

West Oxford Ornithological Surveys

Over some six visits to the site between April 2002 and February 2003 some 50 species of bird were recorded. In addition, two species of owl were noted at other times. A total of 52 species is a respectable number considering the limited habitat on offer. This figure will provide a useful baseline on which to add further species in the future.

Breeding species totalled 21 with a further six probable breeders and four possible. All the definite breeders were established either in scrub or tree lines around the periphery of the site and along the Seacourt Stream. None were found on the meadow grassland with the surprising absence of breeding skylarks. However, this species is experiencing a nationwide decline and the situation at North Hinksey meadow may be simply a reflection of this. But it is worth noting, that skylarks still breed in reasonable numbers in similarly managed fields less than a kilometre to the south.



Figure 14: Grey heron



Figure 15: Great spotted woodpecker

The Seacourt Stream offers a riverine aspect to the western boundary of the site. Yet here were no breeding sedge warblers or reed buntings. The primary reason for this would seem to be the lack of suitable nesting cover due to the cutting of the grassland in late summer except for a narrow strip beside the bankside willows.

This could be easily rectified by leaving a wider margin of perhaps 10 – 15 metres of uncut grass, which would persist through the winter into the following spring. Similarly, the same policy could be adopted to the relatively small area of land within the old meander. Song perches could be provided by planting a few damp-loving species of shrub – notably willow and osier. These species are closely associated with water meadow habitats elsewhere. With the recent deepening of the old meander, it may now be wet enough to support a few stretches of *Phragmites* reed, which would in turn invite the reed warbler to remain and breed. The reeds could be hand planted by volunteers to speed up the process of natural colonisation.

Such limited changes of management to a relatively small area of the meadow would benefit the bird life and improve the general bio-diversity of the site while the majority of the meadow would continue under the present policy of late summer hay cut/light grazing which is so important to many of the indigenous meadow plants.

Finally, I hasten to add that such limited changes to the general management of the site are not intended to be a plan of instruction to the owners and trustees.

Mike Bayliss, Oxford
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Table 3: Bird species observed in West Oxford surveys

The following abbreviations describe each species status at the site.

RS = Resident	U = Uncommon
RG = Regular	VR = Very Rare
SV = Summer Visitor	R = Rare
WV = Winter Visitor	X = Proved Breeding
PM = Passage Migrant	* = Probable Breeding
O = Occasional?	B = Breeding Uncertain

Species		Status	Remarks
Scientific name	Common name		
(<i>Ardea cinerea</i>)	Grey Heron	RG	May be seen by waterside and on grassland at any time of year.
(<i>Cygnus olor</i>)	Mute Swan	RSX	Breeds on Seacourt Stream.
(<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>)	Mallard	RSX	Crowns of waterside willows common nesting site.
(<i>Accipiter nisus</i>)	Sparrowhawk	RG	May be seen dashing along perimeter hedgerows.
(<i>Falco subbuteo</i>)	Hobby	USV	In summer may be seen overhead hawking for dragonflies and martins.
(<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>)	Kestrel	RG	Hovers over grassland in search of voles and mice.
(<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>)	Pheasant	RS*	Present in areas of scrub.
(<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>)	Moorhen	RSX	Breeds along Seacourt Stream.
(<i>Fulica atra</i>)	Coot	RSX	A few pairs along Seacourt Stream.
(<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>)	Common Snipe	UWV	The wetter areas of grassland and the meander best spots.
(<i>Larus sabini</i>)	Black-headed Gull	OWV	Sometimes small groups gather on grassland.
(<i>Columba palumbus</i>)	Wood pigeon	RSX	Nests in bushes and trees around site.
(<i>Cuculus canorus</i>)	Cuckoo	OSV	The only host species present is likely to be the dunnock.
(<i>Tyto alba</i>)	Barn Owl	RV	One heard calling in the early hours of January 24, 2003.
(<i>Strix aluco</i>)	Tawny Owl	RG-?B	Reports of birds calling in the area.
(<i>Alcedo atthis</i>)	Kingfisher	RG	Frequently seen along Seacourt Stream.
(<i>Picus viridis</i>)	Green Woodpecker	RG-?B	Look for in mature trees.
(<i>Dendropopos major</i>)	Great Spotted Woodpecker	RG-?B	Possibly breeds in perimeter willows.
(<i>Alauda arvensis</i>)	Skylark	RG -?B	One or two pairs may nest on grassland.
(<i>Apus apus</i>)	Swift	SV	Seen hawking for aerial insects overhead.
(<i>Hirundo rustica</i>)	Swallow	SV	Feeds low over grassland.
(<i>Delichon urbica</i>)	House Martin	SV	Feeds on aerial insects.
(<i>Anthus pratensis</i>)	Meadow Pipit	WV	Small parties on grassland.
(<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>)	Grey Wagtail	UV	Seacourt Stream most likely spot.

