



BTO Research Report No. 478

**Westfield Farm, Cambridgeshire (Plot 1572)
The Countryside Restoration Trust
Report on Breeding Birds 2005**

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**Fieldwork carried out by:
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1. INTRODUCTION

This was the fourth annual survey of the breeding birds of Westfield Farm, Comberton, Cambridgeshire, using a territory mapping methodology (Marchant *et al.* 1990). This survey followed a baseline survey in 2002 before any management practices were modified to benefit birds and other wildlife (Carter & Glue 2003) and two years of management practices (Carter & Glue 2005; Carter 2006).

The major change at Westfield Farm was in the winter of 2002/03 when the one large field of winter wheat surveyed in 2002 was converted into four fields, each with 6m margins. The pollen and nectar strip, with adjacent beetle bank was retained for 2005. Various habitat changes were made to Westfield Farm for 2005, a hedge was planted on the western boundary to fill gaps and two margins were sown with a flower-rich mix for bumblebees. Cropping in 2005 was winter wheat (two fields), spring barley and winter rye. In addition, a small patch of wild birdseed mix, consisting of spring barley, linseed, rape and dwarf sunflower, was sown in the southwest corner. The area near the stream entered the third year of a meadow recreation scheme, with some willow planting, at the western end.

The surrounding land is mostly arable with a disused railway line running along the southern boundary. There is a small nature reserve in the southwest corner. Bourn Brook runs along the southern edge of the area.

2. METHODS

A complete mapping census of the breeding birds was undertaken using the methodology laid down by the BTO's Common Birds Census (CBC) scheme (Marchant *et al.* 1990). This involves recording, on large-scale maps, the location and activities of all birds seen or heard. Eleven complete visits were made between late-March and the end of June, including one afternoon visit in mid-April. No evening visits were made in 2005. Coverage was excellent, with 19 hours of observations, compared with 11 visits (over 20h) in 2004, 12 visits (24 hours) in 2003 and 9 visits (13 hours) in 2002. It is important that coverage is standardised from year to year.

3. RESULTS

In total, 55 species were recorded on, or flying over the area during the census visits, compared with 56 in 2004, 50 in 2003 and 47 species in 2002 (Table 1). This included 28 species that were considered to be holding territory, compared with 33 in 2004, 32 in 2003 and 27 in 2002. Some interesting species and species of conservation importance occurred including: Grey Partridge, Skylark, Linnet, Bullfinch, Yellowhammer and Reed Bunting (Table 1). One red-listed species, that had been recorded in 2004 was however lost: Corn Bunting; and Lapwing (non-territory holding) and Turtle Dove (one territory) also were not seen after being lost in 2004 (Table 1).

3.1 Waterbirds

One Cormorant (amber-listed) was observed as a flyover on one occasion (12 June) while Grey Heron flew over on three occasions (with two taking off from the non-CRT land on the eastern side on the last visit at the end of June). One Canada Goose was seen flying over the north-west corner, during the first visit, in late-March. As in previous years, none of these species were considered to be holding territory on the farm. No Mallard territories were registered in 2005, compared with two in the previous three years. This was despite birds being seen on five occasions, either flying over or birds along the stream. Likewise, Moorhen was only seen on two visits, along the stream, and was not considered to be holding territory.

3.2 Diurnal Birds of Prey

Buzzard was recorded on one occasion in 2005, as a flyover near the stream. Sparrowhawk was seen on one visit only, a perched bird in the southwest corner near the stream. Kestrel (amber-listed) was

recorded on one occasion, a female flying down the eastern boundary. Hobby was again recorded once, being sighted near the southern edge of the plot.

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, a return to the levels in 2002 and 2003. As in previous years no young birds were seen during CBC visits but pairs of birds were seen on three occasions and birds were *singing* on two occasions. Two pairs of Grey Partridge (red-listed) were considered to be holding territory. One pair was centred along the southern edge, the other, in the northwest corner, centred primarily in the winter cereals. No young birds were seen during CBC visits, as in 2003 and 2004 but in contrast to 2002 when on one occasion 10 young were seen near the southern edge. Pheasant, with five territories, had declined from the 12 territories in 2004. It was still the most numerous gamebird. They were observed across the farm, but were especially concentrated on the meadowland, as usual. No young were observed during CBC visits.

