear in the early spring before the leaves. Pussy Willow has done well too, and the bushes on the ponds have also been covered in flower, like the Blackthorn it flowers before the leaves appear.

July 1976

The noise made by several small birds indicated they were disturbed by some intruders. This was on the west side of the first pond among the willows. Moving closer, it was soon apparent the intruder was in fact high among the thick leaf cover. A ten minute wait proved fruitful as the intruder suddenly flew out of the willows followed by a chirping horde of birds which soon gave up the chase.

It was a little owl which had caused all the disturbance and it was soon flying out of range of the ponds and across the fields where it settled down on a fence post.

It was most likely the same one which had been seen on the ponds on two previous occasions in the same place.

The little owl is the smallest of our owls and can be seen very often in daylight as well as at dusk. It is much smaller than other British owls being only 9-10 inches in length.

This bird of prey feeds on birds, mammals and insects. Its plumage is of grey-brown colour,

Stoats can be seen occasionally and a pair were seen a few weeks ago in the trunk of an old tree on the edge of the copse on the third pond. Their squeaks could be clearly heard as they ran about the inside of the old tree, then both appeared no more than 5-6 feet away in the open and a clear view of them was possible. On another occasion a stoat was seen again quite close on a path on the third pond presumably hunting alongside the long grass.

The stoat is a clean looking animal in its chestnut brown above and white underparts. It has a black tip to its tail.

It cannot be mistaken for a weasel as it is a much bigger animal.

August 1976

Visiting a local wood in the middle of July found it practically void of any full bird song, except perhaps for the wren, which was in full song in different parts of the wood. The reason for the lack of singing is of course the end of the breeding season, except for late nesters.

The call note of the robin, the alarm call of a blackbird, the dreamy call of the wood pigeon, the twittering redpoll together with the call notes of juvenile willow warblers was about all that was heard, but on emerging out of the thick leaf covered beech trees, another sound was heard, that of a colony of long tailed tits, probably only 9 or 10 of them, but very interesting to watch as they came closer and closer to see who had disturbed them. A pair of these tiny birds with the very long tails were observed during the spring nest building. At intervals of 3-5 minutes one would appear with feathers on the silky yarn of spider's webs. The finished nest is a marvellous structure of the softest texture imaginable. About 6 to 15 eggs are laid in this feather ball during April and May.

The woodland sides were drenched in warm sunshine making them a haven for insect life. Small tortoiseshell butterflies were in evidence as was the meadow brown, which seemed to be everywhere.

Lesser Knapweed was beginning to burst into bloom, wood groundsel was in full flower and shone bright yellow in the sunlight. Spear thistle was showing up well, as were the cow parsley and rosebay willow herb.

The rides looked well in their contrasting greens of beech, Scots spine, sycamore and ash etc.

September 1976

Recently a young tufted duck was found on the third pond with a length of fishing line wrapped around its legs and body.

The line was cut away but the duckling had obviously swallowed the baited hook, which was firmly embedded inside its stomach.

When it was returned to the water it swam away to join its family, but as a length of nylon fishing line and a metal hook are not part of a tufted ducks diet it can be assumed that the bird is now dead.

Other birds have met the same fate. Black headed gull reed bunting, pied wagtail, coot, moorhen, and lapwing have been found dead entwined in fishing line with the hook and line down their throats. These have been found over a period of years on Harthill and Pebley ponds.

The two families of tufted duck were observed on the third pond in the middle of August.

The male tufted duck is black with white flanks and is easily recognised. The female is brown. Both have a tuft of feathers which sweep back over the head. They are diving ducks and are constantly diving for food which consists of shellfish, water weed and various insects.

Red Admiral and Peacock butterflies were to be seen, also in August, feeding among the thick thistle beds along the pond side, and a good number of dragonflies were also seen hunting among the long grass on the third pond bank.

October 1976

Visiting the ponds on 18th September was very interesting. Hundreds of birds are now grouping and feeding on the stubble and pasture land around all three ponds to build up energy for the forthcoming winter.

A large flock of tree sparrows, linnets, reed bunting etc., flew across into the pasture land on the West side of the first pond to join the scores of starlings and rooks.

About 300 black headed gulls were on the first pond together with mallard, coot and moorhen.

Moving onto the second pond five little ringed plovers and two common sandpipers were feeding on the water line, and bathing in the clear stream which feeds the second pond were fifteen goldfinches.

The pussy willow bushes and hawthorn bushes on the third pond were full of birds, and six different species were seen, and like the flock on the first pond they eventually flew off and into the stubble.

Mallard and tufted duck were on the third pond, and no doubt they will be joined during the winter by shoveler teal, pochard, wigeon etc., which come to winter in the area.

The shoveler duck can be recognised by its large bill even from a good distance. The head is bottle green in the drake with white breast and chestnut

flanks. The duck is mottled brown. Both sexes have a blue patch on the fore wing.

The hawthorn bushes which border the ponds were covered in red berries, proof of the abundance of may-bloom which the bushes held during the spring, and small tortoiseshell butterflies were about in the warm sunshine feeding on the last blooms of thistle and rosebay willow herb.

November 1976

The last of our visiting birds will be on their way by now to winter in the hot climates of Africa.

House-martins were seen on the first pond on October 16th. They were probably the last visitors to leave Harthill. House-martins are the birds which build their nests under the eaves of houses etc. They are easily distinguished from the swallow by having a white rump and a more shallow tail fork. Its underparts are white and above it is of a blue-black hue.

Many house-martins nests are taken over by house-sparrows, and a fallen nest picked up this year contained three house-sparrows eggs.

A large flock of lapwings were seen in a field down Manor Road accompanied by herring and black-headed gulls, and in the same area a kestrel was observed for half an hour quartering the fields and hedgerows. Dunlin, little ringed plover, ringed plover, redshank have been seen on the ponds and no doubt many more waders will visit us during the winter months.

December 1976

The large flock of fieldfares and redwings took to the air out of the large hawthorn bushes on the third pond tail. Their notes rang out on the still air of the November morning. The 'chack' of the fieldfare was easily distinguished from the soft notes of the redwing. They are both very timid birds and a very careful approach has to be made to get a clear view of the birds.

The fieldfare is 10 ins in length. The grey head and rump can be clearly seen, the back is brown, the breast is lighter covered with black spots, the tail is very dark, the breast is lighter covered with black spots, the tail is very dark and in subdued light it looks black.

The redwing is more like a song thrush in appearance but its light eye stripe and red wing patch distinguish it from the song thrush. It is 8½ inches in length.

At least forty mallard were to be seen on the ponds and were accompanied by twenty tufted duck. Also on the third pond were half a dozen pochard, most likely the first of our visiting winter ducks.

The mild morning also brought snatches of song from the wren, blackbird and robin. Redpoll were feeding in the tops of birch and elder, and occasionally would fly off to settle in another tree to continue feeding.

Moving off the well worn patch between the third pond copse and Pebley found the track of a fox clearly visible in the soft rain sodden trench made by the plough. It had probably been hunting the rabbits which inhabit the copse.

January 1977

Early December found us in the grip of ice and snow. The second and third ponds were frozen over, but a small area on the first pond was free of ice, and in this water crowded a large number of water fowl including mallard, pochard, tufted-duck, coot and mute swan. On the ice at least 70 black-headed gulls were present.

On being disturbed, many of the ducks flew off towards the second and third ponds but soon returned to the only available water. Most of the ducks alighted safely on the water, but a few landed on the ice among the gulls which noisily took to the air.

The third pond copse was silent except for the alarm call of the blackbird and the call note of the dunnock.

Bullfinch, chaffinch, great-tit, blue-tit, robin, thrush flew silently about their business.

The clear stream wound its way round into the third pond and in the bright sunlight the snow covered ground, bushes and trees presented a pleasant scene. Even in winter the copse is a nice place to be in.

Visiting a local wood on the same day revealed tracks of bird and animal. Tracks of rabbit, fox and water-hen could be clearly seen in the soft snow as they led down to the stream which runs alongside the wood. Three common snipe were flushed from the stream and just inside the wood, among the tree branches, 18 long-tailed tits were busy searching for insects before settling down to roost in the fading light.

February 1977

On January 9th the pastureland west of the first pond was full of activity as hundreds of birds milled about as they fed. Over one hundred partridges were counted as they fed in groups. A large flock of lapwings took to the air, possibly 200. 20 to 30 skylarks flew off into the next field followed by a score of golden plovers. Starlings and rooks were present in great numbers and on the skyline stalked a lone heron.

The first pond was well stocked with water birds. Mallard and coot were there in strength, four pochard had dropped in and a small duck which was swimming alongside a drake and was recognised as a teal. The teal is our smallest resident duck being only fourteen inches in length. One mute swan was present and for some reason had only one eye. Black headed gulls numbered approximately 50. With them on the ice was a lesser black-headed gull which was conspicuous by its greater size compared with the black-headed gulls and by its dark grey back. A pair of meadow pipits were feeding on the water line and were joined by a pied wagtail. They were still there as dusk fell.

March 1977

On the dull afternoon of February 12th Loscar Wood looked bare and lifeless with its leafless trees and bushes but inside there were signs of spring. Bluebell shoots had forced their way through the carpet of dead leaves. Fresh green grass was growing among the rough vegetation. Buds were appearing on bush and tree. A colourful chaffinch flew across the ride followed closely by a female, while a pair of blue tits chased about the undergrowth. A robin sang his clear song from the stump of a tree and some distance away a song-thrush was in full song. Deeper in the wood four male blackbirds chased one another through the beech trees, no doubt trying to establish territory prior to breeding while another sang his mellow song from the branch of a tree. A wren hidden in the undergrowth sang his loud song. These early signs indicate that spring is not far away and soon the trees will be covered in various shades of green and filled with bird songs as more and more birds come to nest and breed in this pleasant wood.

April 1977

On March 6th, 28 tufted duck were on the third pond, and eight pairs of mallard were feeding in the pastureland west of the first pond but by the 10th only two pairs of tufted duck and four pairs of mallard were left. Both these species bred on the ponds last year and with a bit of luck they will breed again this year providing they are left alone. The male mallard is a colourful duck with glossy green head, white collar, brown breast and purple wing patch. The female is brown with purple wing patch.

The flooded farmland of February and early March attracted many bird species. At least 70 birds were in attendance at one water logged area. These included herring gull, black-headed gull and lesser black-backed gull together with lapwing, golden plover, rook, partridge and a host of smaller birds. The most probable reason for their presence at these water filled areas is that the top soil had been washed away exposing insect larvae and seed, therefore providing a good food supply.

May 1977

Many bird species were in full song in the third pond copse on the warm sunny April afternoon, and on the ponds coot and moorhen were busy nest building.

Two pairs of great crested grebe were also present while in a field on the east side of the third pond a pair of herons stalked in search of food. In the small copse between the third pond copse and Pebley pond one of our summer visitors was in the company of a pair of dunnocks. It was either a willow warbler or a chiff-chaff. Both these species are almost identical and only close examination will tell them apart. The best way of identifying them is by their songs which are very distinctive but on this occasion there was no song. Whichever it was it was certainly an early visitor to Harthill and maybe the first. This was on April 2nd.

While our summer visitors are on their way here we still have, in early April, birds which will soon be on their way North to breed. These are field-fares of which eight were seen feeding in a field west of the third pond.

June 1977

This year's first sighting of a swallow was on the third pond on April 9th. Last year's first sighting was on April 15th. House martins came in on the 24th of April, last year they arrived on the 28th. Sedge warblers were spotted on the third pond on April 29th, last year they were here by the 2nd May. Sandmartins were seen for the first time on the first pond on April 16th, last year they were here on the 11th. This isn't bad timing for birds which have flown thousands of miles from their winter quarters in Africa to their breeding grounds in this country. These are just four species which make the long journey here. Many more species make similar long journeys, like the wheatear which has once more dropped in on Harthill ponds and has been seen regularly since April 16th, mostly on the second pond. The last record of one visiting Harthill was on May 2nd 1973. The male wheatear has a grey back, black wings, black eye patches, black tip to its tail, buff underparts and white rump. The female is the same except for brown wings and brown eye patches.

The nightingale was in full song at 7pm on the 9th May in Clumber Park. it was perched on a low branch in an old elder bush, and from a distance of no more than fifteen yards, was observed with the aid of binoculars, for at least ten minutes as it sang its beautiful song. It is the same length as a yellow bunting, 6½ inches. Its plumage is of brown upperparts, red-brown tail, white throat and grey underparts. Nightingales sing by day as well as night, but the best time to hear one is at night when he has the stage to himself.

July 1977

Despite the large number of wild fowl which crowded the ponds during the winter months and early spring only one female mallard has been seen with young by the 11th June. The result of egg taking and disturbance by air gunners is now clearly visible, not only by the absence of young, but also by the absence of adult birds. Eggs of coot, moorhen, mallard, great crested grebe and dabchick have been taken, and nests which couldn't be reached by wading out to them were reached, on at least one occasion, by the use of a rubber dinghy.

After the survey of the ponds and the third pond copse in 1973-4 the area was registered with the British Trust for Ornithology and a site of ornithological interest. In a period of 18 months during the survey 98 bird species were identified, this gives some idea of the enjoyable quality the ponds and copse hold for people who like to watch birds. The Sheffield Bird Study Group which did the first survey are at present conducting another one which will take one year to complete. Help in this survey will be appreciated by the group, and perhaps a group could be formed in Harthill as a branch of the S.B.S.G. to gather information on bird movement to be forwarded to the Sheffield recorder.

August 1977

The pair of sedge warblers had their beaks full of insects as they circled above the thick grass near the water's edge. Every now and then they alighted on the small willow bush which was near their nest, and there the male sang his rattling song during the nesting period.

After five minutes of agitated flying around one of them decided there was no danger in simply being watched. It settled on a thistle then on a stem of grass which it slid down and disappeared into the vegetation, emerging seconds later minus the insects. The second bird was more wary and was still flying around when the first bird returned with more food which it took straight to the nest via the thistle and stem of grass. Soon both birds were busy fetching food for their young taking the same route each time into the long grass.

The plumage of this bird is brown above the streaked lighter colour, the underparts are buff. There is a light stripe over the eye and the top of the head is nearly black. Its song is a loud jumble of notes containing harsh churring sounds and sweet warbles. Both male and female are alike. Their length is four and three-quarter inches.

September 1977

A visit to a local wood was very interesting as young of many species could be seen as they flitted about the thick leaf covered tree tops. Blue tits were to be seen in large numbers, most of them were recognised as juveniles by their pale colouring, Coal tits flew in and out of the Scots pine trees in search of food. Willow warblers were as common as the blue tits but were more inquisitive and came in very close where they could be seen quite clearly. Young yellow hammers hung about the edge of the wood, while a corn bunting sang his tuneless song from the top of a small hawthorn bush. Redpolls were about in quite large numbers and flew around in their characteristic manner twittering out their song. The crow of a pheasant echoed in answer to that of another which was some distance away. Blackbird, song thrush, wren, dunnock and long tailed tit were also present.

Rosebay willow herb had completely blocked off one of the rides and had made a sea of pink with its flowers, which showed up against the greens of beech, ash and sycamore. Many other wild flowers were in abundance including field scabious, which was seen frequently in the hedgerows with red campion and white campion.

In the old quarry on Loscar scentless mayweed covered the ground and in the hedge bordering the quarry was great burdock and corn marigold which showed-up with its long stalk and yellow flower.

October 1977

The half grown coot was rescued from among thick water weed by two boys. Normally it would have freed itself easily, but due to a length of nylon fishing line which was tightly wrapped round its legs it was unable to escape. After taking the line from the bird's legs it was found that the left leg was

completely useless as the line had cut right through to the bone and the leg was swollen to twice its size. The right leg was also cut but at least it was useable. The Coot was put back into the first pond where it managed to paddle off with its one leg, but for how long is anybody's guess. Maybe the next day it could be caught up again in fishing line carelessly thrown away by someone who doesn't realise the danger it represents to waterfowl and other birds which come to feed at the water's edge.

Baited hooks are a more dangerous thing altogether. Once the bait and hook are swallowed there is no chance at all of saving the bird. Each year birds are found with the hook inside and the line protruding from their beaks. Pied wagtail, reed bunting and coot have been found in this predicament this year.

November 1977

Early October found the third pond copse very quiet. Only the occasional burst of song from the wren and a few weak notes from a robin could be heard. Pochard have been with us from the middle of September. These chestnut-headed ducks are one of our earliest winter visitors flying in from their breeding grounds in Eastern Europe. As the weather gets colder more will arrive and as in previous years, these will form quite a large flock adding to the flocks of other water fowl which stay and winter on the ponds.

Another bird which comes in from its moorland breeding grounds to winter and feed on farmland is the golden plover. Four of these birds were seen on October 9th circling the first pond before flying off towards the pastureland west of the second pond where they settled in with a flock of lapwings.

As these winter visitors arrive only a handful of our summer visitors are left, such as, on October 9th, three swallows were seen in the areas of Harthill ponds and Pebley pond, but by the 11th these had disappeared.

December 1977

A pair of house martins and one swallow which seemed reluctant to leave for the warmer climates of Africa, were still with us on October 28th. They were most likely the last of Harthill's summer visitors and were no doubt enjoying the mild spell which came in during the latter part of October, but after the winds, and the fog, which followed the mild spell, they decided to leave it all and were not seen after the 28th.

The common snipe were flushed out of the muddy swamp on the first pond, and one redshank took to the air nearby to where the snipe had been. After circling the pond the redshank settled down again near the waterline where it began its feeding. This was on the 10th November in bright sunlight which showed up clearly the markings of both snipe and redshank. The sunlight also showed up a pair of stonechats which were flitting about the hedgerow on the second pond. This was a very welcome sight as these birds are not very often seen in the vicinity of the ponds.

January 1978

Due to the proposed bank repairs both the first and second ponds have had their water level reduced to such an extent that it is now perfect for waders, with plenty of water holes and hundreds of yards of water line to patrol in search of food. Redshank can be seen at almost any time either feeding or in flight circling the ponds. Its piping call can be heard as it takes to the air on being disturbed, but soon returns to continue feeding with other members of the wading family such as dunlin which have been frequent visitors to the muddy shores. Common snipe have been seen in quite large numbers and a party of ten were seen probing for food in the mud with their long narrow beaks.

