



BTO Research Report No. 430a

**Westfield Farm, Cambridgeshire (Plot 1572)
The Countryside Restoration Trust
Report on Breeding Birds 2004**

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CONTENTS

1.	INTRODUCTION	3
2.	METHODS	3
3.	RESULTS	3
3.1	Waterbirds.....	3
3.2	Diurnal Birds of Prey	3
3.3	Gamebirds	4
3.4	Waders and Gulls.....	4
3.5	Doves	4
3.6	Cuckoo to Wagtails.....	4
3.7	Thrushes and Allied Species	4
3.8	Warblers	5
3.9	Tits.....	5
3.10	Corvids.....	5
3.11	Starling, Sparrows and Finches.....	5
3.12	Buntings	5
4.	DISCUSSION	6
5.	References.....	7

TABLES

Table 1.	Numbers of breeding territories on Westfield Farm in 2002, 2003 & 2004	8
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APPENDICES

I	CBC Master Sheet	11
II	Habitat Sheet	12
III	Habitat Map	13

1. INTRODUCTION

This was the third 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 the first year of management practices (Carter & Glue 2005).

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. There was also internal hedge planting, the sowing of a pollen and nectar strip and a beetle bank. Cropping in 2004 was winter wheat, spring barley, spring oilseed rape and winter beans. Further hedge planting was carried out along the eastern edge of the plot in February 2004. In addition, a small patch of triticale and quinoa was again sown in the southwest corner and the area near the stream entered the second year of a meadow recreation scheme. A small spinney of oak and ash was planted in the northwest corner of the plot.

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 mid-March and the end of June, including one evening visit in late May to detect crepuscular species. Coverage was excellent, with over 20 hours of observations, compared with 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 50 in 2003 and 47 species in 2002 (Table 1). This included 33 species that were considered to be holding territory, compared with 32 in 2003 and 27 in 2002. Some interesting species and species of conservation importance occurred including: Grey Partridge, Skylark, Linnet, Bullfinch and three species of Bunting (Table 1). Two red-listed species, that had been recorded in 2003 were, however, lost: Lapwing (non-territory holding) and Turtle Dove (one territory) (Table 1).

3.1 Waterbirds

One Cormorant (amber-listed) was observed as a flyover on one occasion while a Grey Heron flew over on three occasions (with one landing at the edge of the winter wheat field). One Canada Goose (not noted in 2002) landed in the spring barley field in early May. As in previous years, none of these species were considered to be holding territory on the farm. The two Mallard territories and the three Moorhen territories recorded in 2002 and 2003 were maintained in 2004. Not surprisingly all were centred on the meadows area, near the stream, in the south of the plot.

3.2 Diurnal Birds of Prey

No Buzzards were recorded in 2004 (seen once in 2002 but not in 2003) but Sparrowhawks were seen on two visits but were not considered to be holding territory. Kestrel (amber-listed) was not recorded at all in contrast to the one territory in 2003. Hobby was again recorded once, being sighted in the far northwest corner.

3.3 Gamebirds

As with Lark Rise Farm, gamebirds were relatively numerous on the farm. There were estimated to be four territories of Red-legged Partridge, an increase of one from 2002 and 2003. As in previous years no young birds were seen during CBC visits but pairs of birds were seen on several occasions. Only one pair of Grey Partridge (red-listed) was considered to be holding territory, the same as in 2003, which stretched from the meadowland to the spring rape. No young birds were seen during CBC visits, as in 2003 but in contrast to 2002 when on one occasion 10 young were seen near the southern edge. Pheasant, with 12 territories, an increase from seven in 2003, was the most numerous gamebird. They were observed across the farm, but were especially concentrated on the meadowland. No young were observed during CBC visits.

3.4 Waders and Gulls

Golden Plover, a new CBC species for the plot, was observed on two occasions; two birds in the spring rape in late April and nine birds as a flyover in late March. As said above, no Lapwings were recorded during the CBC visits in 2004. One Black-headed Gull (another new CBC species for the plot) was a flyover in late March and Lesser Black-backed Gulls were recorded on two occasions in April.

