

NEW MILTON TOWN COUNCIL

BARTON COMMON SITE OF IMPORTANCE FOR NATURE CONSERVATION

COMMON BIRD CENSUS
2024

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 Management Plan and Common Bird Census (CBC) reports for 2022 and 2023.

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

Eight visits were made in 2024. On each visit the time spent on-site and conditions encountered are noted and these are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Date	Time	Weather		Notes
		Temp (°C)	Wind	
11 Mar	06.50-07.30	8	N 0-1	Drizzle
21 Mar	06.40-07.50	8	0	Mist
2 Apr	06.40-08.10	8	SW 2	Clear
13 Apr	06.35-07.50	12	SW 1-2	Overcast
22 Apr	06.25-07.55	5	NE 1-2	Overcast
7 May	06.20-07.50	9	W 1-2	Clear
14 May	06.15-07.45	12	SE 3	Cloudy
23 May	06.30-07.45	13	NW 3	Cloudy

4. RESULTS

4.1 BREEDING SPECIES PRESENT AND TERRITORIES

Table 2 shows the number of estimated territories in 2024 and for comparison, the previous years.

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	Territories 2024
Woodpigeon*	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	7 (8)	6	6
Great Spotted Woodpecker*	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	1 (2)	1 (2)	2
Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	1	1	1
Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	3	3 (4)	2
Carrion Crow*	<i>Corvus corone</i>	4	4	1
Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	5	7 (8)	6
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	4 (6)	3 (4)	6
Long-tailed Tit*	<i>Aegithalus caudatus</i>	1	2	3
Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collibita</i>	4	5	8
Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	4 (5)	3	2
Whitethroat	<i>Corucca communis</i>	1 (2)	1 (2)	1
Dartford Warbler	<i>Corruca undata</i>			1(2)
Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	12 (13)	12	13
Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	1		1
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	6 (7)	8 (9)	3
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	2 (3)	1	1
Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	12	12	10
Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	2 (3)		1
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	1 (2)	1	
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	7 (8)	7	9
Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	5 (6)	5	4
Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	1		
Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	3 (4)	3	6
Linnet	<i>Linnaria cannabina</i>	2		1
Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	5 (6)	1 (2)	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 2024

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
Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	One pair 13 Apr
Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Seen hunting and with prey
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	Several birds singing in May
Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Family parties feeding 22 April
Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	Male calling 22 April

5. COMMENTS

The results of the CBC should be taken as a guide; an approximation of the number of territories. This is the third 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 and 2023, 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. For migrants, conditions along their migration routes also play a part. Increased footfall and dog walking increased significantly during the Coronavirus pandemic and this has continued throughout the 2024 survey period. Consequently, for many years no ground-nesting birds have been recorded holding territory on Barton Common. However, in June 2023 and again in 2024, after the census period ended, Nightjar were recorded, with at least one male making the characteristic "churring" call. It is encouraging to hear these birds on-site, but 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.

Also on a positive note, there has been a pair (possibly two) of Dartford Warbler establish a territory. This species regularly overwinters on the site and in the vicinity, but this is the first time for many years that singing males have been recorded during the breeding season. Some sections of gorse are now at the growth stage that this species is known to prefer. Also encouraging was the return of Linnet and Stonechat, and numbers of Chiffchaff holding territory increased from five in 2023 to eight in 2024.

It is slightly disturbing to note that the number of Blackbirds holding territory has gone down by half. 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. Only one pair of the former, and surprisingly (with the UK population in decline) Greenfinch territories doubled over 2023 results.

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. Maintaining open areas in the grassland margins and scrub by management on rotation, will increase the proportion of non-woody vegetation, flowering plants that attract more invertebrates and therefore a greater amount of available food for birds and other animal groups higher up the food-chain. 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. In 2024 there was a “fall” of Willow Warblers for a two-week period in May. It appeared that they all moved-on elsewhere to breed before the end of the month.

The transect route taken for recording territories remained the same as in previous years. A plan of the route is shown in the 2023 report.

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