A large flock of birds feed regularly in the stubble and weed of the west side field bordering the second and third ponds. This flock consists of scores of greenfinches, goldfinches, tree sparrows, reed buntings and a dozen or so bramblings. Bramblings winter in Britain, coming in from their breeding grounds in Siberia and Scandinavia. The male is recognised by its white rump, buff breast, orange shoulders patch, and mottled brown head. In summer its head is glossy black in comparison with the dull brown of the female. Length 5³/₄".

February 1978

The hide in the local wood was deserted on the dull, rainy January morning and the chance of seeing much bird life seemed remote. Situated in a natural clearing the hide is ideally situated surrounded by thick undergrowth, silver birch and beech. In the clearing is an old tree trunk peppered with holes which were filled with nuts to attract tits, while on its branches were lumps of fat, hung as another attraction. An artificial pool acts as a bathing and watering hole, and at the back of the clearing a shelter of twigs and dead grass supported by four stout props serves as another feeding place. The food for the birds is supplied by the natural history group which use the wood for their studies and had most likely stocked the place up the night before. From inside the hide one has a clear view of the clearing through the large windows.

After a short wait the clearing became alive with activity as many bird species appeared to sample the food which had been left for them. Five jays were first to appear followed by a cock pheasant. Bluetits, great tits, coal tits, bullfinches, chaffinches and the tiny goldcrest, just to name a few came along, and completing the scene was a grey squirrel.

Despite the heavy rain the visit to the hide had been worth making a couple of hours of pleasant entertainment.

March 1978

A pair of stonechats were seen on the first pond on February 10th. These were more than likely the same ones which were spotted on November 10th last year. The male was in his distinctive plumage of black head, white collar and white rump. The underparts are chestnut and the back is dark brown.

Plumage of the females is duller and does not have the black head and white collar. (Not a deaconess! C.R.)

Due to the water board deciding not to do the bank repairs the water level has been allowed to rise. With the heavy rain in January all three ponds are now full. This has resulted in the disappearance of almost all the wading birds which enjoyed the large areas of mud on which they used to feed. As if to compensate for the loss of waders a large number of duck arrived and 110 were counted, also on February 10th. Mallard numbered 81 and the rest were tufted duck and pochard. A lone duck some distance from the main party was recognised as a shelduck. It stood out from the rest with its smart appearance and size. The plumage consisted of quite a large amount of white, the rest being made up of green, black and rust. The length of the Shelduck is 26ins. Both sexes have the same plumage.

April 1978

On the 12th of March many of the bird species seen on the ponds and in the third pond copse had paired up. Coots fought over nesting rights on the third pond while nearby a pair of great crested grebes displayed. Two pairs of moorhens took cover in the tail end of the pond and on the shallow side of the third half a dozen mallard dabbled about among the water weed. Only 28 mallard were left on all three ponds out of the 81 counted in February.

Six reed buntings were counted, the males in their smart plumage of black head, white collar and brown streaked back. During the breeding season one male may be responsible for several nests with different females which build their nests in tussocks of grass or in vegetation near water which is their favourite habitat. They can be found well away from water like the pair which nested last year in the old quarry field on Loscar.

The birds in the copse were in full song as well as being in their breeding plumage. Blackbirds and song thrushes were seen carrying nesting material. Two pairs of bullfinches flitted about the tall hawthorne hedge, the males looking very colourful in their black, white, pink and brown plumage. Long tailed tits, robin, dunnoek, chaffinch, bluetit and great tit were also there as well as a couple of stoats, one of which hunted among the thick undergrowth while the second one came along the path carrying a water vole which it dropped on being approached. The vole was warm and had only just been killed. Five minutes later the stoat returned to drag its prey off the path into the long grass.

May 1978

Dusk fell over the wood and the only sound to be heard was that of a woodcock as it meandered slowly over the tree tops in its territorial flight. The bird flew over five or six times giving its calls, one of which is a high-pitched whistle, while the second one is a croak repeated several times and is not at all bird-like. When darkness forced the woodcock to roost, all interest was centred on the reason for being in the wood in the first place, that was to watch badgers.

Taking up a position some seven or eight yards from a hole, and well wrapped up to guard against a cold N.E. Wind, the only thing to do was to wait. After 35 minutes, at 9.10 p.m. a black and white head appeared above the hole, a few seconds later three badgers were out, and with the aid of binoculars were clearly visible in the gloom of the wood. After a period of grooming and moving around the sett, all three wandered off and disappeared among the trees and undergrowth.

This was in Loscar Wood on a night in April. Very enjoyable, and yet, the enjoyment of seeing these beautiful animals was threatened a few weeks ago. Irresponsible people were caught in the nick of time as they were about to dig into the sett for the sole purpose of destroying both badgers and sett. They were not local people. Badgers are protected by law, but there are people who don't care about protection acts and are prepared to destroy anything so long as it suits their purpose.

Many people from Harthill walk along Packman lane which runs alongside the wood and it is certain that not one of them would like to see any harm come to Loscar's badgers. The best thing to do if anyone sees anything suspicious happening near the sett, which can be seen off Packman Lane, or strangers hanging about the drives, would be to inform the police straight away. A passing motorist would probably help as the nearest phone is a long way from Loscar Wood.

June 1978

On April 23rd a pair of great crested grebes had almost finished building their nest among the vegetation on the third pond tail. Both birds were busy fetching nesting material in the hope of completing it so they could bring up a brood of young. This is an event which would be most welcome, as year after year their efforts have failed due to nests being destroyed before completion, or after completion, when both nests and eggs have disappeared. Last year three nests were destroyed, one with eggs which were near to hatching. Incubation is about 28 days but any grebe which gets anywhere near to hatching time is very lucky.

Many people have the idea that a grebe will devour all the fish in the ponds. When one appears it's panic stations, but when a pair start nest building then it's a real emergency. Grebes do eat fish; but they also feed on tadpoles, shellfish, insects and weed, so it is most unlikely that a pair of these birds and their young would make any difference to the fish population of Harthill ponds,

On May 1st a great crested grebe was found dead on the second pond. It had been shot. It was in good condition and had been dead only a day or so. The only mark on it was where the pellet entered its breast, discolouring the white downy feathers.

July 1978

Orange tip, small tortoiseshell, large white, small white and meadow brown butterflies flitted about the fields and hedgerows bordering the dyke

which flows from the ponds down to Kiveton Colliery. The orange tip is recognised by the orange patches on its white forewings. The small tortoiseshell is one of the prettiest of our butterflies with orange, blue, black, yellow and red making up its colour. Small white and large white need no introduction as they are the ones which cause quite a bit of damage in vegetable gardens, especially among the cabbage family. Meadow brown is so called because of its brown appearance, but it also has orange and black markings.

Many bird species were seen on the mile or so walk down the dyke. Cuckoo, lesser whitethroat, robin, reed bunting, wren and dunnock made up the numbers, and near the filter beds in the surrounding trees a couple of willow warblers sang, but the most interesting sound came from an unattended patch of land near the colliery tip. It was the song of the grasshopper warbler coming from deep inside a large hawthorne bush. The song is a continuous whirring which can be mistaken for the sound of an old fashioned fishing reel being wound in, or the sound of a grasshopper but much louder. Soon the bird appeared on an outer branch of the bush to continue its singing, with its body quivering and its head turning from side to side as if operated by clockwork, then it disappeared into the thick cover of the bush where it stayed.

September 1978

The agitated notes of a blackbird which rang out across the Old Rectory grounds suggested that all was not well. Following the sound of the bird through the trees was easy, and soon the cause of the unrest was seen. It was a tawny owl which was perched on a low branch of a beech tree and was being mobbed by half a dozen small birds which were trying to drive it from its perch and out of sight. The owl didn't move at all and seemed quite unconcerned about the fluttering birds which, together with the blackbird, were kicking up a din.

With the aid of binoculars the owl was clearly seen. Its eyes were mere slits, which is characteristic of a roosting owl in daylight, but it wasn't missing a thing, although it looked asleep. Moving round to the back of the owl I still found it facing fully into the binoculars even though its body had not moved. Wherever it was observed it was always face-on which meant it could turn its head practically full circle.

Soon the light began to fade, the birds ceased their mobbing and all was quiet. The owl began to stir as if preparing to fly, and with eyes now wide open launched itself into the fading light and flew silently through the trees towards the old quarry.

October 1978

The vegetation survey of 1973-4 by the Sheffield Bird Study Group revealed 66 different species of wild flowers and grasses in the area of all three ponds and the copse. The survey was not completed, so it is possible that many more species are unaccounted for. Another survey was planned for 1976 but this didn't even get started. Perhaps the man in charge couldn't count after 66, but whatever reason it was for not doing the survey it certainly put paid to

finding out just how many species of wild flowers we do have on the ponds. But there again 66 isn't bad going and will no doubt amaze some people in the village who are interested in botany, to know about the abundance of wild flowers we have on our own doorstep. Many of these wild flowers can be seen at a glance, like the white carpets of the scentless mayweed or the yellow beds of common ragwort which, as usual, seem to be everywhere. Another species which stands out is the great hairy willow-herb which, by the 28th of August, had reached a height of over 6 ft. and nearby, rosebay willow-herb had reached up to at least 5 ft. These two members of the willow-herb family presented, with their flowers, a sea of pink which stood out against a background of green. Marsh Marigold, lady's smock, bistort, yarrow, tansy, field pansy, silverweed, red campion, charlock and coltsfoot are just a few of the 66 species which are in the 1973-74 survey and can be seen during spring and summer.

Trees which surround the ponds consist of beech, ash, alder, sycamore, willow, oak, silver birch and crab apple. The shrub layer is made up of blackthorn, hawthorn, willow, elder and holly.

All these trees, bushes and flowers play a big part in the attraction of the large number of different bird species which come to breed and feed in the area. Resident birds, summer and winter visitors, migrating birds, and vagrants enjoy the abundant vegetation, whether it is aquatic feed, or feeding in trees or on the banks. Such birds as oystercatcher, turnstone, redstart, snowgoose, black term, little term, curlew, reed warbler, sheld duck, teal, wigeon, shoveller, pintail and goldeneye have all been seen on and around our ponds over the past few years, giving some idea of how interesting it can be on Harthill Ponds.

November 1978

The beginning of August was a good time to watch great crested grebes on Harthill ponds. The reason being that during that time a female was seen with a pair of young.

In a previous report in Nature Notes it stated that it would be something of an event if young were reared on the ponds, as year after year eggs and nests of this bird were destroyed. The impossible has happened, but only due to the wet weather which kept the water level at its highest for weeks on end making it difficult for anyone to reach the nest, that is if it could be found. The nest was concealed among thick water weed and well hidden from view, even from a distance of only a few yards on the shallow, west side of the first pond.

The presence of a pair of grebes in the same area day after day suggested a nest was under construction. Then from the high ground of the bank between the first and second ponds, and from a certain spot, the nest could just be made out among the thick reed beds and rushes, but only with the help of binoculars.

This was all happening in early July. Then one day in early August there they were, only two of them, but at last great crested grebes were swimming on the very pond on which they were bred. They were still with us on the 11th of October and still with their parents, swimming about and diving for food, not

far from the spot where their nest was, among the lush green water plants of the first pond.

December 1978

Swallows had disappeared by the 28th of October, exactly the same date as in 1976, but last year they were not seen after the 11th.

The house martins which nested and bred under the eaves of 5 Carver Close, left about a week before the swallows as their nests had been taken over by roosting house sparrows.

Another bird which should have gone, say the experts by the end of August, was seen making its way south over the village on October 12th some six weeks after the ones which were last seen in Harthill. These birds don't keep to a strict time table, but this one was way out. It was a swift, and no doubt there would be others up and down the country which were late in leaving, but it was interesting to see this bird making its way over Harthill.

About three weeks before the swallows set off on their long migration flight, some of our winter visitors were here, such as the redwing, which as in years gone by, filled the copse on the third pond, feeding on the wild fruit which grows in profusion on the big hawthorn bushes. Redwings are our smallest thrush and are very timid, flying off at the slightest disturbances, giving their distinctive, high pitched call note as they disappear out of sight.

People whose houses and gardens back onto the open countryside and who throw scraps of food out during the cold weather could be visited by one or two of these birds, especially when the frosts have hardened the ground preventing them from digging for insects and seeds. Mrs. Madge Widdison had several visits from them last year, encouraged by the scraps of food which she threw out.

Redwings are easily recognised by the broad, white eye stripe, and red wing patch.

January 1979

The kestrel hung in the air some twenty yards from the ground. It then began lowering itself a few yards at a time over the same spot. When about six feet from earth it suddenly closed its wings and fell into the short grass near the hedges where it stayed for a few seconds with outspread wings. Then it took to the air clutching a mouse in its right foot. Settling on a fence post it ripped its prey to pieces with its curved beak. After devouring the lot, tail and all, it flew off after a short rest to the third pond copse where it would most likely spend the night roosting in the thick hawthorns bushes.

The kestrel is a common bird of prey and can be seen at almost any time in our surrounding countryside, whether it be on Loscar, Kiveton Lane, Thorpe Road, Pebley ponds or Harthill ponds. At least four pairs of these birds nested in the vicinity of Harthill during 1978.

The main characteristics of the kestrel is its hovering flight when in search of prey. Observed through binoculars it is noticed that while hovering,

its head remains perfectly still although it's body moves from side to side. It can be recognised in straight flight by the forward position of the wings and the long tail. The plumage of the male is chestnut on the back, blue-grey head, rump and tail, the end of which has a black bar and white tip. The underparts are buff streaked with black. The female is brown with black-barred tail. Mice and voles are the kestrel's main prey but they also take other birds, like the starling which was caught unawares in a field of stubble, or the greenfinch which was pounced upon after a short chase after the kestrel had allowed it to escape on the ground.

The kestrel must not be confused with the sparrow-hawk which has now become rare in this area, although they bred in Whitwell Wood during 1978. Sparrow-Hawks have a similar flight and are about the same size but they do not hover. The plumage is different, being grey above and white underneath barred with brown. Both birds have a nearly white spot on the back of the head. Sparrow-hawks prey mainly on small birds.

February 1979

When James Brindley constructed the Chesterfield canal, little did he realize that he was creating a large area which was to become a beautiful and interesting part of our countryside, right through from the Pebley reservoir to the Killamarsh reservoir taking in the Harthill and Woodall ones in between.

These four reservoirs were constructed as feeders for the canal and most likely Mr Brindley couldn't have cared less whether they were to be used later for fishing, bird watching or anything else. So long as they kept his canal going he would be satisfied. Yet, here we are, some hundred years later regarding the first one dammed at Harthill, with an area which contains picturesque walks, bird life, animal life, trees and bushes of all kinds, and an abundance of wild flowers which attract the many colourful moths and butterflies all along its length. As we live near the Harthill reservoirs we must concern ourselves with them regarding wildlife, especially birds which are many and varied. Each year something interesting turns up, perhaps some other species of water fowl other than the ever present tufted duck and mallard.

On Sunday December 17th, 1978 a rare bird did appear on the first pond in the company of one of our resident great crested grebes. It was just a little bit smaller than our grebe, and its winter plumage was another guide in distinguishing it from it's partner. With the help of a bird watching friend from Sheffield, we finally identified it as a red necked grebe. We were lucky to get a sighting of this rare visitor as by the next day it had gone. This happens very often with these short stayers and it is luck if you happen to be there just at the time they come. An oystercatcher came on April 4th, 1974 and stayed only a short while, as did the curlew on the 30th April 1976, and the turnstone on October 12th, 1976. The black tern and the very rare little tern appeared on May 6th, 1976. Regular visits to the ponds give a much better chance of seeing these rare visitors.

The following information concerns Harthill ponds and their construction and was supplied by the British Waterways Board:-

“The first reservoir at Harthill (the third pond) was most likely constructed for the opening of the canal in 1776. The lower pond (first pond) was constructed in 1796. This date is cut into a large stone in the outlet tunnel. The middle pond was constructed sometime between these dates. In 1961 the bank between the second and third ponds was cut through forming a single reservoir known as Harthill top reservoir, but nobody takes any notice of this new name except Water Board officials. They are still known to Harthill folk as the second and third ponds.”

The best information in the letter reads like this - “The future of the Chesterfield Canal from Worksop to the River Trent as a cruiseway is assured by the Transport Act 1968, thus the future of the Harthill reservoirs is assured as they are essential for the proper use of the canal.”

March 1979

January 26th and another inch of snow had fallen during the early hours, accompanied by a freezing mist which shrouded the ponds, making the place look most inhospitable. No one would have thought that much bird life would be seen on such a dismal morning but it turned out to be a very interesting walk through the snow.

Setting off through the mist at 9 a.m. to the first pond, found visibility down to something like fifty yards, but even then many waterfowl could be seen on the half frozen lake. Mallard, coot and about 30 gulls were present. In the swampy south end of the pond, among the willow bushes, were blue tit, great tit, song thrush, blackbird, collared dove and reed bunting. There was hardly anything at all on the second pond as there is not much cover. The place was frozen over except for a small pool in which swam five coots, accompanied by a pair of meadow pipits which were running around the edge of the pool. Tracks of rabbits ran right across the frozen pond.

The third pond presented a similar picture with ice and rabbit tracks, but the area from the beginning of the copse to Pebley Pond presented a different picture altogether. At the start of the copse, among the dead reeds, a common snipe was seen. It took to the air on being disturbed and zig-zagged away over the frozen pond, in the same clearing a water rail appeared but it didn't stay long and was soon running for cover and out of sight.

Through the now clearing mist in the copse a wren flitted about around the bottom of a tree, chaffinches flew from tree to tree, a pair of mallard took to the air out of the icy swamp, red polls flew overhead, but the prettiest sight was on a snow-clad hawthorn bush at the end of the copse. As if to add colour to the scene a pale sun broke through for a minute, helping to show up the 30 or 40 goldfinches in their colourful plumage which stood out against the background of snow. They flew off over the trees and were seen later feeding in the top of an alder tree.