3.4 Waders and Gulls

Golden Plover, a new CBC visit species for the plot in 2004, was observed on one occasion; forty birds flying over the plot during the first visit. No Lapwings were recorded during the CBC visits in 2005. No Black-headed Gull were recorded in 2005 and Lesser Black-backed Gulls were recorded on two occasions. One Common Tern (a new CBC visit species for the plot) was a flyover in late-May.

3.5 Doves

Stock Dove (amber-listed) had three territories, a decline from the five territories recorded in 2003 and 2004. These were centred around the buildings, on the eastern side, and were mostly records of flying birds. The thirteen Wood Pigeon territories, were the highest yet recorded. They were concentrated on the meadowland and the northwest corner. As in previous years no nests were located and some large, non-territorial flocks were also seen. Worryingly no Turtle Doves were recorded in 2005, as in 2004. Feral Pigeon was recorded as a flyover on one occasion. Collared Dove was absent after being present, for the first time as a CBC species in 2004.

3.6 Cuckoo to Wagtails

No Cuckoos were heard in 2005, in contrast to 2004 (when new CBC visit species for the plot) when one was heard calling in early May but was not considered to be holding territory. A Tawny Owl (a new CBC visit species for the plot) was observed on the last visit at the end of June, near the stream. The aerial feeding Swift was only recorded as flyovers on three occasions, over the winter wheat, with no suitable nesting sites nearby. Swallow (amber-listed) was not considered to be holding territory although it was seen on five occasions and House Martin was also observed for the first time during CBC visits. Green Woodpecker (amber-listed) had two territories, as in 2004, both located along the stream. Great Spotted Woodpecker was again considered to be holding one territory, and as with Green Woodpecker, in the stream area. Skylark (red-listed), with 21 territories, slightly less than the record 24 territories in 2004, but was still the most numerous species. The territories were scattered over the whole arable area but perhaps with less preference for the winter rye field. Crop diversification has obviously benefited this species. Meadow Pipits (amber-listed) were observed on three visits in 2005 (none had been observed in 2004) but it was not considered to be holding territory. Yellow Wagtails (amber-listed) were observed on one occasion only in 2005. Pied Wagtail was considered to be holding one territory, being seen on three occasions across the whole farm.

3.7 Thrushes and Allied Species

Wren, with fourteen territories, a record level for this site, was the third most numerous species, after Skylark and Chaffinch. Most of these territories were found along the southern edge near the brook but two were located in the northwest corner, one in the new oak and ash spinney. Dunnock (amber-listed) held two territories, compared with one in 2003 and 2004 and three in 2002. These were

located along the brook. Robin held five territories, a welcome increase from 2004, when only one territory was registered but still lower than the eight in the previous two years. Most of the observations were along or near to the stream.

Five of the seven Blackbird territories (the commonest thrush) were again found in the stream area, with additional ones in the northwest corner and northeast corners. This compares with seven territories in 2004, 10 in 2003 but only five in 2002. Song Thrush (red-listed) remained lost as a species considered to be holding territory, although it was singing on one occasion and seen during another visit. The observations were in the meadowland, near to the stream. One flock of Fieldfare flew over the plot in late-March.

3.8 Warblers

Five species of warbler (six in 2004): Willow Warbler (amber-listed), Lesser Whitethroat, Whitethroat, Blackcap and Chiffchaff were recorded in 2005 (Table 1). Whitethroat, with 10 territories, compared with 11 in 2004, eight in 2003 and 10 in 2002, was the commonest warbler. All territories were along the edges of the plot, with four around the stream area. Blackcap, with five territories, was the second commonest warbler, with the territories concentrated in the stream area. Willow Warbler held one territory along the stream while Lesser Whitethroat (present but not holding territory) was again heard singing in the northeast corner. Chiffchaff held two territories, up from one in the previous three years, along the stream. Goldcrest was not seen after being recorded as a CBC species for the first time in 2004.

3.9 Tits

The six Blue Tit territories, were double the number in 2004, and were the highest recorded for the plot. Four were located in the stream area, one was in the northeast corner and the other along the western boundary. Great Tit maintained its three territories all along the stream, with two sightings elsewhere. Two Long-tailed Tit territories were confirmed, up from one in 2004 and 2003, both along the stream area. Young birds were seen in one territory in mid-June.

