



**BTO Research Report No. 340**

**Westfield Farm, Cambridgeshire (Plot 1572)  
The Countryside Restoration Trust  
Report on Breeding Birds 2002**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

This was the first annual survey of Westfield Farm for breeding birds, using a territory mapping methodology (Marchant *et al.* 1990). This is a baseline year before any management practices are modified to benefit birds and other wildlife.

In the 2001/2002 cropping season the majority of the area consisted of one large winter wheat field of 43 ha. There is currently one small plantation (less than 1 ha) and a strip of non-rotational set aside of 2.14 ha along the southern edge, separated from the wheat by an established hedge. Much of the rest of the wheat field is bordered by a ditch or fencing. The surrounding land is mostly arable with a disused railway line running along the southern boundary. There is a small nature reserve in the south west corner. Bourn Brook runs along the southern edge of the area.

## **2. METHODS**

A complete mapping census was undertaken using the methodology laid down by the BTO's Common Birds Census scheme (Marchant *et al.* 1990). This involves recording, on large-scale maps, the location and activities of all birds seen or heard. Nine visits were made between late March and the end of June, including two evening visits in April and May. The field effort, just over 16 hours, is relatively small but is presumably a consequence of the current single field layout of the farm, although the interior of the field was walked.

## **3. RESULTS**

In total, 47 species were recorded on, or flying over the area during the census visits (Table 1). This included 27 species that were considered to be holding territory. These figures are slightly lower, but similar, to the results from Lark Rise Farm for 2002 (51 species recorded with 32 species holding territory)(Glue & Carter 2003). Some interesting species and species of conservation importance occurred including: Buzzard, Grey Partridge, Skylark, Yellow Wagtail, Linnet, Bullfinch and three species of Bunting (Table 1). This indicates that the site has definite potential for farmland birds.

### **3.1 Waterbirds**

Cormorant (amber-listed) was observed as a flyover on three occasions while one Grey Heron flew off from near Bourn Brook on 20 May. Neither species were considered to be holding territory on the farm. There were two Mallard and three Moorhen territories located along the Bourn Brook, although only one nest of the latter was located.

### **3.2 Diurnal Birds of Prey**

There was only one sighting each of the amber-listed Kestrel (northeast corner) and Buzzard (southern side) during the nine visits. This is rather surprising as the area of set aside would be expected to hold small mammals which should have attracted more sightings of Kestrel.

### **3.3 Gamebirds**

As with Lark Rise Farm, gamebirds were relatively numerous on the farm. There were estimated to be three territories of Red-legged Partridge, with pairs of birds, but no young, being seen on several occasions. Grey Partridge (red-listed) was well represented with two territories located across the wheat field. On one occasion 10 young were seen near the southern edge. Pheasant, with five territories, was the most numerous gamebird. They were mostly observed in the set aside, including a female with young, and along the edges of the wheat field.

### **3.4 Doves**

Feral Pigeon was observed flying over the area on one occasion. Stock Dove (amber-listed) had three territories, one in the northeast corner near the buildings and the other two mostly centred in the

southwest corner near the brook. The twelve Wood Pigeon territories were located along the southern and western fringes of the wheat field, although no nests were recorded. Some large, non-territorial flocks were also seen.

### **3.5 Owls to Wagtails**

The aerial feeding swifts and swallows (amber-listed) were only recorded as flyovers with no suitable nesting sites nearby. Green Woodpecker (amber-listed) had one territory in the southwest corner. Skylark (red-listed), with 12 territories, was the most numerous species alongside Wood Pigeon. The territories were scattered over the whole wheat field but were concentrated at the northern end. Meadow Pipit (amber-listed) did not hold any territories but it was recorded from the northeast corner, on two occasions. Encouragingly both Yellow Wagtail (amber-listed) and Pied Wagtail had one territory each. The Yellow Wagtail territory was situated in the northwest part of the wheat field while the Pied Wagtail activity, including food carrying, was situated in the northeast corner.

### **3.6 Thrushes and Allied Species**

Wren, with 10 territories, was the third most numerous species, along with Whitethroat and Chaffinch. Nearly all of these territories were found along the southern edge near the brook. Two of the three Dunnock (amber-listed) territories were also located along the brook, with the third in the northeast corner. Robin, with eight territories, was also quite numerous. Again most of these were found along the southern edge especially in the southwest corner.

The five Blackbird territories were found along the southern and western edges of the field, with most activity in the southwest corner. The only Song Thrush (red-listed) territory was in the southwest corner, near the brook.

### **3.7 Warblers**

Four species, Sedge (one sighting) and Reed Warbler (two sightings), Lesser Whitethroat (one sighting) and Willow Warbler (amber-listed), were recorded but were not considered to be holding territory. All sightings were along the southern edge. The three sightings, two on the same visit, of Willow Warbler were thought to relate to different birds. Whitethroat, with 10 territories, was the commonest warbler. Most territories were along the southern edge near the brook and the hedge between the set aside and wheat field, although three were recorded along the north and northeast edges. The three Blackcap territories were located in the southwest corner near the brook. The single Chiffchaff territory was recorded near to the set aside.

### **3.8 Tits**

The two Blue Tit and one Great Tit territories were also located in the southwest corner, although the latter species did range widely over the site. Young Great Tits were observed on the last visit.