Moving out of the copse to Pebley Grove was interesting as the first bird seen was a heron standing near the dyke. It flew off towards Pebley Pond. Near the wooden bridge which spans the dyke is an old tree trunk which is covered with dead rushes and grasses. Out of this cover came the sound of a water rail. Standing still and waiting for it to appear was a pretty cold job, but out it came

and a clear view of this very secretive bird was a reward worth waiting for. That wasn't the end, for another one appeared just behind the first. Three water rails in an hour was quite something, but two together was a sight not very often seen around the ponds. A slight movement to change my position was enough to send these two birds scurrying quickly for cover.

In the fresh snow which carpeted the floor of the small wood before Pebley Pond were tracks of rabbit and fox. Above in a beech tree, close to the trunk, sat a tawny owl. A yellowhammer flew by, then out of a bush flew three greenfinches followed by half a dozen tree sparrows.

A Woodcock, easily recognised by its size and downward pointing bill, took off erratically out of the frozen swamp.

Despite the cold wintry weather, the walk which lasted three hours, was worth every yard of its length, proving that even in conditions of this kind a walk can be most interesting to people who have an interest in bird life. It's nice to sit beside a warm fire looking through a bird book and reading about them, but going out and seeing them in their natural surroundings is another thing.

April 1979

During the cold, bleak winter weather many water birds visited our ponds as a place to feed and rest before moving off to other areas. One period when Pebley, Woodall, Killamarsh and our own second and third ponds were frozen over hundreds of birds came to the only available water of the first pond. On one particular day an estimated 800 of them enjoyed the ice free area. This was a sight worth seeing and one wondered how many different species of water bird had flown in.

A couple of birdwatchers from Dronfield had popped up to Harthill to see if there was anything interesting on our ponds as their local waters were ice-bound. When they saw the number of birds we had here they couldn't believe their eyes and hurried over the bridge to the pond head where they set up their telescope. I went on to the west side of the pond where the birds were most likely to come, as that is the side where most feeding is done. I was rewarded straight away with a goldeneye duck which flew in from the north circling the pond before alighting among the other ducks not far from where I stood. It was recognised by the triangular shape of its head, and white neck.

Mallard numbered something like 300, give or take some either way, as it was impossible to get an exact count due to the continual movement of the birds on the choppy, windswept surface of the pond. Coot were there in large numbers, probably 200 of them, while tufted duck came third with around 150, then came pochard with around the 20 mark.

The rest were made up of the following:-

Teal, our smallest duck, numbered 8 and were identified by their small size. A pair of gadwall ducks were there in their drab plumage. Five shoveler ducks were observed from something like 15 yards as they moved in towards the shallow water where they stayed for quite some time feeding. Their large, spade-like bills were clearly visible. Three wigeon were there and had been for

at least a week. Nothing there to get excited about as all these duck species are seen during most winters but it's nice to see them at least once a year in the case of the shoveler, wigeon, goldeneye and gadwall.

It's more than likely that some other species of duck, rarer than the ones mentioned, have been to our ponds for a quick visit, driven down by the arctic weather. Other regulars on the pond were mute swan, great crested grebe, little grebe, moorhen, black-headed gull, lesser black-backed gull, and the big great black-backed gull, not forgetting the herring gull and the common gull which is not as common as it's name suggests.

May 1979

Dark clouds hung overhead, rain fell at regular intervals and the cold weather persisted, but even in these conditions there was plenty of activity on and around the ponds on April 1st. Reed Buntings in their black, white and brown plumage flitted about the willow and sallow bushes. Coots were busy collecting nesting material. Two pairs of great crested grebes swam around. I wonder if they will be allowed to breed again this year. A pair managed last year only because the nest was well out of the sight and reach of egg-takers and nest destroyers.

Blackbird, song thrush, robin, dunnock, blue tit, linnet, wren, and chaffinch were all in full song, their notes echoing through the third pond copse. Spring had arrived at last bringing with it two of our visitors from Africa. The first one to be spotted was a wheatear all on its own in the fallow field west of the second pond. It had most likely dropped in to feed while on its way to its breeding area on the coast or somewhere on moorland. The other visitor was a chiff-chaff whose song was heard long before the bird itself was spotted. It was seen in the hedge on the first pond head singing its two note song which it repeats continuously. Its plumage is almost identical to that of the willow warbler and without the song of either it is very difficult to tell one from the other. Both wheatear and chiff-chaff had disappeared by the next day.

June 1979

The big bat appeared over the tree tops on the west side of the first pond, then disappeared into the willow tree near the water's edge, reappearing a few seconds later not far from where it was being observed. It was presumably on the hunt for insects which were on the wing on the warm afternoon. After hunting for something like ten minutes it suddenly flew low overhead towards the second pond area where it gained height, still diving and gliding in search of prey. Then gradually it moved off in the direction of Pebley where it disappeared out of sight. It isn't very often these bats are seen, so it was something of an event to watch this one, through binoculars, as it gave a display of twisting and turning as it darted after insects. The habit of flying at a great height, and hunting by day suggested this was a noctule bat, and with a wing span of around 14 inches was recognised as something not so common to the area.

Our most common bat, the pipistrelle, has a wing span of about 8½ inches giving some idea of the difference in the size of the two bats. The head and body lengths of these bats are small in comparison with their wing spans. The noctule's head and body measure 3¼ inches, while the pipistrelle measures around 1¾ inches. Pipistrelle bats can be seen at almost anytime during the summer, flying around farmyards and houses where there are plenty of insects. On quiet evenings their shrill squeaks can be heard as they chase their prey.

July 1979

Another common bird census is in progress covering all three ponds and the copse. The last census was carried out by a team of eight from the Sheffield Bird Study Group who worked in pairs taking it in turn to visit the ponds, making sure that as many reports were sent to the B.T.O. as possible. The group of eight has broken up, leaving two of the original team to do this present survey. They are a birdwatcher from Dronfield and myself, and we could do with a bit of help from people in the village who are keen to do a bit of bird watching, and at the same time see more of the natural surroundings of the ponds such as plant life or animal life. There is much to see besides the large number of bird species which we have at this time of the year, but occasionally a rare one appears like the one which came along on May 20th.

Its unfamiliar call notes were heard before the bird itself was seen flying over the third pond towards the second pond area. It was too far away to say exactly what it was although quite a lot of white was noticed on its wings, and its flight suggested it was a wading bird, much larger than the ones which we see regularly throughout the year, such as the redshank, dunlin, common sandpiper, etc. A minute or so later the wader was back flying low over the third pond, rising sharply as it approached the tall trees of the copse which it cleared and flew off towards the Pebley area. The bird was an oystercatcher. Its pied plumage and nearly red bill were clearly visible when it flew low overhead before it rose to clear the trees. The last one recorded here was on April 4th, 1974.

Other things are there to be seen and patience can be rewarded with bird and animal appearing quite close, feeding or hunting. While sitting on the bridge which spans the dyke near Pebley Grove a hunter did come along in the form of a stoat. It wasn't carrying prey so it was presumably on the hunt and had just left its nest and young. It bounded through the water weed of the dyke, across the bridge, climbed on to an old tree trunk, ran along it and disappeared. I settled down to wait for its return, wondering if it would be carrying a vole, bird or a mouse, or maybe it would come back another way, or perhaps it had not been hunting at all and had gone on its way. Quarter of an hour passed by, then, not four yards away, with a mouse in its mouth, was the stoat. It reared on its hind legs and had a good look at me before darting off into the long grass carrying its prey. Stoats don't have identity discs hung around their necks but it was a certain bet that this one was the same one which had kept me sitting there for so long. It was worth the wait.

September 1979

While still some distance from the third pond tail, the harsh churring notes which came from the reed beds could be heard on the quiet morning. They could have come from a sedge warbler but the habitat wasn't right. This bird likes the waterside sedges to nest in and there had been no sight or sound of this bird on previous visits to this area. Reaching the spot a few minutes later with the bird still singing, it was soon obvious that it was a reed warbler. The songs of these two birds are similar but careful listening can distinguish one from the other. Reed warblers do not visit us every year, so it was nice to have at least one male here.

To find out if there was a pair, the song of the bird was taped the next day and played back. It wasn't long before it appeared clinging to the stem of a reed, but no longer singing as it listened to its own song. A few seconds later it was within a few yards of the tape recorder, flitting about the hawthorne hedge trying to make out where the song was coming from.

The tape was switched off and the bird returned to the reeds and started singing. When the song was played again two warblers appeared and flew straight to where the recorder was. Both male and female reed warblers look the same and it was quite a time before it was certain they were a pair. They were last seen flying off together, disappearing into the thick reed beds where the male began his singing once more. Regular visits afterwards proved they were still with us. With luck they will have nested and brought off young as a pair did in 1977. The plumage of the reed warbler is brown and lighter underneath, lacking the distinctive markings of the sedge warbler.

N.B. from Canon Richardson

I have been doing a bit of bird watching myself recently. We have had a swallow family nesting in the church porch. They constructed a neat nest on top of an electrical junction box. I took a photo of four young swallows sitting closely side by side on the conduit during flying lessons. They made rather a mess of the porch and dotted me one on the shoulder. With apologies to Bill I give the following information about these birds. They have pink eyes and long toe nails. Their legs are so thin that the blood goes up one leg and down the other. They were singing in French. On a Sunday when the church door was open one over ran its runway and flew in. As there was no guitarist in the church at the time, there was no temptation to execute. We opened the chapel door and it soon flew out. They can be distinguished from the rarer garage swallow because they winter in Africa, thank goodness.

October 1979

During the warm, sunny weather of late August and early September many species of butterfly were on the wing enjoying the warm sunshine. Scores of large white and small white invaded gardens in search of cabbage, brussels, broccoli etc., on which to lay their eggs. The large white lays eggs in clusters of yellow-orange, and are found easily with a bit of patience, whereas the small white lays in ones and twos and are mostly-hatched out before they are found. The first signs of caterpillars of the small white are the holes in the leaves of the plants which begin to look like torn net curtains, but when the hordes of

uncontrolled large white caterpillars get on the move then a vegetable plot can be reduced to look like something resembling umbrella frames.

Other butterflies visit us which aren't so destructive, like the lovely yellow one which came into the gardens of Carver Close, (wonder how many people noticed it!). It was a brimstone and with the sun on it the colour showed up brilliantly. Another garden visitor is the popular small tortoiseshell which is one of our most colourful butterflies. The small tortoiseshell was on the wing and quite a few were seen alongside the wood near Pebley Grove. Meadow brown, peacock and red admiral were also seen. The meadow brown is as its name suggests but the peacock is not likely to be mistaken for any other with its dull brownish-red wings, and "eyes" which show up more on the hind wings than they do on the fore wings. The red admiral is brightly coloured and is easily spotted in its red, black, white and blue colour scheme.

The tiny small copper with its copper coloured wings was seen on a bed of small flowers by the side of Pebley pond. Several other species were seen but were not identified except perhaps the pretty blue one which could have been the common blue.

At this time of the year when our birds are moulting and have lost most of their colour and practically everywhere is without birdsong, then it is nice to go out and have the scene brightened up by the beautiful colours of these butterflies.

November 1979

Sparrow hawks have become a rare species around this area although they breed regularly in a local wood. On August 20th a dead one was found in the garden of Mrs. Staley who lives at the top of Serlby Lane. The hawk had probably hit something in flight and fallen into her garden or maybe one of Mrs. Staley's cats had brought it in from a nearby field. It had a head wound. Sparrow hawks are legally protected so it is hoped this one did hit something in flight instead of being hit.

The bird had a B.T.O. ring on its leg, so I got in touch with the local ringing group to see if they had ringed any this year. They might have ringed one or two last year and this could have been one which had stayed in the area. The group said they had ringed three this year, two adults and one juvenile.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Staley presented the hawk to the Rotherham Museum. They were able to report that the bird was the juvenile which was ringed in the local wood on July 23rd of this year. So the young sparrow hawk hadn't lasted long after leaving the safety of its nest.

Thousands of birds are ringed every year so there's always a chance of finding a dead one. If one is found the ring should be taken off and sent to the British Museum in London. They will in return send a full account of the bird which may have been ringed in a foreign country or locally. Whichever it is, it will be interesting to know.

December 1979

On a quiet morning during late October, the many water birds which had dropped in on the first pond were enjoying the peace, and having a good time feeding and preening on the placid waters. Twenty five Canada geese, thirty mallard, a dozen pochard, fifteen tufted duck, fifty or so coot and four moor hens were all grouped on the west side of the pond where the best feed is. A pair of great crested grebe flew in, then a lone mute swan glided in, settling near the group of pochard. As the pond was low and plenty of mud showing, there was the chance a wader or two might be present.

On the other side of the pond half a dozen red sailed dinghies were setting sail on what might be the slowest race recorded on the pond as there was not a breath of wind. They gradually moved away from their moorings and came slowly round to where the birds were. Half a dozen mallard flew out of fright while the rest of the birds moved nearer the pond side. Then without warning the Sailing Club's claxon horn blasted out a message to the yachtsmen, which only they understood. This noise coupled with the red sailed boats was too much for most of the wild fowl which took to the air and flew away in all directions. Another blast on the horn disturbed a redshank, a common sandpiper and half a dozen common snipe.

There wasn't much point in staying any longer to listen to the horn blasting out messages and it is most likely the birds which stayed didn't enjoy the sound either. It is possible the horn is used for warning shipping in the number as well as for sending messages across a pond. On reaching the second pond bank and looking back at the pleasant scene of sailing boats and still water, it was hard to believe such a terrible noise could be associated with the quiet pastime of sailing. The bell they use occasionally is much better and not so disturbing to our bird life. Returning to the pond a couple of hours later I found that quite a few birds had returned and feeding on the waterline were a redshank and a common sandpiper.

January 1980

There was a strong December wind blowing across the fields surrounding the ponds and not many birds were on the wing except for a few black-headed gulls. Linnets, tree sparrows and greenfinches had taken cover in the willow bushes on the west side of the third pond, while most of the water birds had taken shelter close to the thick cover of the waterside sedges and underneath the overhanging branches of the willow bushes.

It was a different thing altogether in the copse, this being protected by the steep, high bank was almost still, only the tops of the tall trees were being blown by the wind. It looked as though most of the birds in the area had taken shelter in the copse. Robins and wrens were in song, blue tits were everywhere. Song thrush and blackbird flew swiftly away into the tangle of fallen trees. Fieldfare, one of our winter visitors, were feeding in the big hawthorne bushes together with redwings, another winter visitor. These two species are very often seen flying together in flocks. In the swampy part of the copse is an alder tree which is a favourite with many of the small birds which inhabit the copse, as they find plenty of feed among the branches and there are always plenty of

cones to go at. On this particular day the alder tree was occupied by some of our most colourful species, their colours clashing with the dull background of brown branches and cones. There in this tree were a pair of male bullfinches, about half a dozen chaffinches, male and female, four great tits, numerous blue tits, a few redpolls which aren't so colourful but make up for that by their dainty appearance, and four or five bramblings, winter visitors, in their smart plumage of white, brown, orange and black. What a pity the goldfinch wasn't there, this would have completed the colouring.

February 1980

The flock of rooks which blackened the sky over Barlborough Park was the biggest I'd ever seen. There were thousands of them! It took at least ten minutes for them to pass over to their roost somewhere south of Barlborough. At this time of the year large flocks of birds are seen at almost anytime, especially just before dusk, when they are moving off to their roosting places. They can also be seen feeding on farmland.

On January 12th a very large flock of golden plover were seen in a field near Woodall. They were well camouflaged in their brown winter plumage and it was only when a black headed gull chased one that I realised what it was. I counted up to 150, then packed it up as I should have been there longer than I had wanted if I counted the lot. Golden Plovers move on to farmland during winter from their breeding grounds on the moors. Another field near Woodall had a large flock of black headed gulls in it. Quite a large area was white over with these birds, and there was a continual flow backwards and forwards to the ponds where there was another large contingent. Further in the field was a flock of lapwings accompanied by a large flock of starlings. Each winter our starling population is swelled by an influx of them from eastern and northern Europe and is noticeable everywhere, especially when scraps of food are thrown out. Starlings outnumber any other species and soon get rid of bread, meat or anything which has been put out. The best way to ensure that our smaller birds get a fair share of the pickings is to rub bread and cake into crumbs, then robins, chaffinches, dunnoek etc. will be able to compete.

March 1980

Not many duck species have visited us during the period up to February 14th. Last year there were quite a few which had been driven in by the cold arctic weather and some of them stayed for quite a long period. During December and the early part of January this year the ponds attracted quite large numbers of ducks and coot. The signs were there for another winter with plenty of waterfowl to see, but the mild weather has kept lakes and ponds free of ice and most of the birds have dispersed to feed on any water they wished. This left us with only a few mallard and tufted duck. Even the coot population dwindled.

There was, however, one rare visitor on February 9th on the third pond in the form of a male goldeneye. It was first seen under the cover of the overhanging branches of a willow bush but soon came out and began diving for food. This went on for some time. Then it suddenly took off almost vertically,

circled the pond a couple of times and flew off towards Woodall. There it would most likely drop in on either Woodall or Killamarsh ponds.

The male goldeneye is easily recognised by the white patch at the base of the bill and by its black and white plumage. The female is brown-grey and lacks the white patch near the bill. Another feature of this duck is the whistling sound it makes with its rapidly beating wings. So, if anyone sees a black and white duck flying overhead, making this noise, then they can safely say they have seen a goldeneye.

April 1980

Blackbirds and song thrushes were busy on March 9th as they gathered nesting material in the third pond copse. One partly built nest was found in a hawthorne bush, but it is not expected to last long as it can easily be seen. Both nest and eggs will no doubt disappear from deep inside the big hawthorne bushes. They will nest at the end of March or the beginning of April, using the usual nest holes which they have used for years. A pair of willow tits appeared. If they decide to stay they will excavate a hole in an old tree where they will nest. The rarer marsh tit uses a ready made hole to nest in. Both willow and marsh tits are very similar and are difficult to distinguish from one another. A large flock of green finches, linnets and skylarks were feeding in the field west of the third pond. These will soon disperse to pair up prior to nesting. A pair of great crested grebes were swimming about the third pond. Good luck to them in their attempts at nesting. They'll need plenty of luck to avoid the attentions of their arch enemy, fishermen. Other signs of spring were the buds on the willow bushes and the green shoots of the hawthorne. Bluebells were forcing their way through the dead leaves and grasses and on the side of the path was a single coltsfoot. This yellow flower usually appears in spring, so this one was quite early.

