

Tree Sparrow in winter by Sarah Kelman/BTO

## **GUIDANCE FOR VOLUNTEERS - v2.0**

# **BBS Online**

For Winter Bird Survey volunteers



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## **BBS ONLINE**

### **WELCOME**

The Winter Bird Survey (hereafter WINBS) uses BBS squares and methods to count birds in the UK during the autumn and winter. WINBS volunteers will make use of the web-based online application – BBS Online – to enter their counts. This guide shows you how to do that.

### FIRST STEPS

In order to take part in the Winter Bird Survey (WINBS), you will need to be able to identify the birds you are likely to encounter on a given square during the autumn and winter – given sufficient views and/or vocalisations – by both *sight and sound*.

If you are an existing BBS volunteer, you will have had a chance to book your square for WINBS via your BBS

Online preference setting tool, housed in 'My Details & Settings'. For BBS volunteers looking to take on squares other than their own, or for volunteers who don't take part in BBS, you should contact your BTO Regional Organiser (RO) to find a suitable survey site from the pool of randomly selected sample of sites. The simplest way to do this is to visit the 'request a square' map, where you can highlight the area you are interested in – your request will end up in the hands of a BBS RO.



app.bto.org/bbs/public/request-square.jsp?s=WINBS

### SURVEY SITE ALLOCATED

Once you are allocated a square, it is time to login to BBS Online using your BTO username and password. This is the same login details for all surveys where the data is entered via the BTO data entry systems e.g. BBS, WBBS, BirdTrack, WeBS, GBW etc.

Go to the BBS Online login page at app.bto.org/bbs, via the survey homepages (see links above) or 'My BTO'.

Don't have a BTO username? Register for a free account - <a href="https://www.bto.org/user/register">https://www.bto.org/user/register</a>.

## Lets get started...

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## LOGIN TO BBS ONLINE / SET UP

### **LOGIN**

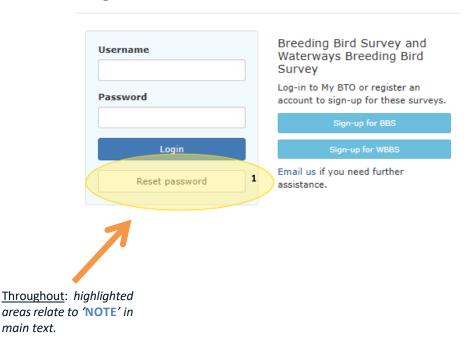
Sign in using your BTO login details, app.bto.org/bbs

**NOTE 1**: option to Reset Password which will send a reset email to the email address associated with your username. Follow the instructions in the email to reset password. If you are not receiving your reset-password email, then please check the following:

- That it hasn't been filtered into a 'spam' folder by your email provider.
- That the email that you are using is the same as the one you have registered with BTO. If the two differ, please ensure the two are the same.



### **Login to BBS Online**

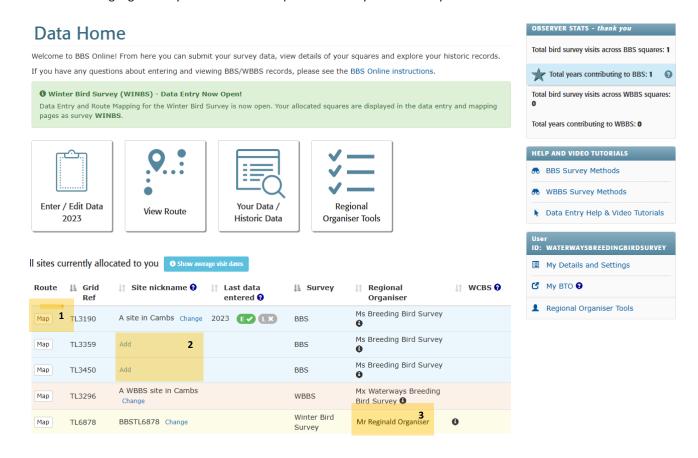


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## LOGIN TO BBS ONLINE / SET UP

#### **HOME PAGE**

- Once logged in, you will see the BBS Online homepage.
- Your WINBS Squares will appear alongside any other BBS or WBBS squares in the table; WINBS squares
  are highlighted in yellow. Check the squares currently allocated to you are correct.