3.5 Doves

Stock Dove (amber-listed) had five territories, the same as in 2003. Two territories were centred on the winter beans, one in the oilseed rape, one in the spring barley and the final one in the southeast corner. The eleven Wood Pigeon territories, the same as in 2003, were spread over the whole area but were concentrated on the meadowland. As in 2002 and 2003 no nests were located and some large, non-territorial flocks were also seen. Worryingly no Turtle Doves were recorded in 2004. Feral Pigeons were present on one occasion in the northeast corner. Collared Dove was also present, for the first time as a CBC species.

3.6 Cuckoo to Wagtails

One Cuckoo was heard calling in early May but was not considered to be holding territory. The aerial feeding Swift was only recorded as flyovers with no suitable nesting sites nearby. Swallow (amber-listed) was considered to be holding one territory in the northeast corner. Kingfisher (amber-listed) was not recorded in 2004. Green Woodpecker (amber-listed) had two territories, an increase of one over 2002 and 2003, both located along the stream. Great Spotted Woodpecker, recorded for the first time in 2003, was again considered to be holding one territory, and as with Green Woodpecker, in the stream area. Skylark (red-listed), with 24 territories, was the most numerous species and showed a large increase compared with 2002 (12 territories) and 2003 (17 territories). The territories were scattered over the whole arable area. Crop diversification has obviously benefited this species. No Meadow Pipits (amber-listed) were observed in 2004 although it had held two territories in 2003. Yellow Wagtails (amber-listed) were observed on two occasions in 2004 but were not considered to be holding territory, compared with one territory in 2002 and 2003. Pied Wagtail was only observed, as a flyover, during the last visit in late June.

3.7 Thrushes and Allied Species

Wren, with eight territories, one down from 2003, was the seventh most numerous species. All of these territories were found along the southern edge near the brook. Dunnock (amber-listed) held only one territory, compared with three in 2002 but the same as in 2003. This was located along the brook. Robin held only one territory, a dramatic decline from eight in the previous two years. Most of the observations were along the stream, where the habitat has not changed. The decline is inexplicable as Robin populations showed only a small, non-significant decline in England between 2003 and 2004 and populations actually rose at the nearby Lark Rise Farm site (Carter 2006b). One Wheatear, a new CBC species for the plot, was seen in early May.

The seven Blackbird territories were again found mostly in the stream area. This compares with 10 territories in 2003 but only five in 2002. Song Thrush (red-listed) was lost as a species considered to be holding territory, although it was singing on three occasions, during two visits. All the observations were in the meadowland, near to the stream. Two flocks of Fieldfare were flushed from the meadow area during the first visit in late March.

3.8 Warblers

Six species of warbler: Sedge and Willow (amber-listed) Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Whitethroat, Blackcap and Chiffchaff were recorded as holding territory in 2004 (Table 1). Whitethroat, with 11 territories, compared with eight in 2003 and 10 in 2002, was the commonest warbler. All territories were along the edges of the plot, especially around the stream area. Blackcap, with five territories, was the second commonest warbler, with the territories concentrated in the stream area. The other four species all held one territory each. Sedge and Willow Warbler and Lesser Whitethroat were considered to be holding territory for the first time; the former two species along the stream, the last in the extreme northeast corner. Chiffchaff maintained its single territory, as in the previous two years, along the stream. No Garden Warblers were recorded in 2004, in contrast to the one observation in 2003, although Goldcrest was recorded as a CBC species for the first time.

3.9 Tits

The three Blue Tit territories, down from four in 2003, were located in the stream area, although there were sightings elsewhere. Great Tit again increased its number of territories up from one in 2002 and two in 2003 to three territories, all along the stream, although, as with Blue Tit, there were sightings elsewhere. In contrast to 2002 but as in 2003, no young birds were seen. One Long-tailed Tit territory was confirmed, as in 2003, along the stream area.

3.10 Corvids

All the expected corvid species were recorded in 2004. Rook and Jackdaw were not considered to be holding territory. Jay and Magpie were both considered to be holding one territory each, with observations of the former scattered over the plot and of the latter in the meadow area. Carrion Crow, like Wood Pigeon, is a difficult species to census other than through counting its nests. No nests were recorded in 2004 but its population appeared to increase from seven territories in 2003 to 13 in 2004. These were scattered all over the plot. This is a species that is benefiting from crop diversification and habitat management.