May 1980

The mallard built its nest in the most exposed position imaginable. How it survived to contain 12 eggs is a mystery. The nest and duck were easily seen as they were only a few feet from the path. The nest itself had been constructed on top of a few small branches from a willow bush. It was a sure bet that this nest with its eggs would not survive but there was always a chance of survival even if the odds weighed heavily against it.

The nest was first found with only a couple of eggs in it. Then on the next visit I was surprised to find another three. No more visits were made for another week but the duck was seen to be sitting tight and making no attempt to move as I saw quite a number of people pass by. I was lucky to be there when the duck came off the nest to feed. When I looked in the soft, downy nest there were twelve off-white eggs. By the feel of them they were in the first stages of incubation.

The next day the duck was still there but as the weather was fine and sunny its chances of survival were virtually nil. More people were taking a walk and it was Easter as well which meant plenty - of kids would be around. On

April 8th at about 11 a.m. the duck was still on the nest but at 3 o'clock both duck and drake were seen flying over the nest. Near the nest an elderly couple stood enjoying the view, little knowing they were most likely responsible for the duck flying off. I knew the couple who were from Kiveton, and explained the situation to them. All three of us moved off. The duck hadn't returned at 6 p.m. and after another five days it hadn't returned. The eggs were ice cold. The twigs which I had placed on the eggs five days before were still in the same position, showing the duck had not been back. A broken egg proved they were, or had been, in the early stages of incubation.

June 1980

Swallows, house martins and sand martins were a bit late arriving this year and some people seemed to think it was the cold spring weather which was to blame. If they think back to last year, after the long drawn out winter which made spring seem like February, they might have noticed that some of our summer visitors arrived earlier than they did this year. Sand martins, which are among the first to arrive, were this year seen first of all over the ponds on May 4th, while last year they were here by the 18th April. The chiff-chaff which was first sighted on the first pond this year on April 7th was here last year on April 1st.

This shows how unpredictable birds are whether they are arriving or departing. This year swallows were seen as early as April 10th only a few miles from Harthill, but the first sighting of one here was on April 21st. yellow wagtails last year were seen for the first time on April 15th and this year they were first sighted on April 14th.

Weather does play a big part in deciding when birds arrive or depart, but there is also the fact that birds stay in certain areas to feed and rest after their long journey to this country and if the feed is plentiful, then they will stay in these areas till they think the time is right for moving further inland to their breeding areas.

July 1980

Quite a few red legged partridges have been about this year and nests have been found. I myself found three nests all with eggs.

One of the nests however, was abandoned by the bird leaving 15 yellow-brown, tightly mottled eggs. One egg was broken and yolk was spread over several other eggs. This could have been the work of a stoat or rat which like eggs, but the mystery is why all the other eggs were intact. One of the mysteries of our countryside! The red leg is slightly larger than our common partridge and the plumage of this bird is quite different also. Its plumage is of brown appearance but it has a black and white eye stripe, white cheeks and throat, and black markings on the breast and of course red legs. Our common partridge has a plumage of brown, chestnut tail, grey underparts with a chestnut coloured horseshoe shape on its breast.

Both these partridge species have similar habits in nesting and flight but are easily distinguished from one another. Their flight consists of whirring

wings and gliding. They never reach any great height. The common partridge, after the breeding season, can be seen in any of the fields surrounding Harthill as they begin to group and go about in parties, known as coveys. Then as early as January, they begin to pair, and can be seen chasing one another in their usual manner, even when there is snow on the ground. The grating call of the partridge is best heard on a quiet summer evening just before dusk.

October 1980

Great crested grebes have once again brought off young on our ponds. Four were seen on September 3rd being fed by their parents and another one, which looked as though it was the only one in the family, was being fed by another attentive female. Young grebes are easily recognised by their neck markings of grey stripes. Three of these birds swam very close to the rods of the fishermen who took no notice of them at all. Perhaps they realise grebes do not do as much damage to fish populations as some people seem to think.

Besides the good number of grebes, scores of house martins were on the wing, grouping ready for their long journey south at the end of the month or early October. Swallows were also there in large numbers, but, both housemartins and swallows were out-numbered by the thousands of starlings which blackened the sky. These will be joined in winter by starlings from Europe and Russia to form great flocks of chattering birds.

Another bird which has had a good breeding season is the coot. Twelve were seen on the first pond together with at least ten young, some of which were nearly ready for taking to the air.

The vegetation around the edge of the ponds is very thick at this time of the year. Rosebay willow herb on the third pond was well over six feet high and towered above the other waterside plants. Stinging nettles and reed mace (bullrushes) were doing their best to catch up with the willow herb. Sallow bushes had almost blocked off the path and the lush green rushes provided cover for water birds young and old.

November 1980

Even from the confines of your own home, many are the interesting things which you can see out of the window regarding the countryside, and of course your garden.

The first thing I noticed on looking out of the back window were fat caterpillars on my brussels and broccoli and the patterns on the leaves they make as they munch away.

Next on the scene was a black and white tom cat treading carefully along a well worn path towards a hole in the hedge. I didn't like to see this cat trespassing so I made a noise on the window with my wife's best vase and tom was off like a shot. He'd be back.

Looking over the house tops towards Barlborough I could see a big flock of rooks, then through the binoculars, further on I could make out a flock of lapwings. Through the front window I caught a glimpse of a pair of Kestrels,

not hunting, but playing some kind of game by diving and twisting and turning. Starlings seemed to come from nowhere. I heard a robin give a few notes. Blackbirds flew silently by, their songs quietened by the changing season. They'll make up for it next spring. As the evening drew near, and the sun began to sink, more rooks and starlings were seen. Then, through the back window, in the fading light, a pipistrelle bat appeared and I got a good sight of it through the binoculars, in fact, it was so close to the window I had a good view of its face and ears.

December 1980

The two black swans on the first pond didn't cause all that much excitement although they were something unusual as we are used to seeing white ones. If these two birds had come all the way from their breeding areas of Southern Australia, then, and only then would there have been cause for excitement. The way they came to the pond side to accept lumps of bread suggested they were semi-domesticated and had most likely flown in from a zoo, or perhaps had left the seclusion of a pond or lake of some stately home where they had been an added attraction to visitors.

Although these swans were very attractive to look at in their dark grey plumage and red bill, I don't think they came up to the beauty of the two big mute swans which were there. These two white swans kept a reasonable distance between themselves and the pond side, and only took bread which was thrown well out.

Another white swan, which would have nothing at all to do with bread or humans, kept a distance from the pond side of something like 50-60 yards. This swan was a winter visitor from Northern Europe or Asia. It is much smaller than our resident mute swans and is easily recognised by its size, and the yellow marking at the base of the bill. It was a bewick swan and a welcome sight, as this is the first sighting of one for three winters.

February 1981

At least seven trees have been felled around the first pond in the last couple of years, and no attempt has been made to replace them by the people responsible for their disappearance. These trees were classed as dangerous, so along came workmen and cut 'em down with no idea of what damage they were doing to the bird life which these trees supported, besides making great gaps on the skyline.

One of these trees had been the home of a pair of little owls for at least four years, and they could be seen during breeding season, bringing food for their young. Several other holes in this tree housed tree sparrows and blue tits. Three of the other trees had similar homes in them occupied by different bird species. Not only did they provide homes but they provided food for the many species which visited them. If this tree felling continues then the walk around the pond will not be the same and one of the most pleasant areas in Harthill will have been destroyed. Replacing trees is the only answer.

March 1981

On a mild winters day during late January the scene seemed set for an early spring as many birds were in full song. One blackbird was seen carrying nesting material to some place among the bushes in the third pond copse. During the walk, which took in all three ponds, the copse and Barlborough Park, the number of birds to be seen was amazing. Great flocks of lapwings and black headed gulls circled the fields on each side of the ponds. A flock of skylarks, one of the largest seen by me, took to the air out of the stubble, then another large flock of tree sparrows, linnets, greenfinches and red buntings flew out of the stubble and out of sight over the hill. Rooks flew in one long procession towards Barlborough. Blue tits, great tits, chaffinches, goldfinches, bullfinches, just to name a few were all to be seen and all in their breeding plumage which shone in the bright sunlight. The songs of wren, robin, song thrush, and dunnock echoed through the copse. Field fare and redwing, two of our winter visitors, fed among the big hawthornes near Pebley Grove. A party of long tailed tits, seven or eight, were enjoying the sunshine and in the same bush a tiny goldcrest was picked out.

All the water birds which were present on the three ponds, and which I took notice of on my return home, added that extra bonus on to what I had already seen, making the walk worthwhile. I wouldn't have missed it for anything.

The birds are there to be seen by anyone who is interested in this kind of thing and along one of the most pleasant walks in the district. 34 different species of birds were spotted altogether.

The snow and frosts of early February put paid to all the bird song and activity, but they will be back as soon as we got nearer to the real spring.

April 1981

During the cold spell which hit us at the end of January, many of our resident bird species had nests with eggs. Sadly, many eggs were left to the elements. This is a regular thing, as nearly every year during the winter months the weather takes a turn for the better and the birds fall into the trap and begin building and laying only to be hit by a spell of real winter weather.

The large flock of golden plover which could be seen regularly on pastured land at Woodall had not left up to March 10th. Perhaps they can read the weather better than our early nesters, but soon they would be on their way to moorland areas where they can start their breeding.

The males of the golden plover are in full breeding plumage long before they leave for their nesting areas and they look very smart in their yellow and brown, which takes on a golden hue from a distance. The black cheeks and breast are shown up by the band of white which runs in between the yellow and brown of the upper parts and the black underparts.

In flight the golden plover is easily recognised by the pointed wings and swift flight. The sight of a flock of these birds, as they twist and turn, as though by a given signal, is something worth seeing.

I like to see this bird, but the trouble is we only get it in winter.

May 1981

The kestrel has in recent years been more than holding its own around Harthill. Last year was a very good time for them and by the look of things there is a good chance of the same thing happening this year.

Two pairs have definite nesting sites, and another pair were seen on April 12th hanging around an old ivy clad tree, no doubt examining the place. This tree is a favourite perching spot for numerous birds including rooks, and it was no surprise to see these big birds come, along and see off the two falcons which were on the top branch. After several attempts to get back to the tree the kestrels gave up and flew away.

Later on in the afternoon a lone kestrel was seen perched on the old tree. The rooks had gone so all was peace and quiet for the time being. Perhaps the second kestrel was on the nest, who knows.

We shall see in a few weeks time.

As most country folk know, the kestrel hovers as it scans the ground for it's prey and it doesn't care much about humans when it is actually hunting. Again on April 12th a kestrel flew towards me and began hovering some 10-12 feet from the ground and near enough to be seen easily without binoculars.

June 1981

Occasionally we have had falls of snow during the latter part of April, but the snow which fell on the 24th, 25th and 26th of April this year surpassed anything I can remember, and people of the older end can't remember anything like it either.

Most of our summer visitors had arrived, and, one wonders what effect the unusual winter weather has had on them. Birds such as the swift, swallow, house martin and the sand martin will no doubt have suffered as they are all insect eaters and catch their food on the wing. As no insect in it's right mind would have even thought of venturing out during this cold winter spell, then they will have had it rough. Some of our resident birds which were feeding young will also have been hard pushed and many of their chicks will have perished.

On April 26th, which was a particularly wet, cold and snowy day, I decided to visit the ponds to see if there were any of our summer visitors in sight. I was rewarded immediately by the sight of three wheatears on the north bank of the first pond, and, about five minutes later a common sandpiper skimmed across the snow swept pond in its characteristic flight.

Everything had disappeared from the second pond except two pairs of coots and the third pond was about as lively except for two pairs of coots and three tufted ducks. I was about to turn away from the bleak scene and go home when a redstart appeared in a small willow bush. We don't get this colourful bird every year so this was an added bonus for me and it made the visit to the ponds worth while.

The most unusual sight during this snowy period was the green of the trees and bushes showing up through the snow and, in Loscar Wood carpets of

wood anemone and early bluebells were struggling through this cold winter weather.

July/August 1981

After all the excitement over the dotterel which visited Loscar in early May, and which brought people from Doncaster, Lincoln, Sheffield, Rotherham, Matlock, Chesterfield and various other places, it seemed they were the only birds to come to visit us, but a visit to the same area and the woods nearby in early June proved that our other nesters had arrived in force, and together with our resident birds were in full song.

It was 5.45 a.m. and the woods echoed with the songs of many species but the one which could be heard above all the rest was a blackcap singing from the top of a rowan tree on the edge of Loscar Wood. These birds seem to be here in greater numbers than in previous years and before I left the wood, three more had been heard. It was the same story in the Loscar plantations as at least four more males were in song.

The wood which borders the old quarry field was full of life and many species were identified and, as the early morning sun warmed the air, bringing out thousands of insects, the spotted flycatcher came into his own, darting out from his perch to catch his prey then back to the same perch.

Then a great spotted woodpecker flew low overhead and into the wood with what looked like a young bird in its beak. Bullfinches, goldfinches and a tiny goldcrest were there.

A pair of cuckoos arrived and a whitethroat flew high into the air out of the rough, uncultivated, overgrown quarry. Two pairs of great tits came to the edge of the wood into the warm air and half a dozen swifts flew up and down the wood side feeding on the many insects. Yellow Hammers could be heard in the big hawthorne bushes. Blackbirds, song thrushes and robins flew to and fro from the quarry.

The willow warblers song echoed loud and clear from deep inside the quiet wood. Blue tits and tree sparrows occupied a large hawthorne bush and as I scanned the woodside for something else, a 'Trespassers will be Prosecuted' sign came into view and it was then that I decided to call it a day as I'd seen enough in that hour and a half to satisfy me for the time being and there was no need to trespass at all.

September 1981

Late July and most of our songsters had finished singing. Only the late nesters can be heard at this time of the year. When the breeding stops, the singing stops. The woods are silent, except for an outburst from a wren or the song of the robin, but these two species will sing when snow is on the ground so it is no surprise to hear them now.

One bird in full song in Loscar quarry on July 28th surprised me. It was a whitethroat which should have been feeding itself up ready for its long journey south, but there again there is no reason why a whitethroat cannot do a bit of

late nesting if the weather is right, and the weather was right. Another visitor which had decided to stay and sing was a willow warbler in Norwood wood on 30th July. It wasn't the full song, but enough of it was heard for it to be recognised, and in the wood between Woodall pond and Killamarsh pond at least five young Willow Warblers were seen.

Some time ago Woodall pond was drained so that the N.C.B. could mine underneath without fear of water seeping through into the workings. Now there is talk of the pond being refilled. At the present time the area is a deep valley overgrown with all kinds of vegetation and surrounded by trees. It would be nice to see it filled again, then the place would take on the pleasant features it had before and the walk from Woodall to Killamarsh pond would be worth while. Fishermen would welcome it and many other people interested in bird life would be pleased to see the return of so many species of water fowl and waders which used to inhabit the area. The walk from Harthill right through to Killamarsh pond used to be a favourite with quite a few Harthill folk once upon a time, but not many get out that way now.

When we were kids we used to walk it accompanied by our parents, or perhaps it was mum who had the task of taking us. The first stop used to be Mrs. Bill Bownes tiny sweet shop opposite the gate which used to take you through the lovely little meadow which led to Woodall pond. The stop at the shop was mostly in vain as the mothers told us that the shop was closed. On reflection I cannot ever recall it being shut. Well, after that bit of kidding we used to cover every inch of that meadow which always seemed full of flowers and skylarks. On reaching the trees near the pond, we would start climbing, being careful, of course, not to tear our trousers as they were the only pair we had. Eventually we would reach Killamarsh pond and make straight for the little cottage nearby where we were treated to a packet of crisps and a drink of water. It had to be water because we could not afford pop and the crisps. That incidentally, was why the sweet shop was by-passed. Apparently a packet of crisps was cheaper than a packet of sweets. I think the people who lived at the cottage were called Glover, then later on someone called Heath lived there. The place is now overgrown, in fact there isn't a brick to be seen. The refreshments these folk provided for fishermen and walkers would be appreciated even today as it is quite a long way from the pond to the nearest shop which is at Norwood.

After a rest at the cottage, and a good scout around the pond and the wood, we would set off back home. We were no longer energetic enough to climb trees and throw stones in the pond, so the walk home became something of a burden and one by one we would start to lag behind and wish we lived at Woodall. Eventually we would reach the road, ignore the little shop and turn right, heading for home past Mr. Nilan's little cottage, around the corner where Harthill Church would come into view, and then we knew it would not be long before we were home. The requests for donkey rides were turned down flat, which meant that the grown ups were tired as well. At last we would reach home tired and weary and after a quick scrub in the sink, (just the front of the face), we would head for bed.

This was the pattern followed in those days. Perhaps the next walk would be to Lindrick or picnicking in the quarry field at Loscar. These are now memories but time will not erase the beauty of the countryside which has

embedded itself in my mind. The memories of that little shop, the sweet smelling meadow and the cottage at Killamarsh are still fresh in my mind as well.

The shop and the cottage are no longer there, but the walk is, although the path does not run through the meadows now. The way to the ponds is right at the end of Walseker Lane, down the bridle path, under the M.1 motorway and you are there. Do not go through the fields off Woodall Lane, it is not allowed.

October 1981

September the 9th was a nice warm day and just right for a walk through the fields and woods, if you could put up with the thousands of insects which were on the wing, but, even then it was nice to see some of them, especially the colourful butterflies. The bright yellow brimstone butterfly is easily recognised by its colour and size, and, one of these got up out of the stubble of a newly harvested field. Typical of quite a few butterflies it flew a few yards, then settled, then waited until I was 3 or 4 yards from it before flying off again. This went on for quite some time until it flew away towards Cuthbright Wood.

