

NEW MILTON TOWN COUNCIL

BARTON COMMON 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 Barton Common within the area bounded by the stockproof fencing, which are dependent upon the site for the most important part of their life-cycle – breeding.

All management work undertaken on the site which may temporarily impact wildlife in the short-term follows the Management Plan (2022). All management work is designed to encourage habitat restoration and wildlife recovery over time. For a site description see the 2022 report.

2. METHODS

The survey methods are as described in the 2022 report.

The Management Plan proposes a few changes and a more structured approach to management in the best interests for wildlife over a 10-year period. Any intervention for nature conservation has an impact on the flora and fauna, but is hopefully short-term, working towards a better outcome for wildlife. By constantly monitoring over time, these changes become apparent, but most importantly they are recorded.

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 (see Route Plan below). Rarely, therefore, are nests found unless obvious (eg Carrion Crow). Trying to find individual nests would involve too much searching and significant disturbance.

3. SURVEY STATISTICS

Only six visits were made in 2023, purely as a result of time constraints on the observer. On each visit the time and conditions are noted and these are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Date	Time	Weather		Notes
		Temp (°C)	Wind	
8 Apr	06:30-07:45	4	0	Mist
18 Apr	06:30-07:50	6	NE (2-3)	Clear sky
25 Apr	06:25-07:50	4	NW (0-1)	Cloudy
5 May	06:30-07:50	12	W (3-4)	Light rain
22 May	06:00-07:20	11	NE (2)	Cloudy
2 Jun	06:15-07:50	11	NE (4)	Clear sky

4. RESULTS

4.1 BREEDING SPECIES PRESENT AND TERRITORIES

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

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
Woodpigeon*	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	7 (8)	6
Great Spotted Woodpecker*	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	1 (2)	1 (2)
Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	1	1
Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	3	3 (4)
Carrion Crow*	<i>Corvus corone</i>	4	4
Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	5	7 (8)
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	4 (6)	3 (4)
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalus caudatus</i>	1	2
Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collibita</i>	4	5
Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	4 (5)	3
Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>	1 (2)	1 (2)
Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	12 (13)	12
Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	1	
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	6 (7)	8 (9)
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	2 (3)	1
Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	12	12
Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	2 (3)	
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	1 (2)	1
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	7 (8)	7
Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	5 (6)	5
Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	1	
Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	3 (4)	3
Linnet	<i>Linnaria cannabina</i>	2	
Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	5 (6)	1 (2)

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

4.2 NON-BREEDING BIRDS PRESENT DURING THE CENSUS PERIOD

Birds that are seen only once or twice during the census visits, or are seen and/or heard singing/calling but established territories are not secured (eg migrants arriving and then moving-on) or found, are regarded as casual sightings. These are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Common Name	Scientific Name	Notes
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	A pair on 8 Apr
Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	Flying over/hunting
Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>	One male in full song 25 Apr
Grasshopper Warbler	<i>Locustella naevia</i>	Singing male 25 Apr
Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	One male calling 18 Apr
Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	Male calling 2 Jun
Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Family parties feeding 22 May

5. COMMENTS

The results of the Census should be taken as a guide; an approximation of the number of territories. This is the second investigation to determine the breeding bird assemblage on the site, and with such scant data it is not possible, at this relatively early stage, to suggest any trends. By comparing these results with those from future census' will the full consistent breeding assemblage be determined. As in 2022, the bird with the most territories is Wren.

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, any increased disturbance and the location of areas subjected to habitat management during the previous autumn and winter. 2020 and 2021 saw increased visitor pressure as people stayed local as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic. This has continued throughout the 2023 survey period. Consequently, for many years no ground-nesting birds have been recorded holding territory on Barton Common. However, in June 2023, after the census period ended, Nightjar were recorded, with at least one male making the characteristic "churring" call. If this becomes a regular occurrence then some changes in visitor management may be required. These birds' nest on the ground, they are well camouflaged and very vulnerable to disturbance, particularly dogs off leads.

Habitat management work, particularly scrub clearance and coppicing, will, for a short time, cause birds to vacate an area until the vegetation re-establishes. Where scrub is cleared, the objective is for the area to return to open dry grassland, heathland or flush-mire and is dependent on livestock grazing pressure. Also for example, each worked coppice compartment will soon close-in and be undisturbed (hopefully) for up to 10 years until re-coppiced. Maintaining open areas in the grassland margins and scrub by management on rotation, will increase the proportion of non-woody vegetation, flowering plants attracting more invertebrates and therefore a greater amount of available food for birds. Work normally takes place during the period September to March, however where little or no impact to wildlife is assumed, some work takes place in the summer months (removal of non-native species, for example).

As a site close to the coast, it is inevitable that on occasions, there will be times in spring when migrant birds alight and use the site as a staging post on their journey north. For example, on one occasion, a single Grasshopper Warbler was heard calling early morning on 25 April. Most will move-on elsewhere to breed.

The results of the census in 2023 show that neither Stonechat, Nuthatch, Linnet nor Bullfinch held territories. Stonechat and Linnet were not seen at all. It is hoped that this is not a long-term trend.

It is though encouraging that there are established territories of birds which are on the list of Birds of Conservation Concern (those species having suffered massive declines nationally as a breeding species in the last 25-30 years). Song Thrush and Greenfinch, both on the Red List are particularly vulnerable.

Bob Lord
New Milton Town Council
Volunteer Ranger Barton Common

July 2023

Barton Common CBC - Plan of route

