

NEW MILTON TOWN COUNCIL
AND
FRIENDS of BALLARD WATER MEADOW

BALLARD MEADOW AND WOODLAND SITE OF IMPORTANCE FOR NATURE CONSERVATION

COMMON BIRD CENSUS
2024

1. INTRODUCTION

The Common Bird Census (CBC) is a method of assessing the number and variety of birds present on Ballard Meadow and Woodland, which are dependent upon the site for the most important part of their life-cycle – breeding.

The habitats present on site and the methods used in the Common Bird Census are the same as previous years, and are described fully in the reports for those years.

All management work undertaken on the site which may temporarily impact wildlife in the short-term with the view to bring benefits long-term follows the Management Plan (2020-2024) and is recorded in the Event Records for the site.

2. SURVEY STATISTICS

Nine visits were made in 2024 and the statistics are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Date	Time	Weather		Note
		Temp (°C)	Wind	
7 Mar	06.45-07.50	4	3 - E	Overcast
18 Mar	06.30-07.40	9	1 - W	Sun
30 Mar	06.30-07.40	7	0	Sun
8 Apr	06.40-07.40	10	3 - SE	Partial cloud
19 Apr	08.30-09.30	11	3-4 - NW	Overcast
29 Apr	06.30-07.35	10	3-4 - SW	Thin cloud
12 May	06.20-07.40	15	4 - NE	Overcast
20 May	06.30-07.40	11	2 - E	Sun
4 Jun	06.30-07.30	13	2 - NW	Overcast

3. RESULTS

3.1 BREEDING SPECIES PRESENT AND TERRITORIES

By taking the records for an individual species from the weekly visit maps and transferring them to a single species sheet, this begins to build-up a picture of where each species has at least a probable territory and, at best, a likely nesting/breeding site. For a census to work properly (and be repeated in the same manner by others if necessary) walking at a steady pace around a selected route is required. Rarely therefore, are nests found unless obvious (eg Carrion Crow). Trying to find individual nests would involve too much searching and significant disturbance.

Table 2 shows the number of estimated territories in 2024 and for comparison, those in 2022 and 2023.

Table 2

Note: The sequence and scientific names in this list follow more recently adopted and accepted convention of listing birds (British Ornithologists' Union 2021). Numbers in parentheses are maxima.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Territories 2022	Territories 2023	Territories 2024
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	5 (6)	4	4
Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	18 (19)	13 (14)	13
Great Spotted Woodpecker*	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	2 (3)	3	3
Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	1 (2)		
Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	1 (2)		2
Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	2 (3)	1 (2)	3
Carrion Crow*	<i>Corvus corone</i>	3	4	1 (2)
Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>			1
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	4 (5)	1	
Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	14 (15)	13	13
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	6 (7)	11	9
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalus caudatus</i>	2	3	1 (2)
Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus colibita</i>	4 (5)	5	4 (5)
Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	5	3	4
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	3	5	1 (2)
Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	15	16	18
Nuthatch*	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	4 (5)	9 (10)	6
Treecreeper*	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>			1
Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	2 (3)		1
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	2 (3)	2	1 (2)
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	15 (17)	9 (10)	13
Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	15 (17)	9 (10)	13
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	1	3	1
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	10	6	8
Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	5 (6)	3	4 (5)
Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	3		
Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	4 (5)	6(7)	1 (2)

* - denotes nest (seen, bird at nest, entering nest site or young calling in nest)

3.2 NON-BREEDING BIRDS PRESENT ON ONE OR MORE OCCASIONS

Casual sightings, regarded as non-breeding on the site, are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Common Name	Scientific Name	Notes
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	One pair max on 2 occasions at stream
Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>	Feeding, but breeding off-site to the east
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	Feeding, but breeding off-site to the north
Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	Feeding, but breeding off site

4. COMMENTS

As in previous years, the results of the Census should be taken as a guide; an approximation of the number of territories. This is the fifth census to determine the breeding bird assemblage on the site.

There is now sufficient data to determine the number of species as regularly holding territories. By comparing these results with those from the previous years, the tables clearly show that around 25-30 species have territories in each year with 5 species (Wood Pigeon, Blue Tit, Wren, Blackbird and Robin) having ten or more territories in 2024.

Numbers of territories will vary each year to a greater or lesser degree. Species will also come and go. Many factors are at play, not least weather conditions, availability of nest sites, increased disturbance etc. 2020 and 2021 saw increased visitor pressure as people stayed local as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic. This foot-fall remained high throughout 2023 and 2024. In addition, management work, particularly coppicing, will, for a short time, cause birds to vacate an area until the vegetation re-establishes. Each worked compartment will soon close-in and be undisturbed (hopefully) for up to 10 years until re-coppiced. In addition, maintaining open areas in the woodland long-term (the glades) will increase the proportion of non-woody vegetation, flowering plants, invertebrates and therefore a greater amount of available food for birds.

A significant amount of site-edge management took place in early 2023, particularly along the eastern margin. It is now hoped to leave this strip of vegetation, between the stream and the new fencing, as non-intervention (no management work except perhaps for some small-scale shrub planting). The hazel along this strip has been coppiced and is now being left to re-grow.

The cattle were re-introduced in October (2 cows) and an additional 2 in November 2023. The cattle were not removed until late-April 2024 and were causing the wet ground to become seriously "poached". The animals were hungry and spent a lot of the early spring tracing the fence-line to the east of the site causing significant trampling to the proposed non-intervention area. They also broke-out, finding a route through a gateway onto the surrounding roads. It is possible that the delay in removing the animals, may have, once again, caused a lowering of successful breeding birds along the eastern scrubby margin of the site.

Of particular note for 2024 was the establishment of a pair of Ravens and the return of pairs of Treecreepers and Starlings. However, there were no Jay, Coal Tit or Greenfinch recorded having territories on the site. The latter species is seeing a massive decline in breeding success nationwide. Tawny Owls are present in the woodland, their calls are evident, but they have not taken up residence again in the artificial box provided.

Thankfully, there continues to be established territories of birds which are on the list of Birds of Conservation Concern (species having suffered massive declines nationally as a breeding species in the last 25-30 years). These are Stock Dove, Song Thrush, House Sparrow – the latter two in the "Red" category (most highly vulnerable) of the above list.

The route of the CBC 2024 is the same as that shown in the 2020 report.

Bob Lord
Chairman
Friends of Ballard Water Meadow

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www.friendsofballardwatermeadow.co.uk