**NOTE 1:** Check sites allocated are correct and the routes are mapped.

**NOTE 2:** Function to add a 'nickname' to the Grid Reference to reduce confusion when entering data if you have more than one site. *Only you will see this nickname, it is deleted when the square is allocated to someone else.* 

**NOTE 3:** Regional Organisers per site are listed. Click on the ① for contact details.

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### **DATA ENTRY HOMEPAGE**

## Data Entry - 2023 field season

The table below shows the sites you have been allocated to enter data for the 2023 field season. To enter data for a previous year, please fill in a set of paper forms for and send them to your Regional Organiser. To enter your **Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey** data, go to the WCBS website.

Click on the + icons to enter data for the relevant transect section. If you have not surveyed a given section, leave it blank. Once you have entered your data a green the shown for that transect visit. If you cannot see your site in the list below, contact your Regional Organiser (see BBS Online homepage) for assistance.

Survey	Grid	Map I	Recce Data	Visit	Transect Sections										
					1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
BBS TL3190 A site in Cambs	TL3190	A Print		Early	•	-	<b>+</b> / <b>-</b>								
	✓ Edit	+	Late	<b>+</b> / <b>-</b>	<b>+</b> / <b>-</b>	<b>+</b> / <b>-</b>	<b>+</b> / <b>-</b>	<b>+</b> / <b>-</b>	<b>+</b> / <b>-</b>	<b>+</b> / <b>-</b>	<b>+</b> / <b>-</b>	<b>+</b> / <b>-</b>	<b>+</b> / <b>-</b>		
				2											
Winter Bird TL6878 Survey BBSTL6878				Visit 1 - Sept/Oct	<b>+</b> / <b>-</b>	<b>+/-</b>	<b>+</b> / <b>-</b>	<b>+</b> / <b>-</b>	<b>+</b> / <b>-</b>	<b>+</b> / <b>-</b>	<b>+/-</b>	<b>+</b> / <b>-</b>	+/-	+/-	1
		A Print		Visit 2 - Dec	<b>+</b> / <b>-</b>										
	BBSTL6878	BBSTL6878		Visit 3 - Jan	<b>+</b> / <b>-</b>										
				Visit 4 - Feb	<b>+</b> / <b>-</b>										

#### From here, you can:

- Enter new data for a given square and section by selecting the + symbol. Each transect section counts as a separate 'submission'. As well as the standard bird, habitat and (optional) mammal data, in the first section that you enter any data for (no matter which) you will provide the survey dates, times and the weather.
- Edit an existing submission, by selecting the ✓ symbol.
- **Notify the reviewer** that you weren't able to complete a transection by selecting —.
- View, print and edit route maps (to edit, check with RO first).

NOTE 1: A completed visit data entry table will appear either as a row of green ✓ and/or red —

**NOTE 2**: Enter each visit according to the time of year, not the order in which they were made. For example, if you managed to complete three visits in October, January and February, you would enter these as Visit 1, Visit 3 and Visit 4.

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### **DATA ENTRY**

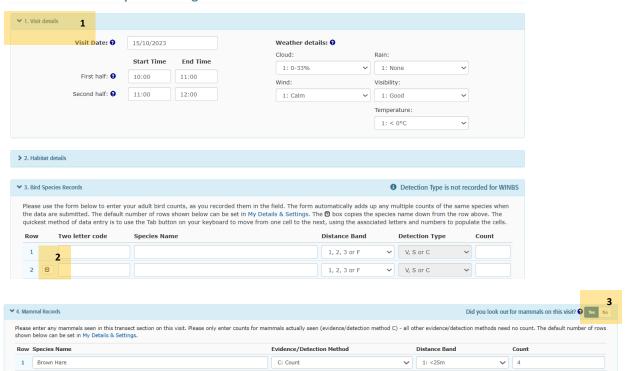
- The data entry themes for WINBS are the same as for BBS. It is quicker to 'tab' through the various cells within the data entry forms than to click with the computer mouse.
- To do this, use the Tab button on your keyboard to move from one cell to the next, typing once at each cell and for cells with dropdown options, use the associated letter or number to select what you need from the dropdown e.g. 1, 2 or 3 for Distance Band options.
- You can change the order that species appear once entered, how many rows appear in the Data Entry form when it is first opened and whether or not you are recording Detection Type via 'Details and Settings' are on the homepage.
- Like in BBS, mammal recording is optional. However, you will only be able to record sightings of live mammals that you observe whilst on your transect and do so within one of the three distance bands, just as you do for birds. Field signs or live mammals not attributed to a distance band cannot be entered.
- Once you have entered your data from a transect section, you will be asked to confirm what you have entered.

