

NEW MILTON TOWN COUNCIL  
AND  
FRIENDS of BALLARD WATER MEADOW

BALLARD MEADOW AND WOODLAND SITE OF IMPORTANCE FOR NATURE CONSERVATION

COMMON BIRD CENSUS  
2023

## 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) and is recorded in the Event Records for the site.

## 2. SURVEY STATISTICS

Table 1

Date	Time	Weather		Note
		Temp (°C)	Wind	
27 Mar	07:00-08:00	5	0	Overcast
5 Apr	06:40-07:50	5	0	Partly cloudy
16 Apr	06:30-07:45	8	0	Overcast
24 Apr	06:20-07:40	5	0	Clear sky
4 May	06:25-07:40	10	3 - E	Light cloud cover
15 May	06:20-07:15	9	3 - NW	Light rain
29 May	06:30-07:30	10	4 - E	Clear sky

## 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 nest site. For a census to work properly (and be repeated in the same manner by others if necessary) 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.

Fewer visits were made in 2023, simply as a result of time constraints on the surveyor.

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

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

\* - 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 and are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Common Name	Scientific Name	Notes
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Two pairs max on 2 occasions
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Flying over 4 May
Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>	Single birds on 2 occasions
Treecreeper	<i>Certhis familiaris</i>	Single bird 27 Mar
Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Single bird 27 Mar

#### 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 fourth census to determine the breeding bird assemblage on the site, and even with such scant data it is possible, at this relatively early stage, to suggest a number of species as "regular". By comparing these results with those from the previous census', the tables clearly show that around 20-25 species have territories in each year with 4 species (Wood Pigeon, Blue Tit, Great Tit and Wren) having ten or more possible territories in 2023.

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. 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 late 2022 and early 2023. The cattle re-introduced in November broke through the eastern fence-line and had to be removed from the site. The Town Council called-in contractors to replace the fence and in doing so, they cleared a significant amount of the low, dense scrub all along the eastern margin of the site. Unbeknown to the Town Council, Ballard School were planning the installation of a high, deer-proof fence. This took place in March, April and May 2023, creating massive day-time disturbance and with their contractors clearing further amounts of marginal scrub and tall vegetation.

This work has had an impact on the breeding bird assemblage along the eastern side of the site with fewer species and territories recorded along this margin than hitherto. Jay, Magpie, Starling and Greenfinch have not been recorded in 2023.

Of particular note for 2023 was the success of Tawny Owls. A pair bred in the donated owl-box fitted in 2021 and four young were reared. Sadly, two succumbed (reasons unknown) and two survived to fledging. They were well-watched and photographed.

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 2023 is the same as that shown in the 2020 report.

Bob Lord  
Chairman  
Friends of Ballard Water Meadow

July 2023

[www.friendsofballardwatermeadow.co.uk](http://www.friendsofballardwatermeadow.co.uk)