Just before I got to Loscar Wood a red admiral butterfly was seen basking on a fence and, with its wings outstretched it looked quite something.

In the wood there were quite a few of the not so colourful meadow brown butterflies flitting about and, not to be outdone, four goldcrests were seen in a Scots pine, coming right to the end of a branch twittering away till I moved off, then they went back into the tree and out of sight. Another butterfly which caught my eye as I approached Cuthbright Wood was a peacock and in the wood I saw two more of these colourful butterflies.

The large tortoiseshell and the small tortoiseshell were also there. In between watching birds and butterflies I collected about 1½ lbs of blackberries. These, together with another 2 lbs collected the day before will be made into blackberry vinegar. A white flowering bramble with thousands of berries not quite ready was spread over the hedges and in the undergrowth of both Loscar and Cuthbright Woods. I shall be fetching some more when these are ready.

At this time of the year when out walking, it is quite easy to collect blackberries either for pies or vinegar. I like 'em both and it doesn't matter whether they are pink flowering or white flowering varieties.

November 1981

The Canada goose, which had managed to reach the ponds after undoubtedly hitting the electric cables over Mr. Skepper's land, had to be shot by the R.S.P.C.A. Two more were dead underneath the wires. The one which reached the pond was in a bad way with both wings broken. It seemed lively enough and came out of the water to take food but both its wings were trailing in the mud and there was no chance that it would ever fly again.

It seemed a pity to see it on its own on the second pond, while at the first there were 56 enjoying the feed which this pond provides. At dusk they all took off, flying away towards Pebley Pond leaving the injured one behind.

These electric cables have accounted for many birds over the years as they are just at a height which can be a danger to birds as they come in at dusk to spend the night on the ponds.

Over the past 6 or 7 years, two mute swans, four tufted duck, quite a few mallard and partridge have been found dead after hitting the wires. The R.S.P.C.A. official who shot the goose said he was going to get in touch with the Y.E.B. to see if anything could be done regarding the wires. The usual practice is to have bobbins fitted at intervals so that birds can see them from quite a distance, thus avoiding them. I hope he is successful in his attempts to get something done.

A more pleasant sight on the 11th October was the sight of a dozen pochard ducks on the first pond. A sign that winter is around the corner and surprisingly five little grebe and five great crested grebe. Tufted duck also had put in an appearance, 14 of them, but the biggest bird there was a lesser black backed gull which made the clack headed gulls look quite small.

December 1981

Now that the shooting season is in full swing it is wise to take care when taking a stroll through the woodland around us as once again "sporting" syndicates are using them.

Loscar wood and Cuthbright wood, two of our local woodland areas, and favourites with many village people who like to walk through them, had "No Trespassing" signs put up at their main entrances. These signs were not official Forestry Commission ones and quite a few people wondered why these signs had suddenly appeared. The shooting syndicate had put them up, I suppose, to put people off as they might disturb the game which abounds in the woods.

Inquiries about these signs through Mr. Peter Hardy, MP, had these signs removed by the Forestry Commission. Permits for these woods have not been renewed and the excuse by the commission was not a good one at all. They suggested that people were in danger of being shot if they continued to use the woods, yet, the path which has been marked out runs north from the main gate of Loscar Wood for a couple of hundred yards or so, then right, along the north side for 300 yards where it disappears over the wall and continues on to Thorpe. As the path is right on the edge of the wood, in fact it is in the boundary of the wood, the excuse by the Forestry people is a poor one to say the least, and according to them, if you walk along the footpath you cannot be shot. Yet, if you move one inch off the path you can most definitely be shot and it would be your fault for not keeping to the path. There is no margin there at all between danger and safety.

People of Harthill have always strolled through Loscar Wood and as far as I know no one has ever been shot. Anyone can tell when the "sporting" syndicate are in the wood by the cars etc., parked in the drive and in Loscar Lane.

January 1982

The two areas of water which were not frozen over on the first pond were filled with water fowl. This was on the 14th December after the heavy snow which fell the night before. In one unfrozen area, which was not all that big, were crowded scores of coot, mallard, tufted duck, mute swan, Canada geese, pochard, moorhen, black-headed gull, lesser black backed gull and at least one teal.

The other area was not as packed, but on the ice were many more of these water birds. A flock of about 10 common snipe got up from the water's edge, their long beaks showing up against the background of snow. In the field on the west of the ponds were many tracks of rabbit and hare and near the hedgerow were quite a few reed buntings feeding on weed seeds which had not been covered by the snow. I approached these birds and got within a few yards of them before they flew off. It was the same thing a bit further on with a small flock of tree sparrows which were feeding. They didn't seem to mind me and the dog one bit as no doubt hunger forced them to ignore us, but the cheekiest bird on that cold and bleak morning was a robin. As I walked along the path alongside the tall hawthorn hedge just before the third pond copse, this robin flew out of the hedge and on to the branch of a willow not a yard away. In fact I could easily have touched it. It followed for quite some distance before it left us. It was seeing us off its territory and to prove it I went back to where it first appeared and the same thing happened, leaving us in exactly the same place. That wasn't the last encounter with this bird, as after I had tramped through the deep snow of the copse and through drifts, I was once again confronted with this bird, only on the opposite side of the narrow third pond. I know robins are quite tame especially at gardening times when they will come quite close to the spade in search of grubs, but this one wanted me out of the way. It flew on to the branch of a small hawthorne bush and as I stopped it came closer and it was no more than 2 feet away from my face. It was close enough to get a couple of shots of it with the camera, (hope they come out O.K.) and to show it wasn't scared it flew at me and actually brushed my shoulder with a wing. As I moved off through the snow the robin flew away across the narrow channel to where I had first encountered it. I'm sure it must have been the same robin.

On my way home I saw more tracks and one of them interested me more than the usual hare and rabbit ones. It was the track of a fox. Each step practically dead in line and the print much more dainty than the print of a dog.

Many bird species were seen and the colourful ones like the chaffinch, bullfinch and robin showed up brilliantly as the sun reflected the snow on their plumage.

February 1982

The winter weather will have taken its toll of birdlife in and around Harthill but we shan't know the real effect till spring arrives. Then probably the absence of certain birds will be noticeable for a period until the real time arrives for breeding. Then birds from other areas will arrive. Tiny birds, such as the goldcrest, tree creeper and the wren which inhabit woodland areas, seem to

suffer more than the small birds which hang round buildings and can find a bit of warmth from them and where scraps of food are readily taken. There are the many nut dispensers which can be seen in gardens in the village which attract the hungry birds. Insect eaters like the three mentioned above have it rough any winter time, but this winter will have put paid to lots of these tiny birds. It isn't very often dead birds are found, especially the small ones, but sometimes one comes across one which, has perished, like the tree creeper which I found a winter or two ago. I was in a local wood during a period of snow and heavy frosts and I was near some rather large trees. So I decided to have a look around the base of one or two of them hoping to find an owl pellet or two to examine, but I noticed a piece of bark on one of the old trees had come away from the trunk about an inch and a half, wide enough for a bird to be in, and inside was a tree creeper, dead and frozen stiff. Even in its natural shelter it had died. As for the owl pellets, I did find a couple and I remember they contained feathers and inside one was the skull of a tiny bird. Neither of them contained fur.

March 1982

The fox is persecuted to such an extent that all over the country hunting parties and shooting parties are organised to harass and kill this beautiful animal which is classed as a menace to people who have nothing else to do but chase foxes as a pastime, and see them ripped to pieces by packs of hungry dogs. I prefer to see them shot if they are to be kept under control. I've never seen a fox caught by these hounds, but I've been 'on the spot minutes later to find nothing but bloodstained grass where one had been ripped apart. I once saw a big brave huntsman waving a fox's brush in the air in triumph. The reason for not seeing the fox actually killed by the dogs is that there is no chance to see this act unless by chance you are on the exact spot at the right time and then, with the fox being much smaller than the hounds, and, each dog trying to get at the prey, it is difficult to see the actual kill. I've not seen a hunt since the M.I Motorway nosed its way past Harthill as there is a rule that no hunting is to take place within 3 miles of a motorway, But I saw several before these roads were constructed. My first recollection of a meet in Harthill was when I couldn't have been much more than five or six years old. I remember going to see them outside the Blue Bell with some of my pals and I well remember the red coated huntsmen on their fine horses and all the hounds milling round. I also remember one well fed, red faced rider throwing handfuls of ha'pennies amongst us. He was either drunk or he enjoyed seeing grown ups as well as kids grovelling after a coin or two. I didn't get a ha'penny and was lucky to get away unscathed in the fight for a penny or two. It could have been the same red faced fellow who featured in another fox hunting episode in the early thirties.

The story tells about this particular hunt which was covering the land south of Thorpe. A group of Harthill men who were all miners and were on short time, decided to follow the hunt and were leaning on a gate watching the proceedings when this gentleman on horseback approached. He looked at the group and said to one of them, a certain Mr. Wragg, "Wragg, open this gate!" The story goes on to tell how the early morning air was rent with very colourful

phrases as Mr. Wragg made it quite clear that if this chap wanted the gate opened he would have to open it himself.

The rider's face went redder than his jacket as neither Mr. Wragg or any of his friends opened the gate. I wonder if the word "please" would have changed Mr. Wragg's mind. Wish I could have been there. A few months ago a programme on the wireless featured a talk on foxes which people from different walks of life took part in and it was not surprising to hear the fox being criticised.

One lady said she loved foxes until one walked into her hen run one night and nipped off with a hen, and in future would make sure her hens were locked up. Pity she didn't think of that before. A gentleman who was a member of a hunt was then asked if he thought hunting was cruel. He said no it wasn't, in fact, he said the fox really enjoys a good run and doesn't mind at all being chased by the hounds. He didn't say anything about what it felt when being caught. This man was most certainly speaking to people who had never seen a fox and had no idea at all about anything regarding the countryside. I've seen foxes before a hunt and I've seen foxes after a hunt, and I'm sure if this man of leisure had been chased then his attitude would be changed at once.

One particular instance of a fox which had been run around comes to mind straight away. I got to know about this certain hunt which was going to take place and was going to cover fields and woodland around Thorpe. I also knew of at least four earths which had been active, especially one near the canal bank in Thorpe Wood which earlier that year had seen the birth of either 3 or 4 cubs. I was on the day shift and decided after I came from the pit and had my dinner I would go and see if this particular earth had been deprived of its foxes.

Horses hoof marks were everywhere and there had been quite a lot of activity around the earth, but I decided to wait to see if any fox returned.

The wood rose steeply from the earth so I parked myself against a tree and the position was such that I could see all approaches to the earth below. Everywhere was silent as it is at that time of the year, but after about half an hour, and just as it was becoming dusk, I remember hearing this noise and looking to the right and not more than 20 yards away was a fox. It wasn't in very good condition at all, in fact it looked as though it had been dragged through all the mud in Thorpe, and it was no longer the sprightly, perky animal I was used to seeing. It passed within about 10 yards of me and with a quick look round it disappeared slowly into the earth. I'm certain it had not enjoyed the chase, but at least it had escaped and returned home.

April 1982

Most of the waterfowl which arrived after the big thaw had dispersed by the 15th of March although quite a few were still with us including tufted duck, great crested grebe, coot, water hen, mallard and mute swan, all on the first pond.

Many were paired up and it was interesting to see the three pairs of grebes going through their head shaking displays.

There wasn't a great deal on the second pond and the third pond wasn't very thickly populated either, but we know that on this pond there will be a lot of action during the breeding season. The third pond copse was unusually quiet for this time of the year and only blackbird, robin and chaffinch were heard. The place was flooded and it was no surprise to see two pairs of mallard and a pair of coots swimming in the sludgy water. The Pebley Copse was a different place altogether regarding bird life and most of the species were in full song. Blue tit, great tit, willow tit could all be heard, as could the robin, thrush, blackbird, chaffinch, tree sparrow and mistle thrush. Linnets and green finches were there and a pair of siskin appeared on a bush not far ahead from where I stood.

This is a good time to see our resident birds in their new plumage when there are no leaves on the trees and bushes to give them cover. Quite a few owl pellets were found at the base of a large tree, some of them new, and on looking up the tree there was the tawny owl pressed close to the tree trunk in its usual posture.

May 1982

Blackcaps and garden warblers are easily distinguished from one another by their plumage. The male blackcap as its name suggests has a black cap and the female a brown cap, whereas the garden warbler is just a brown bird with lighter underparts, but their songs are very similar and only with careful listening can they be told apart. Last year in Clumber Park on a fine June evening I heard both these song birds and as they were only roughly 20 yards apart the difference could be heard. The garden warblers song is a sweet warble containing notes which don't reach a really high or low pitch whereas the blackcap's song, although very similar, contains higher and lower notes and is a little louder.

Another pair of birds with similar songs are the reed warbler and the sedge warbler and like the two mentioned above, can easily be recognised by their plumage and difference in size. Sedge warblers are very common in Summer and can be seen and heard at almost anytime around the ponds which is the habitat of both these birds when visiting Harthill, when passing through on to breed.

The sedge warbler will use any vantage point to sing from, whether it is from reeds, hedgerows or a fence it will let you know it is there.

The Reed warbler arrives in England later than most of our Summer visitors so it is no good expecting it early on. We don't get them at Harthill every year, but last three years we have been lucky enough to have them, mainly on the third pond tail where there are plenty of thick reed beds for them to nest in, and it is from the reeds that their song comes.

The songs of these birds contain as you would imagine, a lot of sweet notes, but they also contain a few harsh notes, especially in the case of the Sedge warbler which always uses these harsh grating notes on being approached. The blackcap and garden warbler can be heard most summers in the third pond copse and Pebley copse and the sedge warbler anywhere around the ponds and with a bit of luck the reed warbler will be in the reed beds of the

third pond tail, if you want to hear and see these birds have a walk around the ponds and into the copse.

All are summer visitors but some blackcaps have been known to winter here.

June 1982

The first pond looked beautiful in the early morning light and the willow and sallow on the west side of the pond put the finishing touches to a lovely placid scene. This was at 5.45 a.m. just as the red glow of the rising sun lit the sky and clouds, and by the time I reached the west side of the pond the sun had risen and the effect of its reflection on the water was really something.

There was plenty of activity regarding birdlife with starlings foraging for insects in the grass on the pond bank and flying off towards the village with beaks crammed full of food for their young. Willow warblers and sedge warblers were in full song.

At breeding time most of the waterfowl disappear leaving just a few to breed here like the ever present mallard and this year there is a very good chance of tufted duck making it, and if the water level stays high there is a chance once again we might see young great crested grebe.

Coots have several nests dotted about the pond sides. These are birds which can't stand the sight of other birds getting too near their nests and are soon ready to see off any intruder. It so happened on this pleasant morning that a male mallard, which I had been watching, slowly approached the nest of a coot which was concealed by thick vegetation. Now the mallard is not classed as a diving duck as the tufted duck is, but this one was about to have five or six quick lessons in diving. One coot was on the nest and the other was busy pulling water weed around the base of the nest until it spotted the mallard four or five yards away, then like a rocket it flew at the duck forcing it under the water, and when it surfaced the same thing happened again. This happened four times but on the next attack the duck forgot its classification as a non diving duck and without the aid of the coots beak, it went under on its own. By this time the calm water had been turned into a battlefield and some of the other water fowl had taken to the air out of the way. After another couple of unaided dives the mallard found itself with room to take to the air and out of sight of the coot which was still ready for action with its head lowered and wings raised. The other waterfowl gradually settled down, the water became calm again and the pond once again took on its peaceful appearance.

July 1982

As cricket is played in the countryside at Harthill, then it is not exempt from being mentioned in Nature Notes, I think that's as good an excuse as any to write about cricket in Harthill and to mention some names of players who have played with Harthill and some of the people who helped to keep the Club going, such as scorers, the tea ladies (and gents) and non-playing committee members. I might even mention the names of one or two umpires, those people who most cricketers think need glasses and have been told so on more than

one occasion. I have proof beyond any doubt that Harthill had a cricket team well over a hundred years ago and one name alone suggests there was cricket here around the 1850's - 1860's.

Now then, some of the older folk will be able to say it was played here long before that. If that is so then all well and good, but I'm going on knowledge gleaned from the tales told by old cricketers and by reading one or two Church Magazines which were published in the days of Canon Darley and contained cricket scores of the day. I didn't know Canon Darley but they tell me what a big influence he had on the community and, how he was greatly interested in cricket. I have a photograph of him with a team of choirboy cricketers. He left Harthill in 1923.

Now then, that name.

A couple of years ago I was listening to Trevor Bailey (cricket commentator) talking on the wireless about old cricketers who have played in county cricket and, one of them was a player by the name of Fuller Pilch.

It so happens that a Harthill resident of years ago was called Fuller Pilch Highfield. What I am suggesting is that the father of Harthill's Fuller Pilch was a 'fan' of the county player and called his son after him.

With a name like that it is too much of a coincidence to think that two people could be called it, so I am sticking solidly by my idea that our Fuller Pilch was called after the county player, and, as I have a photograph of Fuller P. Highfield in an 1890 cricket team, adding weight to my theory, then I am sure he came from a cricketing family and, it is more than likely his father played for Harthill, and, perhaps his grandfather did also, who knows?

My early recollections of cricket were playing in the back yard with a bat made out of a railing which the council provided unwittingly. All that was needed was a handle shaping and you had a bat.

The 'cricket ground' was on the Crescent, but you had to be careful not to hit the ball over certain gardens or you might not play again till a fresh ball was found.

Anywhere a wicket could be found, whether on the road, backyard or in a field, you would find gangs of lads cricketing. Bricks, tin cans, dustbin lids, dustbins, boxes, lumps of wood, in fact almost anything would act as stumps.

The main playground in those days was the 'Recca' which is the hilly field opposite Firvale Street and this field on summer nights was the scene of fiercely fought games of cricket, which, on most occasions consisted of perhaps twenty or more on each side. So this was the real thing, with bigger lads hurling tennis balls at you, or, maybe a sponge ball was used, bouncing, miles over your head if it was dropped a bit short. But the most, dangerous ball was the wooden one which had been pinched from the coconut stall at Harthill feast which visited us every year in August. All budding bowlers made sure that when the Feast left, the coconut stall would be minus many balls. These wooden balls were not perfectly round, in fact some of them were nearly oval, but as not many of the lads, or I should say ALL of the lads, could afford a new ball, then the feast balls came in very handy even if they did shoot off at

different angles. Legs, fingers or any other unprotected parts would come under the hammer of those balls.

