

## **A Nightingale Sang in Highbury Park: Chamberlain's Birds**

Even on the eve of World War 1 much of the area surrounding Highbury Hall was farmland. It was a landscape of tree-lined lanes, pasture, heath, hedgerows, open watercourses and flood meadows.

Yet in the forty years since the Chamberlains had established themselves in this part of Worcestershire, the population had increased ten fold from four thousand to forty thousand.

The impact of industrialization, an expanding urban population and the demands they made on agriculture caused a fracturing of the natural environment and the wildlife contained within.

Nightingales, cuckoos and skylarks were still occurring annually in the early years of the twentieth century but like a lot of creatures, their numbers were already declining.

### **The Lost Birds of Highbury**

The species listed were all documented either at, or within, a two-mile radius of Highbury Park, between the years 1870 and 1940. The information is based on archive records submitted by several contemporary sources, including Neville Chamberlain, 'a passionate ornithologist'

|                    |                  |                  |
|--------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Grey Partridge     | Little Owl       | Spotted          |
| Water Rail         | Long Eared Owl   | Flycatcher       |
| Corncrake          | Nightjar         | Pied Flycatcher  |
| Lapwing            | Wryneck          | Marsh/Willow Tit |
| Snipe              | Skylark          | Red-backed       |
| Woodcock           | Tree Pipit       | Shrike           |
| Common Sandpiper   | Meadow Pipit     | House Sparrow    |
| Grey Phalarope     | Yellow Wagtail   | Tree Sparrow     |
| (One record only – | Nightingale      | Linnet           |
| 1902)              | Redstart         | Hawfinch         |
| Turtle Dove        | Stonechat        | Yellowhammer     |
| Cuckoo             | Dartford Warbler | Reed Bunting     |
| Barn Owl           | Wood Warbler     | Corn Bunting     |

### **Fact 1**

In the century and a half since the Chamberlain family established the Highbury Estate, more than eighty species of bird have been recorded; since the millennium, nearly seventy. Forty have bred or attempted to breed.

### **Fact 2**

Red squirrels, not the American grey, would have been common sights. Ditto brown hare, water vole, polecat and hedgehog. All are now absent

### **Fact 3**

A number of bird and mammal species unfamiliar in Chamberlain's time now thrive within the grounds of Highbury Park.

## **Birds Present 2016**

### **Unknown to Chamberlain**

|                             |                   |              |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| Canada Goose                | Collared Dove     | Marsh Tit    |
| Common Buzzard              | Ring Necked       | Willow Tit   |
| Peregrine Falcon            | Parakeet          | Raven        |
| Lesser Black Backed<br>Gull | Black Headed Gull | Herring Gull |

### **Known to Chamberlain**

|                  |                   |              |
|------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| Grey Heron       | House Martin      | Great Tit    |
| Mallard          | Grey Wagtail      | Nuthatch     |
| Sparrowhawk      | Pied Wagtail      | Tree Creeper |
| Kestrel          | Wren              | Jay          |
| Moorhen          | Dunnock           | Magpie       |
| Coot             | Robin             | Jackdaw      |
| Stock Dove       | Blackbird         | Carrion Crow |
| Wood Pigeon      | Fieldfare         | Rook         |
| Tawny Owl        | Song Thrush       | Starling     |
| Swift            | Mistle Thrush     | Brambling    |
| Kingfisher       | Garden Warbler    | Chaffinch    |
| Green Woodpecker | Blackcap          | Greenfinch   |
| Greater Spotted  | Chiffchaff        | Goldfinch    |
| Woodpecker       | Willow Warbler    | Siskin       |
| Lesser Spotted   | Goldcrest         | Redpoll      |
| Woodpecker       | Long Tailed Tit   | Bullfinch    |
| Swallow          | Coal Tit/Blue Tit | Woodcock     |

**Paul Anthony. August 2016.**