

# DENHOLME / HARDEN BECK VALLEY

- *My Local Patch*

by Mark Doveston

To the south of Keighley and west of Bingley lies my local patch. It is a valley that follows the course of Denholme Beck through to Harden Beck and down to the River Aire at Beckfoot. Harden Moor and St. Ives are at the northernmost end, Denholme Clough and Doe Park at the southernmost.

What follows is a site-by-site description of habitat and bird-life; I have also included a sketch map of the valley (this is reproduced on page 5 of this *Lapwing*).

*St. Ives Estate* has within its grounds the most diverse habitat of all the areas in the valley. It comprises conifer, mixed and deciduous woodlands, a small lake, farmland and a bit of upland moor. All these habitats provide a good range of bird species. *St. Ives* has similar species to the *Strid*, though not as numerous.

<A> *Coppice Pond*: This is a small lake surrounded by trees with an island. Breeding wildfowl comprise only Mallard, Moorhen and Coot, while Grey Heron, Little Grebe, Goosander and Kingfisher just visit. The only waders I have seen there are Green and Common Sandpiper. *Coppice Pond* is a good place to watch displaying Sparrowhawk and Woodcock. During irruption years Crossbill can be seen flying overhead.

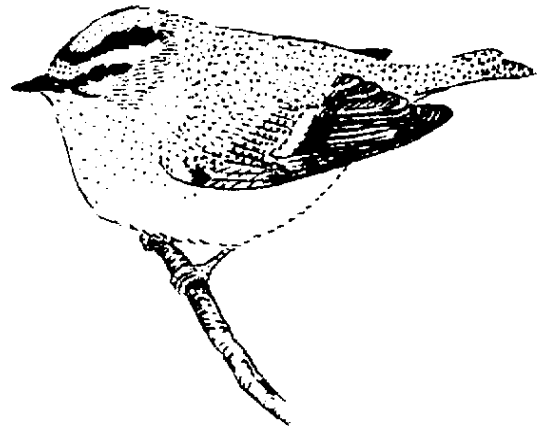
<B> *Coppice Bog*: This lies adjacent to *Coppice Pond*, and, being an upland acidic bog, is designated a SSSI. Surrounded by rhododendrons and scattered trees, it is one of the more reliable spots to see birds in *St. Ives*. It's especially good for Song Thrush, Jays, Warblers and autumn Chiffchaffs.

<C> *Lady Blantyre's Rock*: Surrounded by conifer plantations, this is probably the best area for Crossbill (and not just during irruption years). This area is also good for Redpoll and Siskin.

<D> *Heather Park*: This, as its name suggests, is an area covered in heather. On three sides it has trees, while to the west is the Keighley-Harden road and Harden Moor. My best sighting by far here was a pair of displaying Merlin one spring morning. Woodcock can be seen roding overhead, and Yellowhammer, Tree Pipit and Cuckoo occasionally set up territory there.

<E> *Racecourse Plantation*: This is mainly conifer woodland with a few patches of birch. This is the stronghold of the Redstart population, with up to five singing males each May. Wood Warbler and Tree Pipit also breed there. Near *Heather Park* is an area that attracts autumn migrants, sometimes including Pied Flycatcher.

On the eastern edge of *Racecourse Plantation* in April 1993 I saw a cracking Firecrest among the birches.



<F> *Cross Gates Wood*: This is an area of mature deciduous trees, with probably the best natural undergrowth in *St. Ives*. This is the most reliable site for Garden Warbler, and also a good one for Stock Dove.

<G> *A conifer plantation* on the eastern edge of *St. Ives*, this is another good place to see Crossbill, Redpoll and Siskin.

<H> *Low Park and Cuckoo's Nest*: These are mature, mainly oak woodlands, which are good for typical woodland species. In the early 90s, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was an irregular sight at this location, while Pied Flycatcher now breed there every year.

*Harden Moor* is heather moorland; it often disappoints though, largely due to the presence of 'Joe Public' walking his dog(s). However, it does attract passage migrants, including Wheatear, Whinchat and Redstart, as well as Stonechat (which can over-winter). Yellowhammer usually sings around the car-park vicinity, which is probably the last stronghold for this species within the area.

<I> The area known as *Deep Cliff*: This is wooded toward *Harden*, and has fields and farm buildings to the north, with heather to the east and west. The fields are where any migrant Chats etc. turn up; in the past, these have produced Black Redstart.

<J> *The Quarry*: Stonechat can be found between here and *Deep Cliff* during winter and migration periods. I recorded two pairs near the Quarry in Spring '98.

(Mark's article concludes overleaf.)

*Goit Stock*: This is a long, narrow, mainly birch woodland which follows the course of Harden Beck from Hewenden. At least two pairs of Dipper breed there, as well as Grey Wagtail. The woods are home to Jays and Sparrowhawks.

<K> In May this section of Goit Stock can be good for Wood Warbler.

<L> *The Waterfalls* have held breeding Dipper for as long as I've been birding, and occasionally also get Grey Wagtail.