Frequent visits would be made to the, cricket field to watch the cricketers at practice and perhaps handle a bat or have a feel at a real cricket ball, but on the whole we had to be satisfied with just watching or, 'we would be allowed to fetch the ball if it had been hit too far for the bowler to chase after.

We would help with the rolling and watering of the wicket, that's about the only time we were really made welcome, when we were helping to pull and push the big heavy stone roller and, help to fetch water for the wicket from the water hole just below the cricket field. This water hole was known as the Hurdysik, a name which came from the real name of Thurgosyke. The place is still referred to as the former spelling.

In the summer it would be full of tadpoles and water insects. These were poured with the water into the barrel then wheeled off to be emptied on to the wicket then rolled in.

On Saturday we would be on the cricket field long before the start of the match armed with a bottle which we would fill with cold, crystal clear water from the spring which fed the waterhole. There was no water laid on to the cricket field in those days. The water had to be fetched for the player's teas from a house on Thorpe Road which was quite a good distance from the cricket field. The people I remember doing the teas were Mr. & Mrs. James Taylor, helped very often by Mr. & Mrs Fred Bennett.

During the course of the game we would help by putting the score up, and get bawled at for walking behind the bowler as he was delivering. This was something we would never understand and thought the cricketers didn't like us, but we soon learned why we were shouted at and tried not to walk behind the bowler. The same thing happens today and the same look of misunderstanding appears on the culprit's faces.

The cricket field's playing area was not as big in those early days being some five or six yards further in so it was a bit easier to score runs. The mowing was done by a pit pony pulling the mower. A pit pony which must have been the envy of all the other ponies down Kiveton pit, which in years gone by never saw the light of day unless they came out dead, injured or too exhausted to pull another tub. But later on they were allowed out once a year, when the pit had it's annual summer holiday, so the one selected to do the pulling of the mower was very fortunate indeed. Thank goodness the days of the pit ponies are over.

Some of the ponies were very temperamental and I remember one in particular which would get into top speed in no time at the slightest excuse. While the mower was being geared up to the horse someone had to hold it's head then lead it gently to where you wanted to mow, then someone else took control with the reins. This didn't always work out, especially if the person holding it's head didn't do his job properly.

One evening Ramsey Downing and myself were allowed to do a bit of mowing and, with the help of one or two of the lads and, after rounding the pony up, we were all set. I led the pony to the top left hand corner of the field then Ramsey took over with the reins, but, before he was ready I let go of the

head and gave it the order to go. This it did, full speed down the field it went, with the driver, frightened to let go of the reins and taking strides which one associates with someone about 10ft tall. I forget what the outcome was but it was an incident which was in keeping with the fun we had in those days. I know Ramsey won't mind me mentioning his name.

October 1982

August and September are two months of the year when garden produce, fruit, flowers, etc., can be seen as a result of the summer. In the countryside it is the same with wild flowers, fruit, insects etc., in abundance, especially if the weather is right and this year, once again, the weather at the beginning of September was right.

There has been quite a lot of blackberries and elderberries about and on three brief visits to the countryside I collected 6½ lbs. of blackberries which will be made into blackberry vinegar, which is delicious on Yorkshire puddings and pancakes, and it is also handy to have as a medicine for colds and coughs.

In the old days most of the houses in the village had wines and vinegar made from different fruits collected from the woods and hedgerows of our countryside. My wife says she will need another 2 lbs. of blackberries to make sure of a good supply of vinegar throughout the winter, so I shall be off to collect them, and I shall be able to get them in no time at all. The reason for this is that not as many people go blackberrying these days as they did in years gone by, so the few who do, have an easy time doing so. One bramble, not far from a path near Woodall had surprisingly been by-passed and in half an hour I had picked 2¼ lbs.

Another aspect of the countryside in September is the great number of birds which can be seen as young and old get together in the fields feeding. Families of willow warblers and yellow wagtails can be seen feeding ready for their long flight south to Africa. Large flocks of house martins and swallows are doing the same thing while our resident birds will stay here and fight their way through another winter. Marvellous how they do it. There has been plenty of activity on the water this year and the number of coots and great crested grebes bear witness to this, but sad to relate, fishing lines are still accounting for some of the birds. A three parts grown coot was brought to me on September 12th by Martin Howe. Around one of its legs was a length of fishing line so deeply embedded that it was impossible to get at it. The leg was swollen and useless. I was in two minds as to what to do with it but I decided to let it go and face things with one leg. It was lively enough when I put it back in the water.

Butterflies of all shapes and colours enjoyed the warmth of early September and could be seen all over the place, red admiral, peacock, painted lady, small tortoiseshell, meadow brown, orange tip are just a few which were seen regularly.

November 1982

The main body of housemartins had left the vicinity of Carver Close by the 4th October where the largest flock I'd seen for years had been accumulating for at least four weeks but they are always the late leavers and this year was no exception as right up to the 13th a party of four young were still being fed. For six days they had been alone on the telephone wires taking off occasionally for a fly around, then on the 14th they were no longer there. Both parents and young were on their way, but there are plenty of birds left to satisfy those who are keen enough to keep their eyes open. Winter visitors will soon be here in force giving us something else to look at. The great spotted woodpecker is the most common of our woodpeckers and they have been seen and heard again this summer in woodland around Harthill. They can also be seen occasionally in the third pond copse as well as in the woodland around Pebley Pond and a few weeks ago one was heard and seen as it hammered away at the branch of an old apple tree in the garden of Mrs. Wall, the rate at which they hammer is quite amazing and this goes for the other two species, the green and lesser spotted.

I recorded a green woodpecker hammering at an old tree in Clumber Park early one morning some years ago and I never get tired of hearing it.

December 1982

Nothing seemed to be any different as I made my way round the first pond I'd seen it all before. The trees were shedding their leaves, grass and hedges were turning brown, a bird or two flitted about in the tall willows near the waters edge, scores of waterfowl milled about the placid water. No sign of any winter visitors.

It was the same of the second and third ponds and, on reaching the third pond copse there was the smell of rotting vegetation. Many small birds busied themselves among the branches of the trees as they searched for insects and every now and then a breeze would send a shower of leaves cascading earthwards, leaves which had changed colour with changing season.

The swampy area looked dull and uninviting as it engulfed the last of the water plants. Nests which were concealed in bushes and hedgerows during the breeding season were now visible as their cover was being discarded.

Emerging from the copse on the Pebley side I was met by another scene which was neither dull nor uninviting. The pale sun was shining on the tall hedge on my right and there was the sight of a hedge in its seasonal colours of dark green, yellow, rust, brown and setting it off was the berry laden guelder rose shrub complete with its beautiful coloured leaves of russet.

I left the hedge behind and wandered off towards Pebley, where the scene was much the same, with the bridge still minus its crossmembers pinched some time ago. The small copse which contains many large trees, shrubs, bushes and swamp was silent except for the occasional call note of a bird. The floor under the big beech trees was covered with beech mast and half a dozen owl pellets were found under one of the trees.

I decided to retract my steps and wander back home as I had seen enough to satisfy me. I'd seen it all before but next Autumn I shall be back to see it all again.

The countryside never loses its interest.

January 1983

Redshanks are birds which can be seen at any time of the year, but during the winter months more of them are seen as they drop in to feed and rest on the muddy shores of our ponds and at present there is plenty of mud for them as the Water Board have run quite a lot of water off.

The redshank is easily distinguished from the other waders which visit us by its orange-red legs, and it is quite a good bit bigger than the dunlin, common sandpiper, sanderling and common snipe with which it mixes. Another means of identification is the broad white wing bar and erratic flight when disturbed.

Three of these birds were seen on the 13th December and with all the mud around the ponds I'm sure we shall see more of them this winter.

One winter visitor was spotted on the 13th. This was a goldeneye male. It was easily recognised by its black and white plumage and a white patch in the front of the eye. It has a yellow eye. An interesting aspect of this diving duck is the way it takes to the air. Instead of pattering along the surface of the water, it rises straight up with its wings making a whistling noise. Its triangular shaped head is another means of identification.

The ponds offer a great variety of birds during the winter months and I shall be making many visits to see if there is a rare one among them.

To me winter time in the woods or around the ponds is just as interesting as the summertime.

February 1983

Field fares and redwings have once again arrived in force from their northern breeding grounds. These members of the thrush family seem to arrive to brighten our hedgerows and fields after our resident birds have moved off into more suitable areas, such as orchards, gardens and woodland where they will feed. The summer visitors of course have nipped off to the warmer climes of Africa. A large flock of field fares and redwings were seen on the edge of Cuthbright Wood and in the tall hawthorne hedge which stretches from the wood to the path near Loscar plantation was another flock. On this mild late December day it was ideal for a walk and to see what was happening in the fields and woods. I entered Loscar Wood by the main drive and was met immediately by the usual silence which one expects on a December day.

I made my way to the badger sett and it was what I expected to see. It was a scene of desolation as every entrance was unused and no sign of any badger activity at all. The only footprints around were those of humans and dogs and the mark of a spade where some vandal, some time ago, had attempted to dig out badgers.

It is unbelievable to think that only a few years ago this sett held at one time, at least 10 of these beautiful animals and now there is no sign of anything.

Moving away from the sett, which had once given pleasure to many people who liked to see badgers, I made for the fox earths and the same thing met my gaze as each earth was now unused, except for perhaps one which had recently been used, but I don't think there will be much chance of another fox inhabiting the place. Shooting parties have no sympathy for foxes. I used to find owl pellets under the scots pine trees, but after a thorough search I found nothing. I wonder if the owls have gone the same way as the foxes. My guess is yes, as will have the jays and magpies or any bird or animal which pose a threat to the game birds which are encouraged in the wood.

One pleasant aspect of my woodland ramble was the presence of members of the smaller bird community. While searching for owl pellets I suddenly found myself in the company of blue tits, coal tits, great tits and the tiny goldcrest. I must have spent half an hour watching them as they searched for food among the branches and cones of the scots pines. Robin, treecreeper and a pair of chaffinches also appeared on the scene.

Leaving the scotspines and the birds behind I moved off to the Thorpe side of the wood where I spent a few minutes looking at the scene in front of me and thinking how peaceful the village looked with its many trees, half covering the buildings and the church tower standing out above the rest. Loscar wood is always associated with Harthill which is about a mile away, yet Thorpe is only a couple of fields away. But what does it matter as the walk from Harthill to Loscar Wood is always pleasant.

Making my way round the south side of the wood I noticed buds forming on many trees and, scraping the dead leaves away underneath them I found little green shoots of bluebells. Growing doesn't stop during Winter it only slows down.

The woodland rides at this time of the year are easy to negotiate as the 5 feet high rosebay willow herb is no longer there and the brambles have stopped spreading their prickly branches, but there is no colour, only the browns and greens which you get in Winter time. It is hard to believe that some of the rides will be impassable during the Summer as they will be covered by a sea of pink by the tall willow herb and the white of the brambles.

I eventually stepped out of the wood and on to Packman Lane and was met almost immediately by a most colourful sight which stretched nearly the length of the wood. The colours came from the many unwanted articles which have been dumped by thoughtless people and consist of a multicoloured mattress (single), rusty washer, plastic carrier bags in blue, white, yellow, all the way from Woolworths, Asda, Keith's Fashion Centre and numerous other places. Heaps of food cans which must have taken months to collect and, what a noise they must have made when they were being tipped on the edge of the wood. Colourful plastic bags full of broken tiles are stacked neatly against a tree, an old zinc bath tub which was upside down and must have shattered the peace of the wood when being slung away.

An old aid bed was dumped, as were cardboard boxes, books (books which no one in Harthill sells), old pay slips, plastic bottles and glass bottles. You name it and Loscar Wood has it. So my afternoon in the wood ended with a colourful finale, one that I could have done without seeing. After leaving the tin cans and pay slips behind I began to wonder why on earth all that rubbish couldn't be tipped on the council rubbish heap at Kiveton Park Station, but then I suppose a lot of the tippers don't even know where Kiveton Park Station is. I hope they soon find out.

Loscar Wood is only one example as Cuthbright and Nitticar Woods are also laced with rubbish, especially Nitticarr which also has a mattress and a washer among its unwanted items and a ladies lingerie department.

March 1983

During the gales of early February a large tree at the entrance to the first pond was blown down. This tree was classed as safe, while other trees around the pond have been cut down, trees which were classed as unsafe, leaving great gaps in the skyline.

At least eight trees have disappeared over the last few years, but despite my attempts to have something done about having them replaced, nothing has been done.

Mrs. Joy Pattison did her best to get it through to the Parish Council that these trees should be replaced but nothing was done. If it wasn't for breaking the law I would pinch a few saplings out of the woods and replant them around the pond myself.

It may sound trivial a matter to some people but I can assure you that if trees are continually cut down then the beauty of our most pleasant area will lose its atmosphere altogether, and don't forget this, the bird life will suffer and the many species of birds which we have will gradually leave us. Even in wintertime seeds are available on these trees as well as the insects which the birds get out of the cracks.

On Friday 11th February after the snow which fell the day before I was around the ponds and in one tree alone I identified five different bird species searching for food. These species were the chaffinch, blue tit, dunnock, great tit and robin. This was in midwinter, so imagine what busy places trees are in summer when there is a profusion of insects.

April 1983

The chiff chaff is one of our earliest summer visitors but up to the 13th of March I hadn't seen one. Maybe I was expecting a little too much as the 13th March is a little early, but when an experienced bird watcher friend of mine from Penistone rang to tell me he had heard the cuckoo in early March then I thought anything could happen, so I kept a lookout for the early visitors, but nothing was seen.

The mild weather we have had will no doubt help the visitors on their way but to expect them before April in great numbers is expecting a little too much.

I never worry myself about when these birds are going to arrive, because I know they will come and we shall enjoy them, and, when I can hear the song of the willow warbler echoing through the woods then I know Spring is here as well as the Summer visitors. There is one thing to our advantage at this time of the year (March) and that is most birds are in their new plumage and as there are no leaves on most of the trees then these birds can easily be seen and most of them are in song, so a walk around can be very interesting.

Birds with colourful plumage can be picked out and, on the 12th March in bright sunlight, I had the pleasure of seeing bullfinch, chaffinch, goldfinch, greenfinch, robin, bluetit, greattit, willowtit, goldcrest and linnets and you can't get a much more colourful group of birds than that and they will still hold their own when our visitors arrive, in fact, I don't think anything can compare with our colourful resident birds.

By the way, Mr. Foggitt, the renowned weather forecaster failed again. He forecast a very bad winter and had people rushing out buying umbrellas and all kinds of winter clothing to protect themselves against the savage winter, and what have we had? Nothing to moan about at all.

Mr Foggitt has said before that if there is a glut of fruit then there is a bad winter ahead. The loads of fruit wild, as well as cultivated, are there to sustain our wildlife through the winter elements. I say the glut of fruit is the result of a season which has been just right for fruit growing and nothing at all to do with the forthcoming winter.

May 1983

The great crested grebes have done well up to now, April 11th, and, if their luck holds out they will be able to bring off young. The nest which is in full view of everyone, has done well to survive. I watched the pair during their nest building and have followed them up to them having at least three eggs and I am keeping my fingers crossed for them.

On the 10th April many other signs of spring were there to be seen and heard, although many of the water birds had left, leaving a small number of coots, mallard, tufted duck and of course, the great crested grebes, and at least one little grebe.

There was the sight of 14 magpies all in one tree and another pair in the next tree. Most of them would be last year's young and in a week or two they will disperse and find their own way about.

A lone heron which has been around for a few weeks was still there in Mr. Skepper's field. The copse was taking on the real meaning of spring as at least eight of our resident birds were in full song, and on the path a colony of mining bees were busy throwing tiny heaps of earth out of their holes.

The trees were beginning to take on a green hue as the buds were forming and the floor of the copse was becoming greener with the various spring and summer shoots.

None of our summer visitors were heard but it is a little early for that, although sometimes they can be heard as early as this - like the chiff-chaff which I heard and saw a couple of years ago in early March.

In a few weeks we shall be able to hear such birds as the visiting willow warbler, whitethroat, sedge warbler etc., then we shall know that summer is not far away.

June 1983

The ponds were at their highest on May 2nd and it was well worth a visit to see them. Both weirs were in use as the water overflowed. It wasn't an easy walk as there was water and sludge everywhere and it was a damp, miserable affair unless of course you took an interest in the surroundings.

After sloshing through the long wet grass around the first pond I moved off on to the second where the path was deep in mud and in no time both the dog and myself were sludged up. The path on the third pond was a bit better but on approaching the copse the effect of the heavy rain was to be seen. The dyke through the copse had disappeared under the flood water and it was impossible to get across to the higher ground where the path was reasonably good.

I walked along the hedgeside towards Pebley and the dyke there had turned into a small pond and the wooden bridge was submerged. Pebley Pond, like Harthill ponds was overflowing and I followed the path alongside the deep cutting where the water was cascading down but I didn't try to cross the dyke in those conditions.

The lower end of Pebley copse was under water and it was no good trying to get through to the other side so I turned around and retraced my steps past the submerged bridge, the flooded dyke, the flooded copse, through the muddy third pond tail, along the pond sides and home. My black and white dog was now black, white and brown and she didn't relish the sight of a big bowl of warm water which I was going to clean her up with. The struggle through the sludge and water was worth it as I had seen quite a bit of bird life including a few of our summer visitors such as the swallows, house martins, lesser whitethroat and the sight of 20 beautiful arctic terns. I saw a kestrel with a small bird in its talons and a heron being mobbed by half a dozen rooks. Then to top it up a tawny owl was being mobbed by a flock of small birds.

July 1983

I hadn't seen or even heard the sedge warbler or the white-throat, or the grasshopper warbler up to the 26th April when I heard all three, all in the same area. Their songs are quite different and are easily recognised.

