

Steyning Downland Scheme Bird Survey Report 2017.

Introduction and method

Bird Surveys have been conducted on Steyning Downland Scheme since 2012. In recent years they have been held monthly throughout the year, on the second Sunday in the month starting some time after dawn. Surveys cover two routes. Route 1 is along Nightingale Lane, taking in the Upper pond, the Big Picnic Field and the South Side of the Rifle Range. Route 2 covers the North side of the Rifle Range, Steyning Coombe and the Lower Horseshoe. A third route taking in part of the Pepperscoombe area has not been followed in recent years. Participants are mostly experienced birders (though volunteers of all abilities are welcome to take part). They form themselves into two groups and follow the routes at a slow pace, taking about two hours to complete the survey, noting all the birds they see and hear.

In 2017, for the first time, the Pepperscoombe area, including the Secret Garden, was surveyed as a separate exercise. Surveys were conducted in April, May and June to cover the breeding season and two more were planned for August and September to assess the possibility of the area's use by passage migrants.

All species seen and heard are recorded and results are entered into Birdtrack, the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) national database. Casual records of species of interest are also entered into Birdtrack.

Results

In 2017, surveys were conducted in all months except December when the survey was cancelled because of bad weather. There were 679 records of a total of 72 species, the second highest number of records and the highest number of species since surveying began. The total number of species recorded in Steyning Downland Scheme since 2013 now stands at 93. Table 1 shows the records for all years 2012 to 2017 in order of frequency (most sightings first). Table 2 shows the results of the Pepperscoombe breeding season surveys. The August survey was called off because of rain and on the September Pepperscoombe survey it was very windy with few species putting in an appearance.

"Number of Records" is the number of times the species was noted on the site, not the number of individual birds seen.

Table 1. Species recorded	No. of records in year						Total All Years
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	
Total number of records	635	689	457	601	548	679	3441
Total number of Species	63	68	61	64	65	72	92
Blackbird	30	34	21	29	24	29	167
Woodpigeon	28	30	22	30	25	29	164
Blue Tit	26	32	22	26	23	25	154
Carrion Crow	29	28	21	26	23	27	154
Robin	27	29	23	25	23	27	154
Magpie	24	29	23	23	23	27	149
Wren	27	27	20	28	21	20	143
Great Tit	27	26	20	25	19	24	141
Chaffinch	24	25	16	19	15	20	119
Dunnock	19	21	16	18	20	21	115
Chiffchaff	22	23	14	17	12	21	109
Song Thrush	18	19	12	21	20	19	109
Green Woodpecker	22	22	15	11	14	18	102
Goldfinch	15	15	12	18	15	25	100
Great Spotted Woodpecker	16	19	10	11	18	24	98
Yellowhammer	18	11	12	19	14	16	90
Blackcap	19	9	9	12	10	21	80
Long-tailed Tit	14	15	9	10	11	14	73
Greenfinch	12	13	7	9	16	15	72
Whitethroat	11	9	9	13	10	16	68
Jackdaw	13	12	11	9	8	14	67
Moorhen	6	19	6	15	11	9	66
Goldcrest	10	9	5	13	10	15	62
Jay	12	12	1	14	11	10	60
Stock Dove	7	10	5	11	12	15	60
Herring Gull	13	5	8	5	8	7	46
Linnet	3	4	10	9	9	11	46
Buzzard	4	7	5	8	9	12	45
Starling	11	8	3	10	5	7	44
Mallard	7	16	3	7	2	7	42
Pheasant	11	9	4	4	4	10	42
Treecreeper	10	13	8	3	2	5	41
Swallow	10	4	6	9	3	6	38
Kestrel	3	8	3	7	9	7	37
Nuthatch	10	7	4	9	1	5	36
House Sparrow	6	9	6	4	7	1	33

Skylark	13	3	6	3	2	6	33
Nightingale	5	8	5	4	2	7	31
Marsh Tit	9	7	3	1	3	7	30
Sparrowhawk	4	7	1	5	7	3	27
Teal	1	12	1	9		3	26
Coot	3	10	1	5	2	4	25
Bullfinch	2	4	3	5	5	5	24
Rook	4	5	2	3	4	4	22
Mistle Thrush	1	1	1	6	7	5	21
Coal Tit	1	7	2	3	3	3	19
Meadow Pipit	2	3	5	3	4	2	19
Swift	4	1	5	2	2	5	19
Cetti's Warbler				6	5	6	17
House Martin	5	3	4	1	2	2	17
Spotted Flycatcher		2	1	1	2	5	11
Willow Warbler	2	2	2		2	3	11
Collared Dove	1	6			1	2	10
Firecrest		1		3	2	4	10
Redwing			2	2	4	1	9
Stonechat			1	1	3	3	8
Black-headed Gull			2	2	3		7
Grey Wagtail			1	1	4	1	7
Fieldfare		1	1		3	1	6
Raven	1			1	3	1	6
Lesser Whitethroat	1		2		1	1	5
Red Kite		1				4	5
Gadwall	1	1			1	1	4
Grey Heron	2	1			1		4
Pied/White Wagtail	1		1	1	1		4
Snipe		4					4
Cormorant			2			1	3
Cuckoo	1	1		1			3
Hobby	1				1	1	3
Kingfisher	1	1		1			3
Redstart		1				2	3
Water Rail		2				1	3
Grey Partridge	2						2
Lapwing		1		1			2
Tawny Owl	1			1			2
Wheatear	1					1	2
Bittern		1					1

