

STONECHAT *Saxicola rubicola*
Common passage/winter visitor and breeder

2003 - The annual increase continues with birds being seen in all months of the year. Records can come from almost any area of moorland or in-by-land but there appears to be a few core-regions. These include the Norwood Lane/Sandwith Moor area where up to four birds were regular, the Whetstone Gate/Bradup area, the Low Snowden/Askwith Moor area where at least two pairs bred, Harden Moor, Barden Moor where up to five birds were reported and the southern flank of Rombalds Moor including Hawksworth Moor, Weecher and Glovershaw.

Passage birds do turn up at most of the well watched migration sites from time to time including Denholme Clough, Thornton Moor Reservoir and Kex Gill. A pair was observed below Swinsty dam in October and a single was noted at Fewston Reservoir in January. Seven were found at Cold Edge Dams in September and October.

2004 - Reported from every month of the year, and now becoming a very widespread and frequent species. Regular wintering sites included Swinsty dam and Norwood Lane on the edge of Sandwith Moor.

A singing bird was noted on Catstone Moor, whilst breeding was proven on Barden Moor (two pairs), Denton Moor, Hawksworth Moor, Ilkley Moor, and Thornton Moor Reservoir, where it is probable a pair raised two broods.

The number of sites recording this species is increasing by the year, and any open ground can be attractive to passage birds. Most of the records tend to come from the moorlands and their peripheries.

2005 - This species has increased markedly in Yorkshire as a whole, and this is reflected in its fortunes within the Group area. In 2005, birds were recorded throughout the year, and from about 35 locations, nearly three times the number of 1997. In all, it is probable upwards of 130 adult birds were seen. Between two and five birds were recorded on a number of occasions, and there were locally high counts of nine at Cold Edge on 11th October, and ten at Soil Hill on 17th, clearly a period when birds were dispersing.

Given that pairs are seen throughout the year, it is not always easy to establish just how many birds are breeding, but the presence of juveniles confirmed success at many locations. This occurred at Trough Lane, Cold Edge Dams, Askwith Moor, Norwood Lane, Embsay Crag, Harden Moor, Barden Moor, Ovenden Moor, Sconce Lane (near Baildon) and Shipley Glen. In total, there were 14 pairs at these sites, and at least 40 young were raised, sometimes in two broods. Other pairs clearly on territory were seen around Burley Moor.

2006 - This is another species where comparison with the Group's first Report illustrates the considerable expansion which has taken place in 20 years. In 1987, there were just two records of 'this scarce Yorkshire bird'. In 2006, there were 230 records, probably nearly as many birds, and evidence that Stonechat is now a well-established local breeder.

Records came from 39 locations, the majority of them in the south, and a particularly large number from the well-watched areas bordering Baildon Moor, and the moors to the south of Oxenhope. The first six months of the year brought only 25% of the records, and most observations were of birds on territory and ones either dispersing after breeding or on active migration. It was noticeable that the second winter period produced nearly three times as many records as the first, indicating, perhaps, that birds move away quickly from their wintering areas prior to breeding.

Between two and seven birds were seen together or in the same vicinity on no less than 140 occasions, and there were particularly good counts at Draughton Heights, where what were clearly

migrating parties of 10 and 11 were seen on 8th and 25th August, at Glovershaw, which had 12 birds in the same period, and the fringes of Oxenhope Moor, which had between ten and 12 birds in early October. Making due allowance for resident and semi-resident birds seen on several occasions, the likelihood is that around 200 different birds were seen in the Group area over the course of the year.

Whilst breeding activity doesn't seem to have increased in proportion to these numbers, it is evident from the records that at least 13 pairs were successful, fledging a minimum of 30 young. Reports came from Soil Hill, Barden Moor, Noska Brow, Hawksworth Moor, and from what now appears to be the breeding stronghold, the fringes of Baildon Moor.

2007 - The exponential growth of Stonechat in the area continues. Reports have increased to nearly 300 and it is clear more birds were seen. Making any sort of accurate assessment for birds using sites as staging posts during migration is notoriously difficult, and well-nigh impossible. However, even if a conservative approach is taken, it is considered that an annual total of around 270 adult birds would not be an overstatement: comfortably a Group record.

Birds were well-distributed, but most of the birds clearly relocating were seen from about the middle of August at sites within three miles of Denholme, namely Soil Hill, Oxenhope Moor, Trough Lane, and Thornton Moor and Warley Moor Reservoirs. Further north, Baildon Moor, Draughton Heights and the moors near Timble were the main focal points. It was not unusual to have daily site totals of up to six birds during this period, and the year's highest was ten, clearly setting up territories on Barden Moor in late April.

This duly resulted in breeding success by three pairs in that area, and breeding also took place at the Rombald's Moor complex, Oxenhope Moor and its satellites, Baildon Moor, Soil Hill, Hazlewood Moor, Keighley Moor, Denton Moor and Thornton Moor Reservoir. At least 25 pairs bred, raising a minimum of 60 young.