3.11 Starling, Sparrows and Finches

Starling (red-listed) was present on six visits in the northeast corner and was seen carrying food near to the buildings. It was considered to be holding one territory (the first time). As in 2003, 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 13 territories, with the majority of them along the southern boundary, as in previous years. The rest of the territories were along the edges of the plot. Greenfinch, which had been present in 2002 but was not observed in 2003, held one territory with records spread out across the north of the plot. Goldfinch was present but not considered to be holding territory. Bullfinch (red-listed) was also not deemed to be holding territory, although a pair was seen on one visit. Linnet, with three territories, down from five in 2003, seems to be in steady decline on the farm. The territories were mostly centred on the oilseed rape and bean fields.

3.12 Buntings

The three bunting species had poor fortunes on the farm in 2004. After the good showing in 2003 with two territories, Corn Bunting (red-listed), was seen but was not considered to be holding a territory. Yellowhammer (red-listed), with five territories, especially near the bean field, down from six in 2003 and seven in 2002, was the commonest bunting. Reed Bunting (red-listed) maintained its one territory

in 2004 but this contrasts with five in 2002. The single territory was in the spring barley field with scattered records from elsewhere.

4. DISCUSSION

Nine red-listed species were present on the farm during the breeding season in 2004. No species were gained and one species was lost (Turtle Dove) compared with 2003. Of those species present in 2003 and 2004, four declined (Linnet, Yellowhammer, Song Thrush and Corn Bunting, with the former two species also having declined between 2002 and 2003) three remained stable (Bullfinch, Grey Partridge and Reed Bunting) and two increased (Skylark and Starling, the former species having also increased between 2002 and 2003). The English trends for all these species were stable between 2003 and 2004 (Raven *et al.* 2005). The doubling of Skylark between 2002 and 2004 is the most significant change that might be accounted for by the habitat management changes at the site.

Twelve amber-listed species, including two gull species, were present on the farm in 2004 compared with 14 in 2003. Only one of the four species gained however were considered to be holding territory (Willow Warbler, although it had been present in 2002). Of the eight species that were present in both years; one declined (Yellow Wagtail), five were stable (Cormorant, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Stock Dove, Dunnock and Fieldfare) and two increased (Green Woodpecker and Swallow). Six species were lost: Kestrel; Lapwing; Common Gull; Kingfisher; Sand Martin; and Meadow Pipit. The losses of Kestrel and Meadow Pipit are particularly worrying. As with the red-listed species, the English trends for the eight potential breeding species (*i.e.* excluding Cormorant, Black-headed Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull and Fieldfare) were all stable (Raven *et al.* 2005).

Six out of 22 species, of the non-listed species holding territory, were stable, in line with trends in England, although Chiffchaff increased significantly by 17%, in England between 2003 and 2004 (Raven *et al.* 2005). Of the eight species that increased on the farm (Red-legged Partridge, Pheasant, Whitethroat, Great Tit, Jay, Carrion Crow and Chaffinch) most showed stable populations in England, although Whitethroat (22%) and Blackcap (20%) both increased significantly. There were four new species (Sedge Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Magpie and Greenfinch) compared with 2003 (although all had been present in 2002); these all showed stable English populations. Four species declined: Wren (declined in England by 10%); Robin; Blackbird; and Blue Tit.

Overall the number of species holding territory increased from 32 to 33 species. This increase of one hides more dramatic changes. Three species were lost completely (Kestrel, Turtle Dove and Meadow Pipit) and four others (Yellow Wagtail, Song Thrush, Goldfinch and Corn Bunting) were only present during the census and were not considered to be holding territory. Eight species (Swallow, Sedge Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Willow Warbler, Jay, Magpie, Starling and Greenfinch) were gained as territory-holding species, although three of these (Swallow, Jay and Starling) had been present in 2003. As in 2002 and 2003, 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.

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

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

Species	2002	2003	2004
Jay	1	Present	1
Magpie	Present	-	1
Jackdaw	Present	Present	Present
Rook	Present	-	Present
Carrion Crow	4	7	13
Starling	-	Present	1
House Sparrow	Present	-	-
Chaffinch	10	10	13
Greenfinch	Present	-	1
Goldfinch	Present	1	Present
Linnet	6	5	3
Bullfinch	Present	Present	Present
Yellowhammer	7	6	5
Reed Bunting	5	1	1
Corn Bunting	Present	2	Present
Total No Territories	122	154	149
Total No Species	47	50	56
Number Territory Holding Species	27	32	33