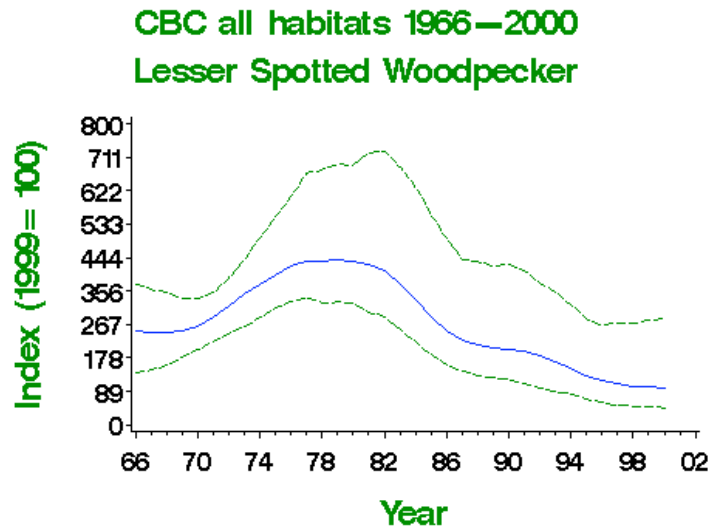


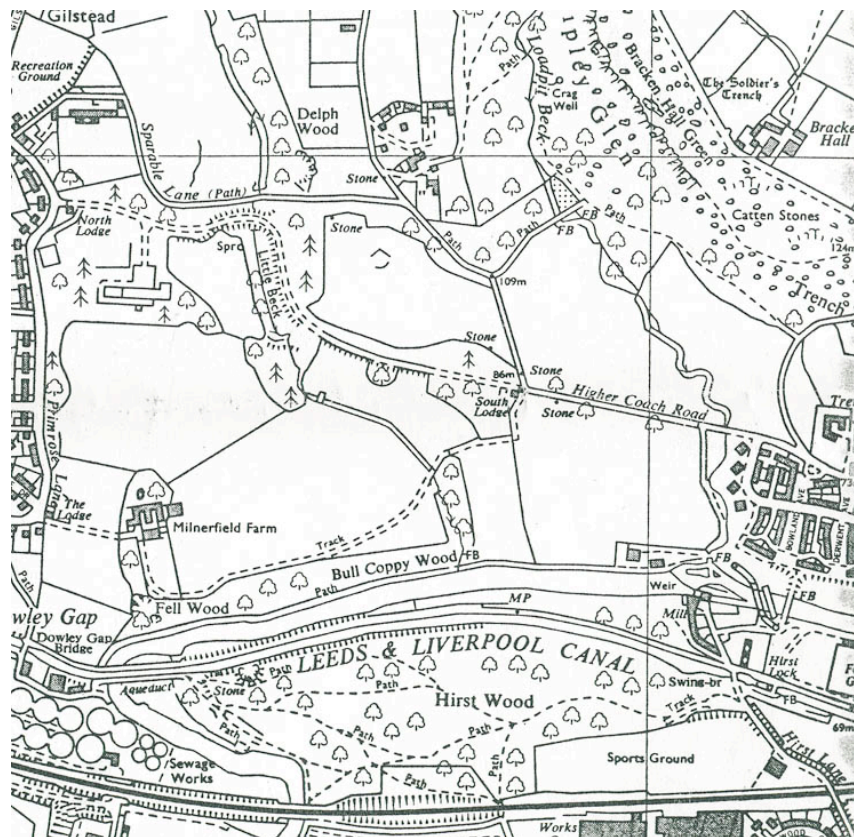
The Lesser Spotted Woodpecker by Paul King

The Lesser Spotted Woodpecker has declined significantly and very rapidly since around 1980, following a shallower increase, and had contracted markedly in range by 1988-91. It now qualifies for red listing, but has become so rare in recent years that BBS has been unable to collect enough data for annual monitoring. Reductions in the area of mature broadleaved woodland, losses of non-woodland trees such as elms, increases in woodland isolation and reductions in the volume of dead wood in woodland are candidate causes for the decline. These details have been researched on the BTO web-site.



For many people our smallest woodpecker is a bird of mystery. Many of them, living in big deciduous trees, seldom come lower than 10 metres and are often very difficult to see. The population is hard hit by cold winter weather but seems to recover fairly well. The spread of Dutch Elm disease with the consequent extra dead wood helped. However the effect did not last — possibly because the thinner dead wood was quickly removed from the trees by gales. The loss is more than 80%, very worrying as it does not coincide with cold winters. Recent trends almost all point to the species being in real trouble.

Where can you search for the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker? A very reliable area is that part of Baildon alongside the River Aire at Bull Cobby Wood (left). From the newly remade footpath you can listen for the faint tapping of a bird within the confines of this mature woodland. It could of course turn out to be a Great Tit, but there have been sightings here in the past and a record exists of three birds disputing territory. It's only a short flight to the Higher Coach Road where a male bird was seen in a Horse Chestnut tree on the 6th February 2006. A similar bird was seen there in 2005 and at about the same time a female bird was seen further up the hill, to the north, in trees alongside the Caravan Park.



Bradford Urban Wildlife carried out a Woodpecker Survey about ten years ago in which they reported that the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was nesting in the area around the Shipley Glen Caravan Park, there was also a nest found in Thackley Woods. I've also seen the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, on two separate occasions, in different years on the edge of Walker Wood, Baildon. This is woodland with the minimum of management, largely overgrown and with a good variety of deciduous trees. The 'Lesser Pecker' is certainly still about in the Shipley Glen area and willing to leave its woodland habit, as in January 2001, when a single bird visited my garden nut-holder on a dark, wet afternoon. I have a rather fuzzy photo!

If you can see red on the crown it is a male. Otherwise the plumage has rather more white on it than the other (bigger) spotted woodpeckers. This is a very sedentary bird although Northern populations are nomadic and some may even migrate. It's a softer and quicker drummer than the Great and the call is a distinctive 'pew, pew, pew ...' going on up to 15 or 20 times. The BTO state that there are about 2200 pairs at the very most.



2003 was a typical year with birds noted at nine different locations. These included sightings of birds at St Ives and Shibden Park (January); Esholt (March); Park Plantation, Swinsty and Sandwith Moor (April); Strid Woods (May); Denton Hall and Nell Bank (June) with finally Farnley (November). The Sandwith Moor record relates to a pair but all other records are of singles. In 2004 there were just thirteen records. Five of these related to one individual at Stockbridge during June and July. On one occasion it was seen to carry food towards the river. In January, singles were reported

from Elland Gravel Pits and St Ives, as well as a male drumming in a private wood, and the following month a bird was seen in Luddenden Dean. Otley Wetland held a female in October and a female was seen on two dates in December at Baildon Bank, during which month there was another record of a male in the same private area as the January sighting.

On February 11th 2006 Andy Jowett reported a pair of birds in an area near Lindley Trout Farm.

If you see a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, tell us, and also tell the BTO. You can register with the BTO and add your records to the national database. A link is provided from the BOG website. If you know of any other areas where this elusive bird is regularly seen, then please contact me (01274 580584) and we can build up a more detailed portfolio.