Curlew					1		1
Garden Warbler						1	1
Greylag Goose				1			1
Little Egret		1					1
Little Grebe			1				1
Oystercatcher			1				1
Peregrine						1	1
Red -legged Partridge		1					1
Reed Warbler						1	1
Sedge Warbler		1					1
Shoveler		1					1
Siskin				1			1
Tufted Duck	1						1
Wood Warbler						1	1
Yellow Wagtail						1	1

Table 2. Pepperscombe Surveys	2017		
P indicates species present	April	May	June
Blackbird		P	P
Blackcap	P		P
Blue Tit	P		
Bullfinch			P
Carrion Crow	P	P	P
Chaffinch	P	P	P
Chiffchaff	P	P	P
Duncock	P		P
Goldfinch	P	P	P
Great Spotted Woodpecker	P	P	P
Great Tit	P		P
Greenfinch		P	P
Green Woodpecker	P	P	P
Jackdaw		P	P
Linnet	P	P	P
Long-tailed Tit	P	P	P
Magpie		P	P
Nuthatch			P
Pheasant		P	P
Robin	P	P	P
Rook		P	
Skylark	P	P	P
Stock Dove	P	P	P
Swallow		P	
Swift			P
Whitethroat	P	P	P
Woodpigeon	P	P	P
Wren	P		P
Yellowhammer	P	P	P
Number of Species	19	21	26

Discussion

The total number of species recorded since the surveys started has now reached 93. Of these, at least twelve can be considered as ‘accidental’, just passing through without making use of the habitat. In most cases these have been recorded as casuals, rather than on surveys. Birders like to build up a good, long list.

The range of habitats on Steyning Downland Scheme offer potential for a wide range of species and of the total number, 49 have been recorded at least once every year, and of those, 25 species have been

recorded on average 10 times every year and fourteen more have been recorded on average five times every year. The combination of woodland, scrub, grassland and 'edge' habitats, account for the presence of 24 of the top 25 species.

We have occasional reports of nests and juvenile birds, but little definite evidence of breeding, but it is likely that a large proportion of the 49 'regular' species breed in or near the site. Most of these species are regarded as UK residents (though immigrant individuals may appear at various times of the year). Summer visitors include: Whitethroat, Blackcap, Chiffchaff (some of these may have overwintered), and Willow Warbler.

Winter visitor species: Redwing and Fieldfare have been recorded every year since all-year-round surveys began. The only passage migrant species recorded regularly is Spotted Flycatcher, which has been seen in every year in late summer since 2013.

Nightingales make use of the dense scrub and woodland surrounding the Lower Pond and bordering the track that has now given them its name – Nightingale Lane. In 2017 there were up to three singing males present. They were joined in 2015 by Cetti's Warbler which also prefer this type of habitat and in 2017 there may also have been as many as three singing males present. Water Rail also make use of this habitat and were recorded again in 2017. Mallard, Coot and Moorhen make use of the ponds all year, while a small flock of Teal and an occasional Gadwall have also been reported on the Lower Pond at various times in winter.

Buzzards, Kestrels and Sparrowhawks are recorded quite frequently, Red Kites increasingly and there have been two records of Hobby and one of Peregrine. Tawny Owls have been noted on two occasions, but our survey times are unlikely to reflect the number present.

Great-spotted and Green Woodpeckers are high on the list of frequently recorded species with the latter making good use of the large numbers of ant hills on the site. Treecreeper and Nuthatch are also present in the woodland areas, but numbers seem to have declined somewhat.

The breeding season Pepperscombe surveys identified a total of 29 species. The survey route included the Secret Garden where very few birds were seen. Most records were on the open slopes and among the scrub on the hillside.

Conclusion

The surveys have shown the great range and diversity of bird life that makes use of Steyning Downland Scheme. The variety of habitats available on the site provide feeding, nesting, cover and roosting opportunities for a significant number of species. The data that has been accumulated over the last six years will hopefully enable us to monitor the effect of management of the site and any other changes (e.g. Ash dieback) may have on bird populations and use of the site in the future.

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