3.10 Corvids

All the expected corvid species were recorded in 2004. Jay, Rook and Jackdaw were not considered to be holding territory. Magpie was considered to be holding one territory, with observations in the meadow area. Carrion Crow, like Wood Pigeon, is a difficult species to census other than through counting its nests. Two nests were recorded in 2005 but its population appeared to decrease from 13 territories in 2004 to 10. These were scattered across the plot but were concentrated in the meadow area and around the spring barley field.

3.11 Starling, Sparrows and Finches

Starling (red-listed) was present on six visits concentrated around the buildings, with juveniles being seen on at least one visit. It was considered to be holding two territories. As in the last two years, there were no sightings of House Sparrow (red-listed) during the census. There had been one sighting in 2002. Chaffinch was the commonest finch, with 17 territories, with the majority of them along the southern boundary, as in previous years. The rest of the territories were in the northwest corner (five) and northeast corner (one). Greenfinch, which had held one territory in 2004 was only observed on one visit. Goldfinch was considered to be holding two territories, although records were scattered across the plot. Bullfinch (red-listed) was not deemed to be holding territory, although a pair was seen on one visit and a bird was heard calling on another. Linnet (red-listed), with three territories, the same as in 2004 but down from five in 2003. The territories were scattered across the farm, with birds being seen along field boundaries.

3.12 Buntings

The three bunting species had mixed fortunes on the farm in 2005. After the good showing in 2003 with two territories, Corn Bunting (red-listed), was not seen during CBC visits. Yellowhammer (red-listed), with six territories, up from five in the previous year, the same as in 2003 but down from seven in 2002, was the commonest bunting. Records were scattered around the edges of the farm. Reed Bunting (red-listed) held two territories but this contrasts with five in 2002. The territories were along the north and in the northeast corner, although birds that were recorded by the stream were not considered to be holding territory.

4. DISCUSSION

Eight red-listed species were present on the farm during the breeding season in 2005. One species, Corn Bunting, was lost and none were gained compared with 2004. Of those species present in 2004 and 2005, one declined (Skylark, although it was still the commonest species) three remained stable (Song Thrush, Linnet and Bullfinch, although only Linnet was holding territory) and four increased (Grey Partridge, Starling, Yellowhammer and Reed Bunting). The trends for all these species in England were stable between 2004 and 2005 (Raven & Noble 2006). The large increase in Skylark territories between 2002 and 2005 is the most significant change that might be accounted for by the habitat management changes at the site.

Twelve amber-listed species, including one gull species, were present on the farm in 2005, the same number as in 2004, although there were some changes in species composition. None of the three species gained (Kestrel, House Martin (new for CBC visits) and Meadow Pipit) however were considered to be holding territory. Of the nine species that were present in both years; two declined (Stock Dove and Swallow), six were stable (Cormorant, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Green Woodpecker, Yellow Wagtail, Fieldfare and Willow warbler) and one increased (Dunnock). Two species were lost: Black-headed Gull and Goldcrest, although neither of these held territory in 2004. As with the red-listed species, the trends in England, for the eight potential breeding species (*i.e.* excluding Cormorant, Lesser Black-backed Gull and Fieldfare) were all stable (Raven & Noble 2006).

Five (Great Spotted Woodpecker, Blackbird, Blackcap, Great Tit and Magpie) out of 18 species, of the green-listed species holding territory, were stable, in line with trends in England (Raven & Noble 2006). Of the nine species that increased on the farm (Wood Pigeon, Pied Wagtail, Wren, Robin, Chiffchaff, Long-tailed Tit, Blue Tit, Chaffinch and Goldfinch) most showed stable populations in England, although Wren (9%) increased significantly and Chiffchaff (28%) declined significantly. There were three new species (Buzzard, Common Tern and Tawny Owl) compared with 2004 (only Buzzard had been present before in CBC visits); these all showed stable English populations. Four territory-holding species declined: Red-legged Partridge, Pheasant, Whitethroat and Carrion Crow (all had increased between 2003 and 2004). One territory-holding species, Sedge Warbler (one territory in 2004) was not observed in 2004. Five species that had held territory in 2004 but were only recorded as present in 2005 were: Mallard, Moorhen, Lesser Whitethroat, Jay and Greenfinch

Overall the number of species holding territory decreased from 33 to 28 species. One species was lost completely (Sedge Warbler) and six others (Mallard, Moorhen, Swallow, Lesser Whitethroat, Jay and Greenfinch) were only present during the census and were not considered to be holding territory. Corn Bunting, which had held territory in 2003, was not observed during CBC visits in 2005. The extinction of Corn Bunting on the farm, despite the sowing of spring barley, is an unfortunate loss. Two species (Pied Wagtail and Goldfinch) were gained as territory-holding species, although both had been present in 2004. As in previous years, the bulk of the bird territories were along the southern fringe, near to the brook, disused railway line and meadowland. The southwest corner, in particular, was favoured. Some species, eg. Wood Pigeon, Wren, Blackbird, Whitethroat, Chaffinch, Yellowhammer and Reed Bunting, were showing signs of using the new spinney in the northwest corner. It would appear that Skylark did not favour the winter rye crop.