<M> *Hallas Bridge*: This is a good little area for common woodland species, and often seems to be the only part of Goit Stock that has any birds! Tawny Owl and Spotted Flycatcher breed here. The last pair of breeding Tree Sparrows were seen using a nest-box here in the mid-80s.

<N> *Bents Lane and the Birchlands*: This is just open farmland, with an adjacent steep hillside which is known as the Birchlands; it includes an area of hawthorn trees which attract migrant Redstart, and in 1994 even a Black Redstart. Fields immediately to the north have spring and autumn Wheatear and Whinchat; also, one winter, a pair of White-fronted Geese were seen in with a flock of Canada Geese there. Last spring at least one Quail could be heard calling from suitable fields near Lower Bents Farm.

*The Norr*: This is the highest point around Wilsden, and gives good views of the surrounding farmland. It's another spot where Wheatear can be found on passage, though I don't know how reliable it is because as yet I haven't spent a lot of time here. The fields to the north get passing Lapwing, Curlew and Wheatear, and (again last spring) had calling Quail.

*Hewenden*: This is more than just a reservoir, it has woodland on its southern edge and fields on all others. Harden Beck starts at Hewenden Reservoir, and has trees on its banks that attract flocks of winter Siskin and Redpoll. The viaduct that overlooks the site is home to a colony of Jackdaw, and - in summer - Swifts. The reservoir itself is often devoid of birds, though Great-crested Grebes display there every spring. Waterfowl that occasionally visit include Whooper and Mute Swans (the latter being a rarity locally), Wigeon, Teal, Pochard and Goldeneye. In 1997 the water levels were kept low for maintenance work; the resulting exposed shoreline enabled waders such as Green Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper and Greenshank to visit that autumn. Also that year, two Common Terns dropped in. In recent years, Hewenden Reservoir seems to be attracting passing raptors, with Common Buzzard, Peregrine and Merlin all appearing - not to mention a pair of Ravens last spring!

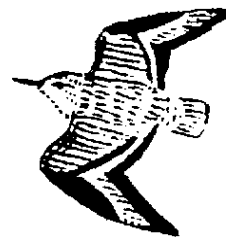
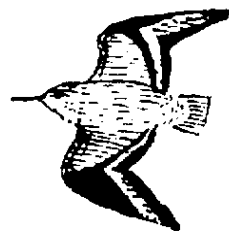
*Manywells Brow*: At the moment, there is a refuse tip here, which can be covered in those delightful birds (sea) Gulls. Iceland, Glaucous, Mediterranean and probable Yellow-legged Gulls and Kittiwake have all been seen since the tipping was started. If the gulls are not on the tip, they can be found in the adjacent fields behind the Five Flags Hotel, where flocks of Lapwing and Geese sometimes visit. Manywells Brow was also a good visible migration watchpoint in 1997; I recorded numerous flocks of hirundines and pipits alongside single Redstarts, Spotted Flycatchers and warblers.

*Doe Park*: This is a recent addition to my local patch, and looks to be my best bet for decent wildfowl. Although fishing and sailing do occur, they are not too much of a disturbance to the birds. On the southern edge is a small marshy area, which so far has produced singing Reed and Sedge Warblers, and appears also to be good for autumn warblers. Other passage birds have included Yellow Wagtail and Willow Tit.

<O> *Denholme Sewage Works*: This lies to the west of Doe Park, and is an interesting little spot. There are only three filter-

beds, but the whole Works area is surrounded by decent undergrowth of nettles, hawthorn, etc. There is also a small channel of bullrushes, which together with the aforementioned habitat attracts passerines. Warblers - including Sedge Warbler - have been seen using the filter-beds during autumn migration, as well as Pipits, Robins and Reed Bunting.

*Denholme Clough*: This runs southwest from Doe Park, and follows the course of Denholme Beck. It is a narrow-sided valley with scattered groups of various bushes and trees. I 'discovered' the Clough while doing work for the Breeding Bird Survey in the spring of '98, and quite fancied it as a potential migration watchpoint. Late August last year saw me down the Clough watching migrating hirundines and Tree Pipits. For about six weeks from early September through to mid-October, (young) Simon Johnson and myself recorded a decent bird sighting on every visit. Spotted Flycatcher and Redstart were present all through September, the latter staying into October. Other October sightings were a late Swallow (17<sup>th</sup>), Chiffchaff (10<sup>th</sup>), and early Brambling and Redwing



(10<sup>th</sup>). Then, in November, we had ten (count them!) Knot and a small flock of Pink-footed Geese. All these birds were seen during weekend visits, so what, I wonder, did we miss during the week?!? It was a little embarrassing at November's Group meeting having to monopolise the 'passerine' section of the log-call!

The next page comprises a sketch map of the valley (however, if any members are thinking of visiting the area, the Pathfinder map SE03/13 shows most of the footpaths). If you need any additional information, then please feel free to ring me (tel.: 01535-274525).

