

NEW MILTON TOWN COUNCIL

BARTON COMMON SITE OF IMPORTANCE FOR NATURE CONSERVATION

COMMON BIRD CENSUS 2022

1. INTRODUCTION

Barton Common lies centrally to the south of the Parish of New Milton, a few hundred metres to the north of the constantly eroding cliff edge. The section of the Common enclosed by fencing, comprises approximately 12ha of heath/dry grassland, secondary woodland, isolated and small clumps of trees, and stands (or brakes) of gorse, bramble and bracken. It is the larger part of a once more extensive, contiguous area of common land and having exchanged ownership several times, is now part of New Milton Town Council's (NMTC) landholding.

Barton Common is bisected by a stream flowing roughly north-east to south-west which dries-up in late summer most years. This rises on land to the north, partly fed by a spring, or springs, within Barton Common North, and has created a shallow valley in which the ground lies wet for most of the year. A much smaller stream rises in the woodland in the north-east corner of the site and at times of high rainfall and in most winters, this is active and flows into the main stream bisecting the site. There are a few places along the valley sides where groundwater emerges and seeps through the surface vegetation.

The water course through Barton Common is a tributary of a constantly flowing, larger stream which runs north-west to south-east to the sea through a deep incision in the soft cliff to the south of the site, known as Bec(k)ton Bunny.

There is a small gravel-surfaced car park to the west and an informal lay-by adjacent to Milford Road to the north-east. The site is fenced and nine pedestrian and two vehicular access gates provide access onto the site. The common is crossed by three public footpaths and numerous informal paths have developed over time, which gives the public free and open access to all parts of the site.

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 or benefit wildlife in the long-term follows the draft Management Plan (2022).

2. METHODS

A series of 10 visits about 10 days apart, are made during the main period of activity (March-June), when birds are establishing and, later, defending territories. A great many of our more common bird species, usually the male, establish territories by song; or by a combination of both song, call and a "display" in the presence of a female or rival. Each visit records the location of the bird on a map. Each record is coded to indicate a bird either in song or calling, singing against a rival, its movement from one place to another, carrying nesting material or food, or merely its presence. The presence of a singing bird in roughly the same place each visit does not necessarily mean it is breeding. Records of a female in the territory, birds carrying food or nesting material are necessary to be reasonably certain of

breeding taking place. All birds present on, and flying-over, the site have been recorded as casual records during the visits. The compiling of a full species list is ongoing.

As mentioned above, there are four main habitats present at this site. The heath/dry grassland with some smaller gorse stands provides opportunity for ground-nesting birds, but on such a heavily-used public open space, where people and dog disturbance is high, none are known to breed. It is therefore the woodland and particularly the undisturbed scrub margins where birds find some quiet refuge.

The draft Management Plan proposes a few changes and a more structured approach to management in the best interests for wildlife. Any intervention for nature conservation also 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.

Like a number of wildlife transects, walking at a steady pace, being careful not to linger for too long in one place, is best. Firstly, and most important, this does not cause undue stress on birds if they're nesting close to the transect route and secondly, it is easily repeatable and consistent. Like all surveys, one year's results, whilst important as a start, will not provide a whole picture. Only repeat surveys over a number of years will give a more accurate measure of the site's birds and its importance to them long-term.

3. SURVEY STATISTICS

On each visit the time and conditions are noted and these are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Date	Time	Weather		Note
		Temp (°C)	Wind	
8 Mar	06:30-07:45	4	SE (3-4)	Clear sky
21 Mar	06:30-07:40	4	E (2)	Partly cloudy
31 Mar	06:45-08:00	2	N (3-4)	Frost. Cloudy
13 Apr	06:45-08:10	10	Still	Cloud cover
21 Apr	06:30-08:00	8	NE (3)	Thin cloud
2 May	07:00-08:20	9	Still	Cloud cover
12 May	06:35-08:00	10	SW (0-1)	Clear sky
23 May	06:30-08:00	12	W (2)	Partly cloudy
2 Jun	06:30-08:00	10	Still	Cloudy
11 Jun	06:30-08:00	15	W (4-5)	Thin cloud

4. RESULTS

4.1 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 (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.

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

* - 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 do not establish territories (eg migrants arriving and then moving-on) are regarded as casual sightings. These are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Common Name	Scientific Name	Notes
Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	One sighting, late March
Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	Two sightings, flying over/hunting
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	One bird feeding, once
Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	A pair on one occasion. Male seen hunting, once
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	Influx of three birds calling, once
Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	One bird calling, once
Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Single bird, once. Family party, once

5. COMMENTS

The results of the Census should be taken as a guide; an approximation of the number of territories. This is the first recent investigation 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 may be "regular". By comparing these results with those with future census', will the full consistent breeding assemblage be determined. It is assumed that around 25 species will have territories in each year but only one species (Wren) has more than 10 or more possible territories to date.

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 etc. 2020 and 2021 saw increased visitor pressure as people stayed local as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic. As a consequence, and has been the case for many years it would appear, no ground-nesting birds held territory on Barton Common. In addition, management work, particularly scrub clearance and coppicing, will, for a short time, cause birds to vacate an area until the vegetation re-establishes. Each worked coppice compartment will soon close-in and be undisturbed (hopefully) for up to 10 years until re-coppiced. In addition, maintaining open areas in the grassland margins and scrub and managed on rotation, will increase the proportion of non-woody vegetation, flowering plants and invertebrates and therefore a greater amount of available food for birds.

It is known from a few recorded casual surveys in the past that species such as Yellowhammer were once breeding on Barton Common, perhaps Dartford Warbler too, although the latter species is present in most winters.

As a site close to the coast, it is inevitable that on occasions, there will be times in spring when a number of migrant birds alight and use the site as a staging post on their journey north. On one occasion (not a census day), eight Willow Warblers were heard calling early morning in April.

It is 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). These are Song Thrush and Greenfinch, are both on the Red List and particularly vulnerable.

The route of the CBC 2022 is shown on the attached plan.

Bob Lord
New Milton Town Council
Volunteer Ranger Barton Common

July 2022

Barton Common CBC – Plan of route