5. References

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Table 1. Number of breeding territories on Westfield Farm in 2002, 2003, 2004 & 2005

Species	2002	2003	2004	2005
<i>Cormorant</i>	Present	Present	Present	Present
Grey Heron	Present	Present	Present	Present
Canada Goose	-	Present	Present	Present
Mallard	2	2	2	Present
Sparrowhawk	-	Present	Present	Present
Buzzard	Present	-	-	Present
<i>Kestrel</i>	Present	1	-	Present
Hobby	-	Present	Present	Present
Red-legged Partridge	3	3	4	3
Grey Partridge	2	1	1	2
Pheasant	5	7	12	5
Moorhen	3	3	3	Present
Golden Plover	-	-	Present	Present
<i>Lapwing</i>	-	Present	-	-
<i>Common Gull</i>	-	Present	-	-
<i>Black-headed Gull</i>	-	-	Present	-
<i>Lesser Black-backed Gull</i>	-	Present	Present	Present
Common Tern	-	-	-	Present
Feral Pigeon	Present	-	Present	Present
<i>Stock Dove</i>	3	5	5	3
Woodpigeon	12	11	11	13
Collared Dove	-	-	Present	-
Turtle Dove	-	1	-	-
<i>Cuckoo</i>	-	-	Present	-
Tawny Owl	-	-	-	Present
Swift	Present	Present	Present	Present
<i>Kingfisher</i>	-	Present	-	-
<i>Green Woodpecker</i>	1	1	2	2
Great Spotted Woodpecker	-	1	1	1
Skylark	12	17	24	21
<i>Sand Martin</i>	-	Present	-	-
<i>Swallow</i>	Present	Present	1	Present
<i>House Martin</i>	-	-	-	Present
<i>Meadow Pipit</i>	Present	2	-	Present
<i>Yellow Wagtail</i>	1	1	Present	Present
Pied Wagtail	1	-	Present	1
Wren	10	9	8	14
<i>Dunnock</i>	3	1	1	2
Robin	8	8	1	5
Wheatear	-	-	Present	-
Blackbird	5	10	7	7
<i>Fieldfare</i>	-	Present	Present	Present
Song Thrush	1	1	Present	Present
<i>Redwing</i>	-	-	-	-
<i>Mistle Thrush</i>	-	-	-	-
Sedge Warbler	Present	-	1	-
Reed Warbler	Present	-	-	-
Lesser Whitethroat	Present	-	1	Present
Whitethroat	10	8	11	10
Garden Warbler	-	Present	-	-
Blackcap	3	1	5	5
Chiffchaff	1	1	1	2

Species	2002	2003	2004	2005
<i>Willow Warbler</i>	Present	-	1	1
<i>Goldcrest</i>	-	-	Present	-
Long-tailed Tit	-	1	1	2
Blue Tit	2	4	3	6
Great Tit	1	2	3	3
Jay	1	Present	1	Present
Magpie	Present	-	1	1
Jackdaw	Present	Present	Present	Present
Rook	Present	-	Present	Present
Carrion Crow	4	7	13	10
Starling	-	Present	1	2
House Sparrow	Present	-	-	-
Chaffinch	10	10	13	17
Greenfinch	Present	-	1	Present
Goldfinch	Present	1	Present	2
Linnet	6	5	3	3
Bullfinch	Present	Present	Present	Present
Yellowhammer	7	6	5	6
Reed Bunting	5	1	1	2
Corn Bunting	Present	2	Present	-
Total No Territories	122	154	149	151
Total No Species	47	50	56	55
Number Territory Holding Species	27	32	33	28