### **3.9 Corvids**

There was just one sighting of Magpie during the census. It was seen near to the brook. Two flocks of Jackdaw were recorded in the southeast corner and one bird was seen in the southwest corner. Rooks were seen on five different occasions; three times as flyovers the other two times birds flew off from the southern fringe. Jay held one territory located in the southwest corner while Carrion Crow, as at Lark Rise Farm, was the most common corvid, with four territories. Three of the territories were along the northern part of the field while the fourth was in the southwest.

### **3.10 Starling, Sparrows and Finches**

One Starling (red-listed) nest was located just off the plot near the northeast corner. No sightings were made on the plot. There was only one sighting of a House Sparrow (red-listed) during the census. One male was observed near the buildings. Chaffinch, with 10 territories, was the commonest finch, with

the majority of them along the southern boundary near the brook and set aside. The rest of the territories were along the northern part of the area. Greenfinch was not deemed to be holding territory as there was only one sighting of a bird in song, in the northeast corner. Goldfinch and Bullfinch (red-listed) were also not deemed to be holding territory. Linnet, with six territories, was also relatively common. Four were along the southern area, mostly in the set aside with the other two in the northeast corner.

### **3.11 Buntings**

Three bunting species were present on the farm, although Corn Bunting (red-listed) was only recorded once during the census and was therefore not deemed to be holding territory. Yellowhammer (red-listed), with seven territories, and Reed Bunting (red-listed), with five territories, were better represented. Surprisingly, the Reed Bunting territories were along the western and northern boundaries, with only two males being seen near the brook. The Yellowhammer territories were spread around all the boundaries, except along the western one away from the brook.

## **4. DISCUSSION**

The farm already has a reasonable list of breeding birds present in good numbers. Nine red-listed species were present: Grey Partridge (2 territories); Skylark (12); Song Thrush (1); House Sparrow (present); Linnet (6); Bullfinch (present); Reed Bunting (5); Yellowhammer (7); Corn Bunting (present) and the same number of amber-listed species were also present. The bulk of the bird territories were along the southern fringe, near to the brook, disused railway line and set aside. The southwest corner, in particular, was favoured. Any changes to management practices in this area need to be considered very carefully before they are carried out to ensure they do not reduce the value of the southern fringe.

Changes in management practices on the rest of the plot will almost certainly centre on dividing the one large field into smaller fields surrounded by hedgerows. If possible, old-field boundaries should be reinstated so long as the average field size is kept relatively large to retain the Skylark population. Analysis of BTO CBC data indicate that about 60-80 m/ha of hedge (equates to average field sizes of 4-7 ha) should retain a high density of birds and broad range of species (Lack 1992). A mixture of crops, with choice being dictated by knowledge from Lark Rise farm, will present more opportunities for field nesting and foraging species. Oilseed rape and spring-sown crops would be obvious choices.

The other alternative is to try out an entirely different regime than at Lark Rise Farm. This could involve introducing a spring crop to the entire field area to encourage nesting Skylarks and Corn Buntings, and to attract Lapwings but clearly the economics of this would need to be carefully considered.



## 5. REFERENCES

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**Table 1. Number of breeding territories on Westfield Farm in 2002**

<b>Species</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>Species</b>	<b>2002</b>
Little Grebe	-	Meadow Pipit	Present
Cormorant	Present	Yellow Wagtail	1
Grey Heron	Present	Grey Wagtail	-
Mute Swan	-	Pied Wagtail	1
Greylag Goose	-	Dipper	-
Canada Goose	-	Wren	10
Shelduck	-	Dunnock	3
Teal	-	Robin	8
Mallard	2	Nightingale	-
Tufted Duck	-	Redstart	-
Goosander	-	Whinchat	-
Sparrowhawk	-	Wheatear	-
Buzzard	Present	Blackbird	5
Kestrel	Present	Song Thrush	1
Hobby	-	Mistle Thrush	-
Red-legged Partridge	3	Grasshopper Warbler	-
Grey Partridge	2	Sedge Warbler	Present
Pheasant	5	Reed Warbler	Present
Moorhen	3	Lesser Whitethroat	Present
Coot	-	Whitethroat	10
Oystercatcher	-	Garden Warbler	-
Ringed Plover	-	Blackcap	3
Lapwing	-	Wood Warbler	-
Snipe	-	Chiffchaff	1
Woodcock	-	Willow Warbler	Present
Curlew	-	Goldcrest	-
Redshank	-	Spotted Flycatcher	-
Common Sandpiper	-	Pied Flycatcher	-
Black-headed Gull	-	Long-tailed Tit	-
Common Gull	-	Willow Tit	-
Lesser Black-backed Gull	-	Coal Tit	-
Herring Gull	-	Blue Tit	2
Common Tern	-	Great Tit	1
Feral Pigeon	Present	Nuthatch	-
Stock Dove	3	Treecreeper	-
Woodpigeon	12	Jay	1
Collared Dove	-	Magpie	Present
Turtle Dove	-	Jackdaw	Present
Cuckoo	-	Rook	Present
Barn Owl	-	Carrion Crow	4
Swift	Present	Raven	-
Kingfisher	-	Starling	-
Green Woodpecker	1	House Sparrow	Present
Great Spotted Woodpecker	-	Tree Sparrow	-
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	-	Chaffinch	10
Skylark	12	Greenfinch	Present
Sand Martin	-	Goldfinch	Present
Swallow	Present	Siskin	-
House Martin	-	Linnet	6
Tree Pipit	-	Redpoll	-

**Table 1 contd.**

<b>Species</b>	<b>2002</b>
Bullfinch	Present
Yellowhammer	7
Reed Bunting	5
Corn Bunting	Present