

BTO/JNCC/RSPB BREEDING BIRD SURVEY DETECTION TYPE



Thank you for taking the time to look at this sheet. The recording of 'Detection Type', whether a bird was first detected by Song, Call or Visually, was introduced in 2014 as an optional addition to recording on Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) squares. These data, along with distance band recording, will help us to calculate differences in detectability between males and females, and birds that are seen or heard, in turn, allowing better estimates of bird populations.

This is an optional addition to the standard BBS recording and already, has had excellent uptake. Now we would like to give everybody who is interested in recording detection type, or already doing so, the chance to practise this element of the survey. The scenarios are below, and answers on the reverse of this page. We do not need to see the result(!), this is just for you to use, if you wish, to hone your skills, see what recording detection type involves or double check you are recording detection type correctly.

RECORDING DETECTION TYPE – QUESTIONS

Tip: recording how your attention was **first** drawn to the bird. This is not a measure of breeding or identification status.

1. I hear an alarm call in a hedge which I'm fairly sure is made by a Blackbird; moments later a male Blackbird flies out of the hedge.
2. I see a small bird perched on a bush ahead of me but I cannot identify it because of the angle of the light. Then the bird starts singing and I recognise it as a Robin.
3. A large bird glides overhead and my assumption that it is a Buzzard is confirmed when it calls several times.
4. I hear a woodpecker drumming in a large tree but I am not certain which species it is. After a few minutes I manage to see the bird and confirm that it is a Great Spotted Woodpecker.
5. I hear the loud screech of a Jay behind me and turn around to see the bird flying out of a tree.
6. After turning and seeing the Jay mentioned in the previous question, I notice a second Jay perched in the adjacent tree.
7. I notice a small bird fly to perch on a bush and identify it as a Dunnock. As I am watching through my binoculars, the Dunnock starts to sing.
8. As I am watching the Dunnock mentioned in the previous question, another Dunnock starts to sing from another bush further away.
9. As I am continuing to watch the Dunnocks, my attention is drawn to a bird calling as it flies overhead. I look up and see the bird and based on the call and the size of the bird I decide that it is a Goldfinch.
10. There is a bird singing loudly in a tree some distance ahead of me. I can't quite place the song at first, but when I get nearer and am able to see the bird at the top of the tree, I realise that the bird is a Song Thrush.
11. Walking over a moor, a Snipe is heard drumming overhead, in full display. Eventually I pick it out, silhouetted against the sky.
12. I hear the 'cuckoo' of a male Cuckoo. I never see the bird.
13. I see a Swift over the houses; it then 'screams' as it passes by.
14. My attention is drawn to a Curlew as it makes some noise during a display flight. I then see it.

RECORDING DETECTION TYPE – ANSWERS

1. **Call.** The Blackbird called first, and was then seen.
2. **Visual.** The Robin was identified by song, but first detected visually.
3. **Visual.** Again, the Buzzard was first noticed by sight then later identified by call.
4. **Call.** Woodpeckers are tricky. Drumming is recorded as a call, which is what the observer first picked up on. More on this in the 'Hints & Tips' below.
5. **Call.** The screech was heard, and then the Jay was seen.
6. **Visual.** This second Jay was first seen.
7. **Visual.** As with answers 2 and 3, the Dunnock was seen first, then started to sing.
8. **Song.** The second Dunnock was heard singing first.
9. **Call.** The quote 'My attention is drawn to a bird calling' is all you need to know here! The Goldfinch was detected by call as it flew over, then identified.
10. **Song.** Again, regardless of the species, we know it was first detected by song, then later seen and identified by sight as a Song Thrush.
11. **Song.** This is a 'non-vocal' sound we class as a song because only the male Snipe makes the noise.
12. **Song.** As with answer 11, this is a noise made by the male Cuckoo, even though it may not sound like a 'typical' bird song.
13. **Visual.** The Swift is first seen, then 'screams'. If it were the other way around, the scream of a Swift being heard first, then the bird seen, it would be recorded as a call.
14. **Song.** As with the Snipe in answer 11, this is a male sound and therefore classed as a song.

HINTS AND TIPS

- For the purposes of recording detection, **a song is normally made only by males, while a call is made by both sexes.**
- Non-passerine 'songs' that you may hear include the 'crow' of a Pheasant, cooing or purring of pigeons or doves, the 'cuckoo' of a male Cuckoo, displaying grouse, and display flights by breeding waders including Curlew, Lapwing, Dunlin and Redshank.
- Most sounds made by corvids (crow family) are calls. Swift screams and Green Woodpecker 'yaffles' are calls. While the males of some ducks make different sounds to the females, these should be recorded as calls.
- Non-vocal noises: Woodpigeon wing clattering and woodpecker drumming should be recorded as calls, as with most other non-vocal noises. The exception is drumming Snipe, which should be recorded as detected by song.
- Some songbirds have songs that are simple or rarely heard, e.g. Long-tailed Tit, Bullfinch, House Sparrow and Nuthatch.
- If in doubt, consult a reference (e.g. Collins Bird Guide or Birds of the Western Palearctic) to see if the sound you heard is defined as call or song. The library of songs and calls at www.xeno-canto.org may also be useful. If still in doubt, record as call.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Read more on recording detection type at www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/bbs/taking-part/survey-methods/recording-detection

The above web page also has a 'list of which species produce songs and calls' you can download. The link to this list can be found in the last bullet point on the BBS 'Recording Detection' web page.

With thanks to Helen Crabtree (BTO Regional Representative for Sussex) for the inspiration behind this idea and supplying many of the scenarios in this quiz.