The sedge warbler's song is a mixture of high and low notes as well as grating harsh ones. This bird is quite easily seen as it will come and meet you if it sees you approaching its nesting place. It has a weak flight and one wonders how it manages to fly all the way there and back to Central and South Africa every year.

The whitethroat's song is a different one altogether with its characteristic fluttering up and down singing its short warble. It is usually seen perched on a high vantage point. The song of the grasshopper warbler is entirely out of character with other warblers. It has a song without one sweet note, and anyone hearing it for the first time can be excused if they think the sound is anything but a bird. This warbler's song is a continuous whirring sound which carries on for quite a long time and it rises and falls in pitch. It could be likened to the sound of an old fashioned fishing reel being wound or a cycle freewheeling.

The three warblers mentioned were still in residence in the same area on the 12th June which means they will most likely have nested. Another bird with a whirring song is the nightjar, not a warbler, but a bigger bird altogether and sings its song at dusk.

Clumber Park is an ideal place to hear it and maybe catch a glimpse of it as it flutters about after moths etc., on the heathland which is its usual haunt.

September 1983

Great flocks of starlings could be seen towards the end of July and even as early as this swifts, swallows and house martins were making efforts to group.

It doesn't seem all that long since the three latter species were spotted on their arrival here in April, and here we are in July watching them in their early preparations for migration.

The swifts will disappear first towards the end of September followed by the other two species in October, but well into August there will still be young to feed, then hundreds of them, house martins and swallows will later on be seen gathering on power lines, then one day they will all have gone. The young making the journey to the warmer climes of Africa for the first time. I don't like to see them go as I shall miss watching them darting and gliding over our village. Also at this time of the year our countryside begins to take on a different look as things begin to ripen in the fields and hedgerows.

I like the walk across the fields from Serlby Lane to Loscar Wood as the countryside over there is virtually unspoiled and there are plenty of hedges and fields to explore as the path takes you straight to the wood.

Once upon a time, after walking to Loscar Wood, either by road, or across the fields, one had the consolation of a rest on the seat at the end of Loscar Lane, but I'm afraid the old seat has gone and in its place is a contraption which could be anything but a seat. I've never seen anything like it, and the person responsible for its construction should be made to sit on it for a couple of hours. To have the back rest somewhere in the middle of the back, where it should be, one has to be about 7ft. 6ins tall. When I sat on it the back rest spread along the back of my head and along my shoulders. It has been reported by more than myself to the appropriate quarters.

October 1983

Fishing line is a real danger to animal bird and fish whether the line has a baited hook or not. I wonder how many animals and birds have suffered at the hands of these people who carelessly throw their unwanted line away. Fish also suffer as a result of broken fishing line leaving the hook still attached to the fish with yards of fishing line trailing along.

Two cases of fish being involved in broken fishing lines have been heard this year. One case occurred on the second pond when a local fisherman witnessed the strange action of a coot as it flapped about not far from his rod end. The bird kept disappearing below the surface, then it would appear and start going backwards and as anyone knows, coots don't swim backwards. So the fisherman's first thought was that the bird had been grabbed by a pike. Putting a weight on his line he began casting and eventually he managed to land the weight just behind the bird and at once he felt the weight of the bird and what he thought was a pike. The landing net was used to land the coot and around it's body was fishing line. Releasing the bird, which was unhurt, he began pulling the line in which was still attached to something, and after at least thirty yards of line he hauled in a tench of around three pounds in weight. So he had saved a bird and a fish with one throw. At least that's one fisherman that cares.

The other case is of an angler fishing a pond not far away. He was bringing his catch to the bank when it became heavier. Landing the fish he noticed it was entangled in fishing line and after a time he hauled the line in and on the end was another fish still with the hook attached, so there again, fish saved. Lengths of fishing line can easily be found. Beer cans and other rubbish spoil the scenery. The notice stating that anyone caught depositing rubbish will lose their licence is still there.

November 1983

Since the ponds have been low there has been quite a lot of bird activity and many birdwatchers have visited the place to have a look at the many species of birds which we are lucky enough to have. Many kinds of waders have been identified, plus the hundreds of Canada geese which have been resident on the shallow muddy waterline.

The Sailing Club have not been able to use the waters and this has been to the advantage of many species of water fowl which would not have stayed if the boats had been sailing. Later on when the weather gets colder we shall most likely have more visitors to our undisturbed ponds. What a marvellous sight we have had of the large flocks of Canada geese gliding in over the house tops and then to see them all congregated on our ponds has been quite something.

When the ponds fill up again and the water reaches the grassy banks we shall be back to normal. I hope the water board allows the level to stay as it is at least for one winter, then visitors such as the shoveler, pintail, teal, goldeneye, wigeon, shelduck etc., will be able to have an undisturbed stay along with the dainty waders, and, who knows, we might have a visit from the

whooper and bewicks swans which I haven't seen here for quite a few winters now.

Now's the time and right through the winter to see our visitors from the North, but you have to be there at the right time, so frequent visits have to be made to have any chance of seeing any of them.

We have some friends coming to visit us soon from the Hope Valley and they are hoping to spend a few hours birdwatching around the ponds. Harthill ponds can't be bad if they can attract people from that beautiful area.

December 1983

November and the signs of winter are all here now as the trees are shedding their leaves, all the summer visitors have been gone some time now. Winter visitors have arrived and I wouldn't be surprised if the large flocks of starlings are from the north. Great flocks of rooks fill the November skies. Scores of black headed gulls can be seen arriving or leaving our ponds. Woods and copse and the hedgerows have taken on a new colour scheme, showing off their yellows, browns, greens, rusts and reds, as if to make up for the songs of our birds which have been silenced by the seasons change. What could be more pleasant than a stroll through a wood at this time of the year with the leaves falling and the musty smell of rotting vegetation, the silence, and the chance of finding old nests, which are sometimes occupied by mice. To think only a few months ago, everywhere you trod in a wood there was some kind of activity, with either bird, animal or insect and now the woods, like everywhere else, have settled down to wait patiently for the spring to arrive. But until that time arrives there is still plenty to see in the countryside, right through the winter.

January 1984

Until the first and second ponds get to their full capacity then our usual sight of hundreds of waterfowl which come during the winter months will not be the same.

The second pond especially was reduced to a mere pool and the first pond looked like going the same way until the outlet valve was closed. A lot of rain is needed to fill up the two areas and even after that the fishing will not be the same for a few years. Hundreds of fish were netted and taken away by the water board men to some lake near Nottingham, to the dismay of the fishermen of Harthill and myself, but I wonder if that action will have saved many fish as the winter frosts begin to bite and freeze the small area of water which these fish had to survive in.

The third pond has not suffered, in fact, many fish were saved by putting them in there.

On December 10th I walked around the ponds and on to Pebley and that pond was well down, but on the way there and back I saw many bird species. A flock of longtailed tits, about a dozen, flitted in and out of a large hawthorne bush. Bullfinch, goldfinch, chaffinch all in the same area. Near Pebley Grove, redwing, fieldfare and brambling winter visitors were seen. Altogether I counted

25 different bird species, so despite the very cold, frosty afternoon I had an enjoyable time, and so did the dog, who I think would have stayed out till dark.

February 1984

Loscar Wood is very quiet as can be expected at this time of winter, but that doesn't make a visit there any less interesting as there is always something there to catch the eye.

On January 9th I visited the place and was soon taking an interest in my surroundings. The badger paths were still there but now getting overgrown as there are no badgers left in the wood to keep them open. The rides were clear of obstacles except for a bramble or two which have spanned them, so on the whole it was a nice easy passage through the wood as I made my way round to the Thorpe side where I saw a large flock of field fare and redwings feeding on grassland and in the hawthorn bushes were at least a dozen blackbirds.

Making my way back into the wood I decided to leave the path and get among the Scots pine trees where I always used to find numbers of owl pellets, but I think the owls have left the wood for the same reason as the badgers. One pellet was all I found and that was an old one.

I moved round to the now vacant badger sett and found fresh earth outside a hole and at once noticed the dainty prints of a fox and as I bent down I got the musty smell of a fox. It won't be there long. Another fox earth deeper in the wood had been attended as around it were many boot imprints in the soft soil.

On a lighter note, I was escorted out of the wood by a colony of long tailed tits which must have followed me some fifty or sixty yards right to the gate.

March 1984

Teal are our smallest resident duck, and each winter we have the pleasure of seeing a few of them as they mingle with the other ducks which grace our ponds. Four of these small ducks were seen on the first pond during the recent stormy weather of early February. They were easily recognised as they bobbed up and down, and their size gave them away against the larger mallard, pochard and tufted duck. These four teal had possibly flown all the way from the continent or Iceland as in winter many of these ducks fly in from these distant lands.

A decent pair of binoculars are all you need to see the colours of this smart, colourful little duck with its chestnut head and green stripe running through the eye right to the nape of the neck, and the conspicuous white stripe above the wing.

With the ponds now full to capacity there is plenty of room for the hundreds of waterfowl which will visit us during the bleak winter months. Ducks like the shoveler, pintail, wigeon, gadwall have all visited the ponds in the past, and there is no reason why they shouldn't come again.

I shall be on the lookout, especially if the weather is cold and wintry as this will force such species as those mentioned above to take refuge here.

April 1984

Magpies have increased in numbers around the Sheffield area to such an extent that it has baffled the experts. Around Harthill they can be seen at almost any time and it is not unusual to see them in small flocks. I decided to have my own count as I set off on a walk down the Beehive fields where almost at once I saw a flock of 10 in a tree even before I'd left the village. On approaching Woodall another six were seen. Passing through Woodall on the Killamarsh Road I saw another three, then as I approached the empty Woodall pond there was another pair, and in the trees on the south side of the empty pond I could hear quite a few more.

Moving on to Killamarsh pond a single magpie appeared, but on approaching the farm at Norwood, I saw half a dozen in a field near the farm house feeding off the food which had been thrown out for the hens.

I walked through Norwood and turned right onto the remains of the old Chesterfield Canal with Norwood Wood on the right. Almost immediately three magpies appeared over the bare trees. The remains of the West Kiveton Pit took my mind off the magpies for a while as I explored the old stonework of the now derelict mine. I couldn't help thinking of the miners who had worked there. Many from Harthill. Still, that's another story. The countryside opened up as I made my way under the M1 motorway towards Woodall. I cut across the fields towards Harthill and up the dyke to see three more black and white birds. I arrived home after 3½ hours of an enjoyable walk and my tally of magpies proved there was a large number of them around the district.

May 1984

The woodcock is mostly seen in woodland so I was very surprised to see one not far from the village in fact it was in a most exposed position and I was right on top of it before it decided to fly off. The reason I hadn't seen it was because of its perfect camouflage as it blended with the dead leaves and grass. I couldn't understand why it let me get so close to it before it flew away. A sitting woodcock, or any other bird if it comes to that, will stay on the nest till the last second, but this one was not on a nest, and another thing it was not even nesting time. A visit, some time ago, to *Whitwell Wood*, with a *bird ringer*, and a photographer, who was going to photograph a sitting woodcock, was very interesting and just showed how birds brave danger when incubating.

The birds nest had been found a few weeks before this particular visit and had been marked for easy finding amongst the thick vegetation. Even when the nest was approached up to about six feet away, the camouflage of the bird was that good that the only thing that gave it away was a black glistening eye, then gradually you could begin to make out the shape of the bird.

The photographer moved in with his camera and took several shots, then moved in closer and actually touched the bird which didn't even move.

June 1984

Pied flycatchers are not a bird which you associate with our ponds, in fact, I had never seen one here until the 11th of May, when one appeared as I was watching and listening for our first sedge warbler which hadn't yet arrived.

To see this bird was a real pleasure and I forgot all about the sedge warbler as I focused my attention on this smart black and white visitor. It is a bird about the size of the sedge warbler but a little plumper. It cannot be mistaken for any other bird, so if anyone sees a small black and white bird flying about the ponds it will be, without doubt, a pied flycatcher.

Later on, during the late afternoon, I visited the same area but saw nothing of the bird, but while sitting on the bridge near Pebley copse, I heard my first sedge warbler. This brought my tally to 10 summer visitors, all in the ponds area. There are still more to come. Magpies are still about in large numbers which means there will be a lot less chance of survival of smaller birds as the magpie is one of the most destructive there is among the larger birds, and very often they are seen bouncing along the tops of the hedgerows in search of nests and then both eggs and young are taken.

July/August 1984

My first sighting of a cuckoo this year was on May 6th, but I had heard two or three before then. Since May 6th I have seen and heard quite a few. On one occasion I had a bonus of seeing two together as they flew overhead to settle in a tree near to where I was standing, and near enough for me to see clearly without binoculars. One of them started singing, then the other began making bubbling noises. This was the female. They flew off in the direction of Woodall.

At a glance the cuckoo can be mistaken for a sparrow hawk, but is recognised by its long tail and pointed wings.

It is no surprise to hear the cuckoo, but it is surprising to hear a tree pipit in a wood where you've never heard one before. Tree pipits are more common in tree clad open country where the male can plane down from a high vantage point to start its song flight. Clumber Park is the ideal habitat.

After a few days I visited the same local wood and made for the area where I had heard the tree pipit. This part of the wood is quite open with tall trees and the floor not too overgrown with bushes. Bluebells cover the area and there are large tussocks of grass, making an ideal nesting area.

I soon picked up the song of this bird. It was only a short version of its real song as it perched high in the branches of a tall beech, but it wasn't long before it appeared as it glided down singing its sweet musical song. Not only did I hear it but I was lucky enough to see it.

September/October 1984

Hayfields are a thing of the past around Harthill and the sight of loaded haycarts heading for the farmyard is just a memory. Not only have the

hayfields vanished but the wild flowers, insects and animals have also disappeared.

There is no better sight than an old fashioned flower strewn meadow and the smell of new mown hay is something in itself. In early July I passed through one of these hayfields which was in the process of being cut. Everything was there, the flowers insects and animals. I saw many birds which had come along for the rich picking of insects which the cutter had disturbed. Poppies, buttercups, ox eye daisies and numerous other flowers were there. Hare and rabbit hurried away. Butterflies and disturbed day sleeping moths appeared.

After about half an hour of watching I left the hayfield and wandered off across a large area of rough unspoiled countryside where I saw many more interesting things. The pretty small tortoiseshell butterfly was everywhere, and the common blue put in an appearance, as well as the small copper.

I didn't see one tree stump where a tree had been destroyed, I didn't see one piece of rubbish chucked in a hedge bottom, and after I left this interesting area I had the pleasure of a good rest on a well made seat which had been constructed to be as comfortable as possible for the traveller, and not at all like the stupidly constructed eye-sores which are dotted around Harthill.

November 1984

16 different summer visitors was my lot this year. Not as high a number as in most years. Birds come along and suit themselves as to where they go. The spotted flycatcher is a bird which I have seen year after year in the third pond copse, but this year no sight or sound of it. The pied flycatcher put in an appearance instead of the spotted one. in fact it was the first one I had ever seen.

The wheatear, a bird which I usually see in a certain area, decided to keep away, or it managed to elude my constant search of the area.

The grasshopper warbler, which for years has inhabited a certain patch of rough bushy land was not heard or seen. Next year may see the three return.

Once again the ponds have been lowered and scores of fish have perished. Whether it is to feed the Chesterfield Canal or lowered to allow work on the bank I don't know, but many fishermen are concerned about the damage to their sport.

December 1984

Redshank are regular visitors to our ponds and occasionally a small flock can be seen but over the past 6 or 7 weeks larger flocks have put in an appearance. This is no doubt due to the low water level over such a long period. Other waders have been but the redshank has outstayed the lot.

It is easily recognised with its reddish legs, white rump and white patch on back of wings which is seen in flight. Another bird which has enjoyed the muddy shallows is the meadow pipit. Quite a lot have been seen and most

likely they were on their way south. Many of these birds will stay with us throughout the winter.

The bank between the first and second ponds is being breached. This will bring the level of the two ponds into one. The weir between the ponds is being filled in. It was 1934 when this weir was built so after 50 years it will be no more. The breach in the bank is to be spanned by a bridge. I don't think this will spoil the beauty of the area or upset the wildlife in general, in fact, our waterfowl will be able to paddle through the gap from one pond to the other instead of having to fly over the bank.

January 1985

The bushes and trees have gone through their change of colour and now most of them are leafless, except for the evergreens. These evergreens provide cover for the birds during the cold winter nights, and at dusk on such nights birds, especially the small ones, can be seen making for the trees such as pines, larch etc., It is worth while a visit to a wood or copse during the winter where you can enjoy the eerie silence, and be in a world of your own. Just the occasional note can be heard, and if you are prepared to stand and wait you will most likely see a few of our small feathered friends. Members of the tit family and maybe a goldcrest or two are the most likely ones you will see. Not only are the birds nice to see but evergreen trees are nice to see as well when covered with a film of snow, then you have a blend of green and brown of the trees and the pure white of the snow. Other birds like the cover of a wood as do some animals and you might be lucky enough to see a fox, hare or rabbit. The tracks of these animals are easily recognised In the snow. A wood can become a very cold place in winter so if anyone decides to do a bit of bird spotting, then get wrapped up. The side of a wood which catches the pale winter sunshine can be interesting birdwise, and with a bit of patience you can very often see, like I did in early December, some of our most colourful birds. I saw chaffinch, bullfinch, goldfinch, jay and quite a few other species as they either flitted about the trees, or, like some of them, basked on branches getting the warmth of the winter sun.

February 1985

Manor Road is a good place for wild life as it is one of the few areas around Harthill which still has its hedgerows and trees. Another area is the land which stretches from Woodall Lane right down to Mr. Clarke's land. These two areas mentioned are full of wild life in summer and I spend quite a lot of time watching and waiting and always finish up feeling satisfied at what I've seen. Winter time is a different period altogether but if one is prepared to watch in the cold winter air then there is always the chance of being rewarded by something interesting. One day in early January on a cold, frosty afternoon. I had the pleasure of seeing three kestrels hovering at the same time, and not far from one another. They were hunting on the same length of hedgerow down Manor Road. Later on in the afternoon, at dusk, down the Beehive fields, I saw a tawny owl launch itself from an old tree. At the bottom of the field it turned right and began quartering the hedgerow down the dyke, then right again up

the long hedge towards Fred Drabble's bungalow. It disappeared over the farm buildings and maybe went back to its regular haunt among the many large trees which surround the church and old rectory.