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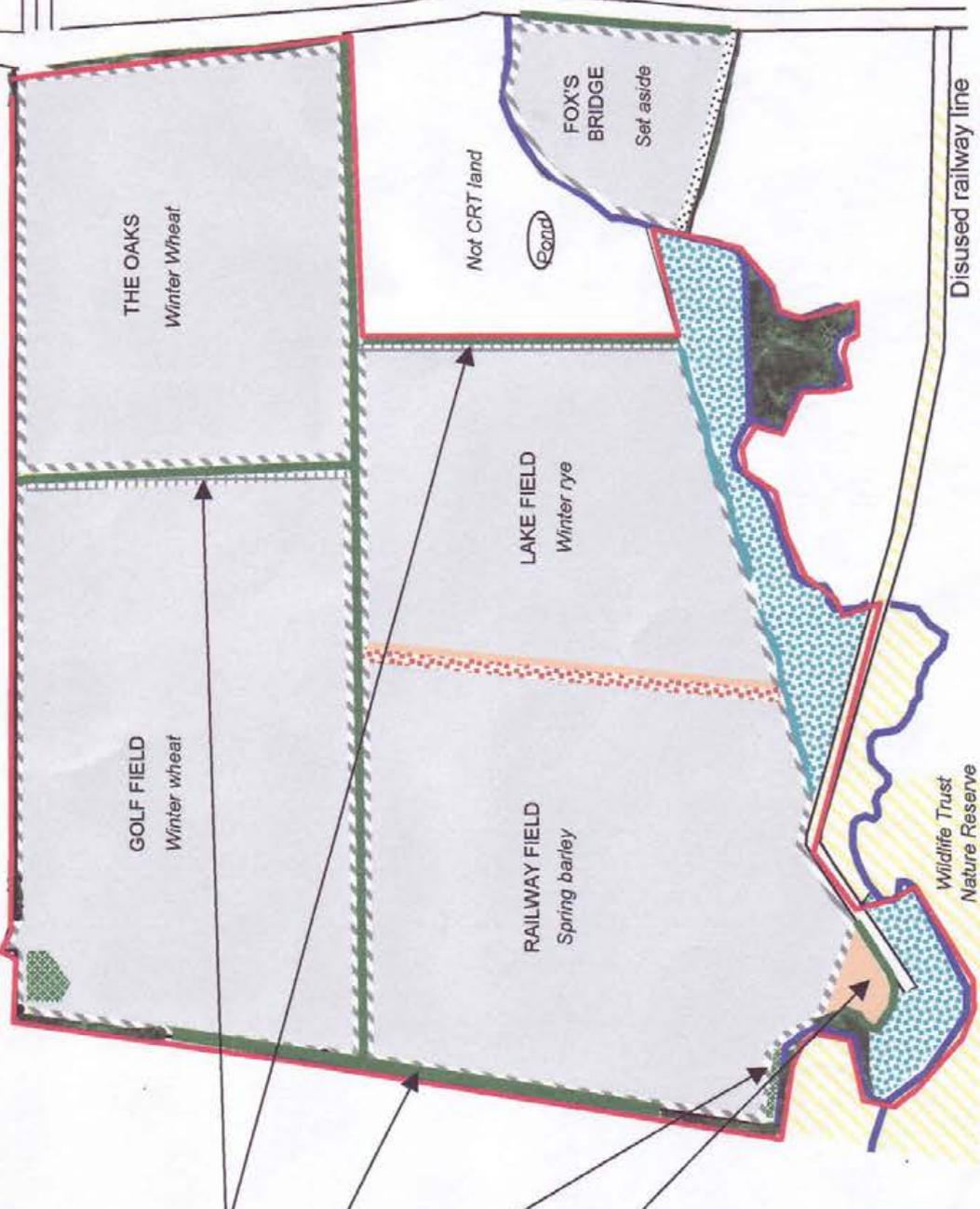
**CRT Lark Rise Farm
Westfield
March 2005**

Additions in Winter 2004-05:

- 2 Margins sown with bumble bee mix from Syngenta
- Hedge planted to fill gaps on western boundary.
- 50 new willows by brook meander
- Seed mix for birds re-sown with sp barley/sp linseed/sp rape/dwarf sunflower

Additions since 2002:

- New hedge
- 6m margin
- Wildlife strip
- Beetle bank
- Pollen and nectar strip
- Seed mix for birds
- Meadow re-creation (mown waste land regeneration)
- Small spinney (most oak, ash)



- Established hedge
- Established Woodland
- Nature Reserve
- AREA SURVEYED FOR COMMON BIRDS CENSUS