The pair breeding at Thornton Moor were particularly noteworthy, as the male, at least, showed some characteristics of the Continental nominate species *S.r.rubicola*, the first to be seen in the recording area.

2008 - This species is well-established across the area as a breeding bird, and significant numbers are seen on migration. Breeding was reported from 17 locations, and it is probable at least 21 pairs raised a minimum of 50 young. Of several double-figure parties of migrants seen in autumn, the biggest was 15 at Penistone Hill on 26th September.

Birds seen at Soil Hill, Thornton Moor Reservoir and Glovershaw in spring were considered to show characteristics of the Continental race *S.r.rubicola*.

2009 - After a number of excellent years, 2009 was very disappointing. Only four definite breeding pairs were located, on Barden Moor and at Whetstone Gate, and though juveniles were seen elsewhere, the observers considered these to be on passage. In keeping with this, the numbers of migrants and wintering birds were correspondingly lower, with eight at Draughton Heights and Glovershaw the best aggregate.

2010 - The downward trend documented in 2009 was, unfortunately, maintained, though, from a smaller number of birds, breeding success seemed slightly better. On Barden Moor, three breeding pairs were seen, pairs raised young at Weecher Reservoir and on Black Moor, Denholme, and at or near Whetstone Gate perhaps the same pair raised two broods. Passage birds were largely limited to a few ones and twos.

2011 - Numbers certainly haven't recovered from the population crash of 2009, but appear to be showing a modest improvement. Including migrants, around 60 birds were seen (50% up on last year), but the highest site count of seven on Whetstone Gate in September was well ahead of the rest. Breeding numbers were similar to 2010. A total of seven pairs raised at least 17 young at Whetstone Gate, and on Ilkley, Baildon, Barden, Haworth and Beamsley Moors.

2012 - The modest improvement shown last year hasn't been maintained. No more than 30 adults were seen in all, with four on Barden Moor and at Whetstone Gate the highest site counts, and breeding numbers were back to four pairs. This was recorded from Keighley Moor, Harden Moor, Glovershaw and Whetstone Gate, and at least six juveniles were raised.

2013 - The drop in numbers which caused alarm in 2012, did not show any miraculous improvement. Once more there was a dearth of sightings of this once prominent bird. Only six pairs were identified during the breeding season, in marked contrast to 2007, when 25 pairs bred and 270 adult birds were counted. There were two pairs located on the Whetstone Allotment, another two were seen on Barden Moor, with the others at Marley and near Paul Clough. From this meagre cluster, eight juveniles were seen. During the autumn, singles and occasional doubles were reported from Hawksworth Moor, Keighley Reservoir, Pennythorn Hill and Sandwith Moor.

2014 - Most of the 80 records, covering each month of the year, concerned pairs, giving rise to the feeling that the bird's fortunes are beginning to improve, confirmed by several definite breeding reports. At Warley Moor Reservoir eight pairs were located in May, including three pairs attending nests, and juveniles were on the wing in June. A family party was located between Keighley Moor and Slippery Ford on 5th August. Breeding pairs were also reported at Trough Lane and at Bradup, Nab Water Lane and Sconce, where family parties were seen in September.

2015 - The improvement in this bird's fortunes, referred to in last year's Report, was maintained with records of at least nine breeding pairs. These were spread across the area, with two on Barden Moor, three on Rombald's Moor, one at Kex Gill, one at Baildon, one in the Washburn and the ninth on Keighley Moor. At all these sites breeding activity was reported and a total of 15 juveniles were seen. Birds lingered on until the end of the year, the largest count being four at Whetstone Gate on 25th November.

2016 - The status of the Stonechat has been similar through the years with an influx one year and a lull the year after but over the last three years the position has changed and sightings are remaining constant year to year, so that this species has now become a common upland sighting. An amazing total of 106 submissions have been collected reporting 43 pairs as well as many singles and a minimum count of 31 juveniles. Reports came in from every month of the year with just six reports in January and four in February after which sightings increased over the spring and summer then dropping off to five in November and back up to 10 in December.

This hardy little bird overwintered in the highest, bleakest parts of the recording area with a pair at Whetstone Gate in January along with a female at Warley Moor Reservoir, whilst two birds endured Soil Hill through December in unbelievable conditions.

2017 - After several false dawns, Stonechat now seems to be well-established in the area, mainly, though not exclusively, at moorland sites. At a conservative estimate, well over 100 birds were seen throughout the year, and there were significant counts of around 11 birds on several dates near Warley Moor Reservoir. Successful breeding clearly took place on Barden, Burley, Ilkley, Baildon and Keighley Moors, and at several Washburn sites.

2018 - With around 124 birds seen, the species appears to be maintaining its status as well-established. There were several counts of up to eight birds, and a maximum 12 on Hazlewood Moor in January. However, probable breeding appeared to be slightly down, with records from Kex Gill, and Ilkley, Keighley, Barden, and Beamsley Moors, the only ones where there was definite evidence.