**NOTE 1:** Open and collapse each section of the Data Entry form by clicking on the arrow to the left of the 'section header bar'.

NOTE 2: You can copy the species down from the row above using the 'copy' button on the left of each row.

**NOTE 3**: Please state whether or not you recorded mammals. You should say 'Yes' to this if you were actively looking for them, even if you didn't see any – this enables us to tell the difference between a real absence of mammals seen, versus and absence of recording.

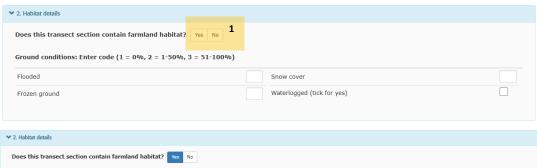
Winter Bird Survey Recording Form - TL6878 (BBSTL6878), Transect Section 1, Visit 1, 2023/24

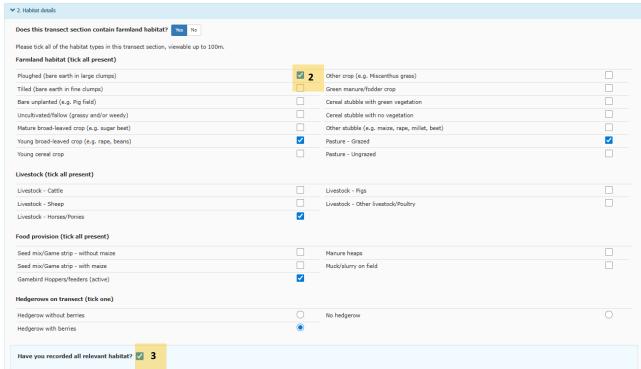


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## **HABITAT DATA**

- WINBS requires a specific type of habitat recording and is different to that used in BBS.
- In each visit, volunteers on squares with farmland (arable or pastoral) will be asked to check for the presence of listed features within 100m of their transect route.
- If farmland habitat is present within 100m of any part of your transect route, select 'Yes'.
- Check all of the features present. Additional guidance and photographs of some of the crop features are provided in the survey resources.
- In every case regardless of the presence of farmland habitat please record the ground conditions.





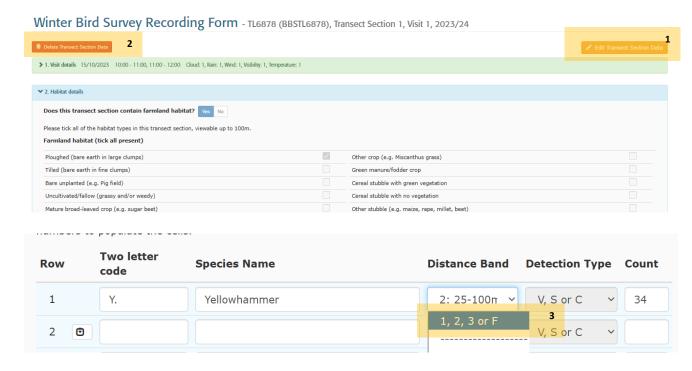
- NOTE 1: Please ensure that you answer this question as 'Yes' if there is farmland habitat.
- **NOTE 2.** Sections with check boxes (square) can have multiple options checked. Hedgerows (radio buttons) can only have one answer pick the 'greatest'.
- **NOTE 3**. Please confirm that you have recorded all the relevant habitat. If you were not able to do this for any reason, leave this box unchecked it enables us to tell if features were genuinely absent, rather than if they were just missed by accident.

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### **EDITING DATA**

• From the Data Entry homepage, select  $\checkmark$  for the section and visit that you wish to edit. The Data Entry form will open.

**NOTE 1:** Select 'Edit Transect Section Data' and the page will unlock for edits. This can only be done for the current survey period. After this period, please email any edits you wish to make to <a href="windth:windth



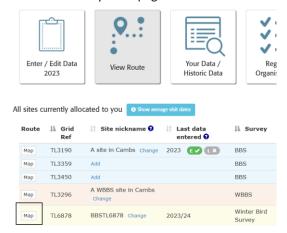
**NOTE 2**: To delete and entire transect section, select the red 'Delete Transect Section Data' button on the top left.

**NOTE 3**: To delete just a single row of data, clear the species fields and count fields, and make sure the categorical field Distance Band is set to the default or null value at the top of list.