March 1985

Half a dozen redshank flew in over the frozen first pond and settled near a flock of black headed gulls. On the ice which surrounded a small area of water, was another large flock of gulls and mallard. Coot, with their heavy lobed feet, plodded about the ice. Only a handful of birds swam on the small area of rough, icy water. A flock of golden plover flew quickly overhead, while scores of rooks made their way back to their roost.

There was nothing different it seemed on this cold, windy afternoon and after an hour or so waiting for something unusual to appear I was just about to leave the cover of the willow trees when a duck, smaller than the mallard, appeared out of the large flock. It was too far away to get a good look at it, but as it took to the air I recognised it straight away. It was a female goldeneye, Next to appear on the ice, to my surprise, was a jackdaw pecking away at something near a group of gulls. Jackdaws aren't very common around Harthill and to see this one, on the ice of all places was really something. Its grey head stood out in the pale afternoon sun. Next to appear was a party of common snipe about 20 in all. These settled on a swampy patch not far from where I stood and straight away started probing the soft earth with their long beaks. Not bad for a winter afternoon after all.

April 1985

March 9th and we seem to have got over the worst of the winter. Many early flowers were to be seen. Birds have been pairing for weeks and preparing nests. Woods will soon be carpeted with lush, new growth as the wood anemone and bluebell push out their green shoots in preparation for their lovely white and blue flowers. Lots of other things are happening as everything prepares for another spring.

The beautiful white snowdrop and the colourful crocus can be seen early on breaking the winter drabness as they bring the first real freshness to many gardens in the village. Every season has something to offer but spring is like a long lost friend turning up, and is welcomed by one and all. I am looking forward to my first walk through Norwood Wood, to see the many and varied trees and the profusion of spring flowers. It's as good a walk as any around Harthill and I would advise anyone to get ready and enjoy the walk through this lovely wood.

Our ponds are a hive of activity in spring, and anyone who takes a walk around them and keeps their eyes open can see the many bird species which water, trees and lush growth attract.

May 1985

Pintail ducks don't visit our ponds very often but on a day in March I had the pleasure of seeing three, two males and a female. The males were recognised straight away but the female which was among a group of mallard near the willow trees on the west of the first pond, wasn't recognised so easily, till it stood up and began moving towards the pond with the two males. The male pintail is a very smart duck in its brown, black and white plumage while the female is a drab grey-brown.

A pair of teal flew in and settled on the water near a pair of tufted duck. Nearby three pochard bobbed up and down on the choppy water. For a few minutes I watched in the hope that something else would appear, but nothing did, then something disturbed the water birds and the air was filled with duck, coot, gull and waterhen. The interesting part of this was that there were five species of duck over the first pond. I kept my eye on the pintails which circled the pond then flew north.

There was another surprise the next day when a pair of whooper swans flew in. They are the same size as our mute swan but the way the neck is held is different, the bill is different which has a yellow patch at the base. They are more timid than the mute and will move away at the first sign of danger.

June 1985

After the cold, bleak weather of April and early May things began to look something like normal for the time of the year, and many of our summer visitors had arrived. The pintail ducks which had been with us for a fortnight or so had disappeared but not before they had been joined one morning by a pair of colourful shelducks. These flew off and in flew our visitors.

Not long after the swallows and house martins, came the first surprise of seeing three little ringed plovers on the mud of the second pond, then a week or so later the graceful tern appeared. It was too far away to say whether it was an arctic or common tern, but whichever it was, it was a pleasant sight as it glided gracefully over the first pond. There is always something pleasing to see in the form of our visitors, but not so pleasing is the sight of coots building nests on dry land, because the first and second ponds have not yet fully recovered the water plants which these birds like to anchor their nests to. Every nest on these two ponds has been robbed. I even saw a carrion crow attempt to grab an egg out of one nest which had been left unattended while the pair of coots were feeding.

Maybe next year the ponds and surrounding areas will be back to normal then waterfowl will have a better chance of surviving the egg collectors.

July/August 1985

The courtship display of the snipe was a regular feature around our ponds years ago, but since the area has become a playground and as more and more people use the place for egg taking and shooting then I'm afraid this spectacular sight has long since disappeared. Snipe do visit the ponds in odd ones or in small flocks mostly during winter time.

Many are the times I have stood and watched as the snipe zig-zagged and climbed high in the air to dive at speed earthward making that humming sound which makes the display more interesting.

I often wondered when I should see this display again and on a day in mid June I was lucky enough to see and hear this bird, not on the ponds, but over a track of swampy land not far from Harthill.

It was early morning and I was surprised to see this particular snipe perched on a stone which was half submerged in water, and no more than ten yards from where I stood. Normally it would have flown away, so I thought it must have a nest nearby. It was then it took to the air and went into its display which lasted something like 30 or 40 seconds.

Maybe this will be seen again over our ponds but it will only be if people stick to the footpaths, and rules regarding egg taking and shooting.

September/October 1985

The number of birds about in late July tell us what another good year they have had. Water fowl have done better than expected. Mallard, tufted duck, coot and water hen have brought young off. Great crested grebe didn't do well at all although at one time there were several pairs displaying.

The area there between the third pond tail and the copse at Pebley Grove was alive with all kinds of birds on the sunny morning of July 21st Wrens, willow warblers, great tits, longtailed tits, blue tits and chaffinches were all there in the third pond copse, not in ones, but in families. Odd ones were tree creeper, blackbird and song thrush.

On the way to Pebley I saw families of the smart looking tree sparrow, swallow and swift glided over the waving barley and a kestrel hovered high above. Goldfinch searched for food on the tall reeds which grow by the side of the dyke. Reed bunting and the linnet appeared. Not a bad morning at all. On my way home I had time to notice the abundance of wild flowers which grace the area.

May 1988

The mild winter has been disappointing regarding winter visiting birds. Usually we get a few strange species on and around our ponds after severe storms. Birds such as the goldeneye duck, bewicks and whooper swans, jacksnipe, sanderling, just to name a few, have blown in at one time or another. Nevertheless, we have had plenty of our resident birds to see. Mallard, pochard, teal, pintail, and quite a lot of tufted duck have stayed with us throughout the winter, and on the 2 April, a pair of ruddy duck were spotted on the third pond.

So much for winter. On the 4th April, after two weeks of continual visits to the ponds, in-the hope of seeing our first summer arrivals, I was pleased to see a pair of sand martins. These are among the forerunners of our summer visitors, and are the smallest of our three swallows. I have known them arrive much earlier than this.

The very next day another early arrival put in an appearance. It was most likely a chiff-chaff. This bird is so much like the willow warbler that it's difficult to tell them apart, except for their songs. The chiff-chaff sings a two note song which is a high pitched "chiff-chaff". Whereas the willow warbler's song is a beautiful, fluent song which can be heard echoing all over the countryside where there are woods and well timbered places.

September 1988

For a few weeks now the ponds have gradually been emptying which means we shall be seeing waders arrive. Waders like muddy waterlines to feed on, and this is what we have got now. I have seen two different species of waders up to now, and with a bit of luck, in the coming weeks, there will be more as they begin to leave their breeding areas.

The two species which I saw were a redshank, which is a resident bird, and a common sandpiper which is a summer visitor.

With a bit of patience, regular visits to the ponds, and a decent pair of binoculars, and providing the ponds stay at a reasonable level, birds like the turnstone, dunlin, greenshank, sanderling, ringed plover, little ringed plover can be seen together with other species which have been seen throughout the year.

December 1988

November 11th was a nice fresh day and just right for a walk. So, in the bright sunlight, I set off and in 20 minutes I was entering Norwood wood at the Woodall end.

Many trees were leafless, and just a tangle of branches, but quite a lot still hung on to leaves which seemed to change colour as the sun caught them. A gentle breeze brushed the topmost branches, sending a cascade of leaves twisting and spiralling to earth. Blue tits took cover in a well leafed oak as I approached them.

I couldn't have picked a better day. I strolled along the well worn path enjoying every step. The dog, sniffing and foraging among the undergrowth, stopping only to look back to see if I was coming, then continuing to disturb the thick layer of dead leaves. A robin flew across my path and settled in a leafless bush. It puffed out its' feathers and looked like a ball of fluff. A pair of magpies, deep in the wood cackled, and I just caught a glimpse of their black and white plumage as they flew away.

Turning right I followed the ride uphill towards the end of Norwood tunnel. A colony of about 10 long tailed tits flitted among the branches of a beech tree. As I approached the edge of the wood a blackbird broke the silence with its' harsh chatter.

I walked the length of the now disused canal to Norwood, past the remains of West Kiveton pit, and couldn't help thinking of the men who'd worked there, many from Harthill. I stood and looked at the massive stone structure of the old locks, and thought what a busy place this must have been

when the canal was in use. The barge bypasses are still there. Coal, timber, grain etc will have passed through these locks to places where the railroads hadn't been reached. Now, as I stood there, I wished these structures of West Kiveton pit and the locks would remain forever. As a matter of interest, the length of the tunnel from the Norwood end to the Kiveton end is 2,850 yds. The canal was opened in 1776.

I was brought back to the present by the whining of the dog, who had had enough of me looking at the remains of a bygone era and wanted to be off to explore more hedgerows along the canal.

I ended up at the crossroads at Norwood. Visited a relative, and after some time talking about things relatives talk about, I set off for home.

By now the temperature had fallen and there was a frosty crispness in the air. I decided to walk back the same way I had come, so, returning to the canal I began to retrace my steps past the pit and locks, and into the now gloomy wood, as it was now dusk, and along the leaf covered ride. The only sound in the eerie silence of the wood was the rustle of leaves as Sally the dog and I ploughed our way through them, accompanied by the ever present musty smell of rotting vegetation.

Sometime later Sally and I emerged from the wood, leaving the trees, roosting birds, and the musty smell behind and headed home satisfied.

January 1989

Redshank have been dropping in at regular intervals over the past few weeks, and on one occasion at least 10 were spotted in the muddy waterline of the first pond. This wader can be easily identified as it mingles with other birds on muddy areas, and its piping song gives it away even if you, can't see it.

Other birds which have visited us recently are the goldeneye duck, the pintail duck and the shelduck. All nice to see, and add that bit more interest to the area.

Even on bleak, dull days like the 11th January there are plenty of colourful birds to see. As I walked along the west side of the first pond I noticed several blue tits in a large hawthorn bush, and in the adjoining tree a pair of great tits searched the branches for insects. The second pond area hadn't produced much in the way of colour except for one beautiful grey wagtail which was busy feeding on the water line.

As I climbed over the bank onto the third pond I was met by more blue tits which disappeared into a willow bush. A robin, which didn't seem bothered about my presence stood its ground until I was only feet away from it. Further along the pond side I saw a pair of bullfinches, then as I approached the third pond copse, a colourful chaffinch flew across my path.

Quite a colourful walk on a cold winters day.

March/April 1989

The Kiveton Park Station end of the Norwood tunnel at Pennyhome is, like the Norwood end, blocked off. No one would have thought the inside of this tunnel would ever be seen again, but in 1977 when the Kiveton Pit drift was being planned, bulldozers smashed through the roof of the tunnel on the colliery premises enabling the engineers to pump out millions of gallons of water to prevent it seeping through into the drift. A friend of mine at the pit who was on hand at the time, and saw some of the work being carried out, and who visited the tunnel after the pumping, told me how he was allowed to have a look into the tunnel. With a powerful miners lamp he could see brickwork which was in perfect order and the tunnel was dead straight as far as he could see. He also saw small recesses in the sides of the tunnel and in the roof, these he thought were where the bargees pushed and guided the barges along with poles. The holes in the roof were said to be used to push the barges along with men lying on their backs and pushing into these recesses with their feet.

The tunnel passes under the main road and underneath land known as Tommy Flocktons, emerging at Pennyhome. From there the canal is fed from Harthill Ponds, and winds its way through some very pleasant countryside full of wildlife, and signs of the past.

There are no locks at this end of the canal, but there is the narrow bridge spanning it at the Old Station., and it looks as though it will last for a long time yet with its large, well-fitting stonework. The length of the canal from the tunnel end to the Old Station is interesting with its built up tow-path on the south side, and the terraced waterfall on the north side where the water from our ponds cascades in a never ending deluge. I have seen Kingfishers many times along this length, either perched on a low overhanging branch, or skimming over the water, showing off its brilliant plumage.

The walk along the canal from the bridge towards Turnerwood always brings back memories of the days when mothers would collect their kids during the school holidays and set off on the long trek from Harthill to Lindrick for a picnic and a day out.

I remember well, although only a lad, how two or three of us would wander onto the golf links looking for golf balls, and maybe finish up paddling in the stone bottomed stream near to where the 4th green now is, or we would be bird nesting among the many gorse bushes-which lined the fair ways, but the thing which amused me most was seeing some of the golfers in plus fours, and wondering why they had to wear such funny attire, which to me, would have been more at home in a farm yard. Even now, if I see plus fours on TV or any where, my mind always conjures up a picture of the golfers at Lindrick.

Time always flies when you are enjoying yourself and it never seemed long before we were being called out of the trees and bushes. So, after an enjoyable day, we would set off home more scruffy than ever with stockings hung over boots, holes in jerseys bigger, tired and ready for bed, long before we were off the canal.

I decided to walk a length of the canal again on Thursday February 2nd 1989, a walk I have done many times since those early days.

The water in the canal wasn't at all clean and for a long way it kept a milky colour, turning to light brown. I strolled past the old Wire Works on the left, and the row of stone houses across the canal, then it was all woodland and fields except for the railway which luckily veers away from the canal and doesn't interfere with the situation too much.

By the time I reached the first bridge, the colour of the water had cleared a little and there were signs of life on the water as the first water vole appeared. A pair of water hens paddled away from me, the ripples fanning out in their wake on the mirror surface of the canal.

The air was filled with bird song on this crisp, frosty morning and before I reached the second bridge I had identified 9 different species.

I passed the place where quarrying had taken place when the canal was in use and the limestone faces are still there. I also passed a place called Darkies Box where Charlie Peace is said to have jumped a train while being escorted from Sheffield to Hull to stand trial for murder.

By the time Sally the dog and I reached the third bridge and passed over the wooden bridge over the weir where the canal overflows, we were quite sludged up as the warm sun had softened the frost hard path. We passed a cottage on the left and I remembered visiting it with my mother when I was a lad. Apparently my family were friends of the family who lived, there.

Following the winding canal passed the fourth bridge was the highlight of the walk as it was here where the canal dropped through a series of locks. After each lock there is a widening of the canal where the barges would wait their turn to pass through, either up or down. I spent quite some time in this area before moving off to where the wood had disappeared, leaving open countryside.

A flock of Fieldfare flew overhead. Magpie and Jay put in an appearance. More Water hens appeared on the now crystal clear water. Mallard took to the air as I surprised them.

Then, as a finale, the beautiful Turnerwood was approached. That place alone made the walk worthwhile. We set off back home. Sally, instead of being black and white was now black, white and brown.

The sun was warm and had, no doubt, been the reason for at least another five water voles basking in its warm rays. They soon plopped into the canal on my approach.

On reaching the second bridge I decided to rest. So with a warm sun on my back and Sally at my feet, I ate my sandwiches as I sat on the bridge. Then it was off again on the last leg home after 5½ hours of pleasure. 16 different bird species were identified.

May 1989

Sand martins are the smallest of our swallows and always the first to arrive. In mid-March they were here and in larger numbers than usual. I was very surprised to see at least a dozen skimming and gliding over the first pond instead of the five or six in previous springs and in some cases only one or two.

By 6th April they had disappeared, and no doubt had gone to nesting sites in old quarries, river banks and railway cuttings.

These birds are easily recognised in their brown and white plumage.

April the 8th and I saw a pair of swallows, and from a long way off, without binoculars, I could tell them as they flew across the first pond.

On the same day I heard my first Willow Warbler and realised summer was really on the way. The song of this bird is a beautiful, wistful series of notes and can be heard ringing through woods, copses or anywhere where there are trees and bushes.

On April 11th, in rain, I ventured out and heard three more of these birds and saw more swallows.

Any day from the 11th could be filled with the song of the Sedge Warbler as these birds seem to come in greater numbers than even the Willow Warbler.

June 1989

The survey of the ponds by the Sheffield Bird Study Group in 1973/4 was a great experience for me in more ways than one. Firstly I was pleased to have taken part, and secondly I was pleased to have made friends with all the members of the party which did the survey. They came from Sheffield, Dronfield, Hackenthorpe and of course one from Harthill. They made up a group of six, with a little help from the wives of two of the group.

They came from all walks of life. There were steelworkers, office workers, a mineworker, a lecturer from Sheffield Polytechnic and a steelworks administrator, all "brought together" by a common interest.

I lost touch with most of them, but the latter two still make occasional visits to see me, as they did a few weeks ago, in fact it was 5th May, and not a very bright day at all. It was overcast but warm, and I knew we were going to hear and see many birds.

It was about ten o'clock when we set off on that familiar walk we had done many times before.

There were the usual waterbirds which we stood and looked at as though we had never seen them before. We watched a kestrel hovering, watched coots fighting, saw great crested grebes diving. We saw scores of things we had seen before but they never fail to create interest. On entering the third pond copse, it was as though all the song birds had got together to greet us. It was a beautiful experience to hear Blackcap, Robin, Willow Warbler, Great Tit, Bluetit, Blackbird, Wren, Chaffinch, Dunnock - all at it throughout the copse. On reaching the bridge at Pebley Grove Farm, we sat and enjoyed the warmth and quiet atmosphere. While we were there we saw Peacock, Orange tip and small Tortoise-shell butterflies. What a pleasant time we had, not only by listening and watching birds and butterflies, but the trees and bushes were nearly all in their greenery, bluebells and marsh marigold shone out through the reeds and grasses. What could have been better. Reaching our house, we ate and drank then talked for about an hour. My friends, John and Derek left about three o'clock. They'll be back.