<i>(Motacilla alba)</i>	Pied Wagtail	RG	Ones or twos may frequent the open grassland.
<i>(Troglodytes troglodytes)</i>	Wren	RSX	Frequents trees and scrub.
<i>(Prunella modularis)</i>	Dunnock	RSX	Commonly seen in bushy areas.
<i>(Erithacus rubecula)</i>	Robin	RSX	Everywhere where there are trees and bushes.
<i>(Turdus pilaris)</i>	Fieldfare	WV	Feeds in hawthorns and open grassland.
<i>(Turdus merula)</i>	Blackbird	RSX	Commonly seen in trees and scrub.
<i>(Turdus philomelos)</i>	Song Thrush	RSX	Less common than previous species.
<i>(Turdus iliacus)</i>	Redwing	WV	Flocks feed in bushes and on open grassland.
<i>(Turdus viscivorus)</i>	Mistle Thrush	RSX	Frequents tall timber in perimeter hedgerows and feeds on open grassland.
<i>(Sylvia communis)</i>	Whitethroat	SVX	One or two pairs breed in perimeter scrub.
<i>(Sylvia borin)</i>	Garden Warbler	SV-?B	A male singing in June 2002.
<i>(Sylvia atticapilla)</i>	Blackcap	SVX	A few pairs in scrub.
<i>(Phylloscopus collybita)</i>	Chiff Chaff	SVX	Two pairs May/June 2002.
<i>(Phylloscopus trochilus)</i>	Willow Warbler	SVX	A pair or two in bushy areas.
<i>(Aegithys caudatus)</i>	Long-tailed Tit	RSX	Confined to trees and bushes.
<i>(Parus caeruleus)</i>	Blue Tit	RSX	Common in perimeter hedgerows.
<i>(Parus major)</i>	Great Tit	RSX	Same as previous species.
<i>(Cathia familiaris)</i>	Tree Creeper	RS*	Preference for old willow trees.
<i>(Garrulus glandarius)</i>	Jay	RG	Increasing in suburban areas.
<i>(Pica pica)</i>	Magpie	RSX	Sometimes form small flocks.
<i>(Corvus monedula)</i>	Jackdaw	RG	May appear anytime.
<i>(Corvus corone)</i>	Carrion Crow	RSX	Breeds in tallest trees.
<i>(Sturnus vulgaris)</i>	Starling	RG*	Possibly breeds in tree holes.
<i>(Passer domesticus)</i>	House Sparrow	RG	Regular visits from nearby urban areas.
<i>(Fringilla coelebs)</i>	Chaffinch	RGX	One of the commonest of breeders.
<i>(Pyrrhula pyrrhula)</i>	Bullfinch	RG*	Suitable breeding habitat exists around perimeter of site.
<i>(Carduelis chloris)</i>	Greenfinch	RG*	Prefers bushy areas.
<i>(Carduelis carduelis)</i>	Goldfinch	RG*	Probably breeds in perimeter bushes and trees.