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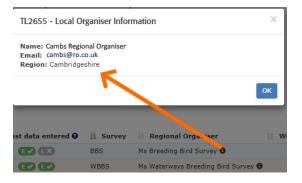
### VIEWING THE MAP

• If a route has been mapped on the system, there are three ways to view the map. From the Homepage via the 'View Route' button in the middle of the screen or via the bottom left with the list of allocated sites and from the Data Entry homepage.



Existing routes should not be changed without prior approval from your BTO Regional Organiser or the WINBS National Organiser at BTO HQ.

- When viewing or editing route maps, please ensure that you are using the WINBS instance of that route. Whilst in the majority of cases this will be identical to that from BBS, if there has for any reason been a change to the WINBS route (e.g., seasonal flooding) then it is important that this route is the one reviewed.
- The email address of your Regional Organiser/s, and first point of contact, are available on the BBS Online homepage and the National Organiser can be contacted at <u>winterbirds@bto.org</u> depending on the survey.



### PRINTING THE ROUTE

• To view or print an existing map, click on the 'View Route' button on the Homepage and see the sites allocated to you. For the site required, select View/Print.



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• Once 'View/Print Route' is open, there are a few things you can do to personalise the map before printing. Once this is done, select 'Print/Save' map and print as normal.

**NOTE 1**: Map Settings – allows you to change the colours of the graphics on the map and change the transparency of the background map to make it easier to see the route.



**NOTE 2**: Toggle on/ off Distance Bands.

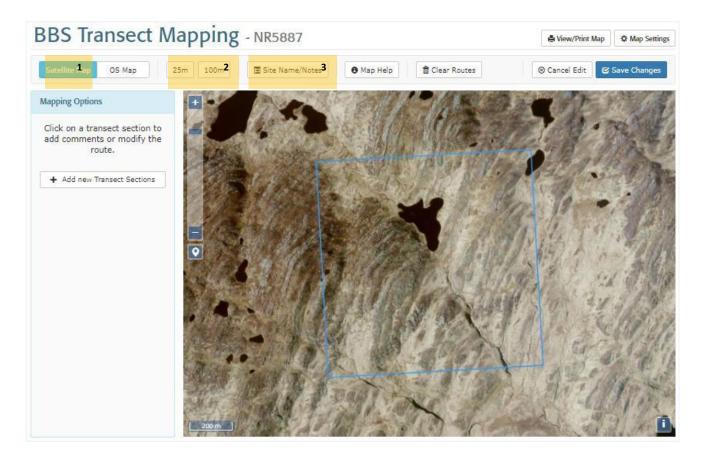
NOTE 3: Toggle on/off different background layers. More than one layer can be viewed site by side.

**NOTE 4**: Grid References – allows you to either show or hide the Grid References in the Transect Notes, or to download them in a csv (Excel) file.

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### **ADDING A ROUTE: 1**

- Read the 'Transect Mapping Help' message fully and click 'OK'. This opens the mapping system.



NOTE 1: Change view from Satellite to OS.

**NOTE 2:** It is advised the Distance Bands (100-m at least) are turned on to check the routes once drawn to avoid overlap of transects.

NOTE 3: Site Name/Notes can be added e.g. place to park or transect sector end 'landmarks' etc.

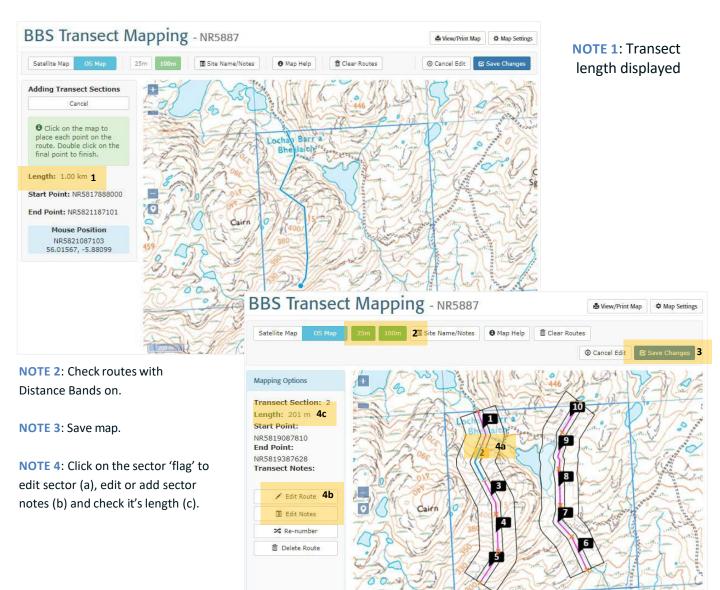
A detailed video tutorial for how to draw, edit and annotate routes is available on the BBS project website:

https://www.bto.org/get-involved/volunteer/projects/bbs/taking-part/bbs-online

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### **ADDING A ROUTE: 2**

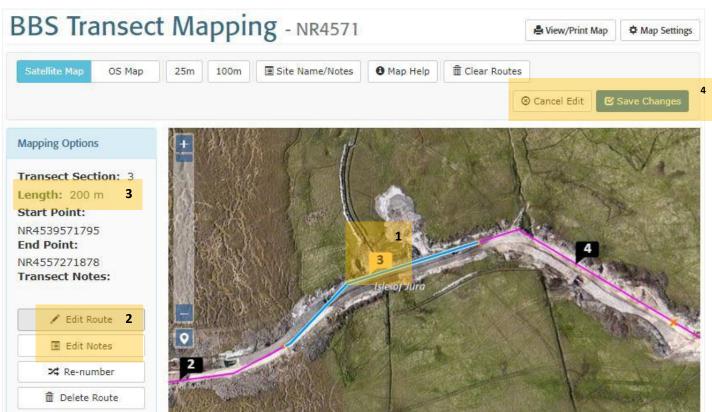
- To draw a route, select 'Add new Transect Sections'. Click on the map at the start of the route and click again at every direction change along the transect. Avoid right-angles which result in double-counting on the inside corner during surveys.
- Once the transect is drawn and the transect length reads 1-km on the left of the screen, double click on the
  map to end the transect and it will automatically split the line into sectors. For WINBS, you will then need to
  draw the second transect by repeating the process.



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### **EDIT A ROUTE**

- Once you have spoken to your BTO Regional Organiser and/or National Organiser at BTO HQ, and have no choice but to tweak the route, go to 'View Route' from the homepage.
- · Select 'Edit Map'.
- In drastic cases, it is possible to 'Clear Routes' at the top of the mapping page. For consistency it is best to tweak the map sector-by-sector. This way the route is changed as little as possible, keeping the sector-level data comparable across years. Section notes will also be deleted with this action, so proceed with caution.
- Select the sector 'flag' and press 'Edit Route' in the column on the left of the page. You can zoom in on the map for more precise editing using the +/- bar on the left of the map. Click on the transect line for that sector and move as required, double click to finish the change and press 'Save Changes'. If the edit is wrong, press 'Cancel Edit' and start again.



**NOTE 1**: Select sector 'flag'.

NOTE 2: Select 'Edit Route' or 'Edit Notes' to add sector level notes.

NOTE 3: Keep an eye on the 'Length' number (200-m per sector for WINBS).

NOTE 4: Cancel or Save the edit.

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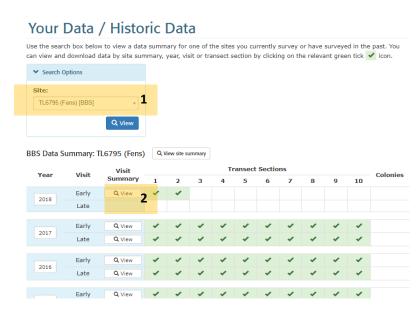
## YOUR DATA / HISTORIC DATA

### **VIEW SITE DATA**

- You can view data entered for each site at 'Your Data / Historic Data' found on the Homepage. Once on this page, select the site to explore records from the dropdown box.
- All data entered for the site will appear in a grid system of years, visits and sectors. This includes any data you have entered but also any historical data from previous volunteers for the site.
- A summary of all data for the site can be displayed by clicking on 'View site summary'.
- Alternatively, press on the Year, the visit 'View' box or the Sector or Colony itself (by clicking on the green tick) and this will pull up the data for your selection. If there is no green tick, there are no data for that Sector in the system.

NOTE 1: Select the site from the dropdown options and press 'View'. The table above will then appear.

**NOTE 2**: View site summary to view all the data for the selected site.



### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The BBS Online data entry system was updated during 2025 and relaunched in August 2025. We are grateful to all the BTO Regional Organisers and volunteers who use this system to submit and manage data for these two important surveys.

Special thanks are due to the BBS Online software developers: Ollie Barrett, Mark Hammond and Ewan Stacey; and Justin Walker, the BBS Database administrator.

Prior to the latest system upgrade, we enlisted the help of three BTO Regional Organisers to test the system. We are grateful to Pete Cadogan, Dave Wright, Simon Roddis and Rod Bleach for volunteering their time to do this. Thank you.

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