

Greenham & Crookham Commons

Common bird census Spring 2009

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Introduction

At the southern edge of what is now West Berkshire lays an expanse of largely open habitats fringed with mixed woodlands. Two areas of adjacent common land form the region, with Greenham Common covering the western side and Crookham Common the east. The commons have a long association with human activity, as revealed by the oldest man made artefact recovered from the site, which dates back to at least 50,000 BC.

Formerly known as Greenham and Crookham heaths, the commons were, as the names suggest, predominately lowland heath, a habitat that has dramatically disappeared in Britain in the last two hundred years. The loss of this particular habitat on the commons had probably been taking place over many decades, but the conversion of much of the region to a military airbase in the 1940's possibly caused the most severe reduction. During the 50 years or so of military occupancy, small remnants of heathland remained at the extreme western and southwestern edges of Greenham Common and in a small area of Crookham Common beside Thornton Road. The wooded areas of the commons remained intact and inside the airbase, there were areas of grassland and scrubland.

Parts of the commons have been afforded special protection by English Nature since 1994, as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Under the Greenham and Crookham Commons Act of Parliament 2002, the return and restoration of the commons to common land included directives that nature conservation on the site should be granted primary consideration, with recreational activities taking a secondary role.

In 2008, the commons were included within a new and visionary conservation project called the West Berkshire Living landscape, which is overseen by West Berkshire Council (WBC) and Berks Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT). The project area contains a mosaic of important habitats covering some 2,600 ha. and aside from the commons, includes Bowdown and Baines woodlands (BBOWT Reserve) immediately to the north and Thatcham reed beds and wetlands (WBC Reserve) beyond that.

Habitat

Greenham and Crookham commons covers an area of approximately 512 ha. including 380 ha of heathland and grasslands that are grazed by Commoners' cattle and a small herd of Exmoor ponies. The extent of heathland is relatively small, some 80 ha. or so, but the grasslands are rich and varied, and include acid, neutral and calcareous grasslands. The commons also contain scrublands, semi natural ancient woodlands, secondary growth woodlands, open gravel areas with encroaching ground vegetation and small lakes and ponds. Old military buildings are dotted throughout the commons, a large business park of industrial buildings runs east-west along the southern half of the area and the whole site is surrounded by suburban gardens.

Running east – west through the centre of the commons lies a broad band of restored heath (see below) and dense gorses (Common Gorse *Ulex europaeus* and Dwarf Gorse *Ulex minor*), interspersed with patches of grassland, open gravel areas and seasonal wetlands and ponds. This region is favoured almost exclusively by species such as Skylark, Meadow Pipit, Stonechat and Dartford Warbler. Surrounding this central habit is a wide border of scrubland and grasslands, with several large areas of sparsely vegetated gravel. The scrubland is home to many breeding birds, but is especially important for summer visitors such as Nightingales and Sylvia warblers. The large, seemingly barren gravel areas are vastly important to the site and are not only home to species such as Woodlark, but are the main breeding sites for Lapwing and Ringed and Little Ringed Plover. At the edges of the scrubland/grassland border, lie several areas of established heathland, which traditionally hold summer visitors such as Nightjar and Tree Pipit. Three species of heather, Bell *Erica cinerea*, Crossed-leaved *Erica tetralix* and Common or Ling *Calluna vulgaris* are found on the commons.

Surrounding all of these habitats are the mixed woodlands, dominated by deciduous species such as Common Oak *Quercus robur*, Silver Birch *Betula pendula* and Common Beech *Fagus sylvatica*, which are now largely restricted to the outermost parts of the commons. Many of these woodlands grow on slopes dissected by deep gullies that allow surplus rainwater to form very damp woodland bottoms. Many of the common woodland birds are present in good numbers.

Methods

Surveys on the site were conducted daily between April 1st and 30th May. The entire region was divided into seven subsections, with each subsection being surveyed once each week on a rotational basis. The majority of daily surveys covered a 3 hour period commencing at dawn and were conducted by following fixed transect routes through each subsection, to cover all habitat types. Towards the end of the survey period, a number of 3 hour surveys were conducted at dusk in the open heathlands, in order to record species such as owls, European Nightjar and Woodcock.

During each survey, the position of singing males of all species, assumed to be territory holding birds, were marked on maps by using unique codes (see below). A territory was taken as an area occupied by a singing male or breeding pair, which was defended from intruding birds of the same species. Straight lines were used to indicate the movement of a particular bird whilst under observation and small circles an occupied nest. All maps were supplied by West Berkshire Council and contained details of all compartments on the commons. At the end of the fieldwork, all field maps were examined thoroughly and data for each species transferred to individual species maps. An unbroken line on the maps to outline each territory encompassed groups of sightings of the same individual.

Species codes

K	Kestrel
LRP	Little Ringed Plover
RP	Ringed Plover
L	Northern Lapwing

WC	Woodcock
SD	Stock Dove
WP	Wood Pigeon
CD	Collared Dove
C	Cuckoo
TO	Tawny Owl
NJ	European Nightjar
GRW	Green Woodpecker
GSW	Great Spotted Woodpecker
LSW	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker
WL	Woodlark
SK	Skylark
MP	Meadow Pipit
PW	Pied Wagtail
Wr	Wren
D	Dunnock
R	Robin
Ng	Nightingale
Sc	European Stonechat
B	Blackbird
St	Song Thrush
Mt	Mistle Thrush
Dw	Dartford Warbler
LW	Lesser Whitethroat
Wh	Common Whitethroat
GW	Garden Warbler
BC	Blackcap
CC	Common Chiffchaff
WW	Willow Warbler
GC	Goldcrest
SF	Spotted Flycatcher
LTT	Long-tailed Tit
Mti	Marsh Tit
CT	Coal Tit
BT	Blue Tit
GT	Great Tit
N	Nuthatch
TC	Treecreeper
J	Jay
CF	Chaffinch
GF	Greenfinch
Go	Goldfinch
Li	Linnet
BF	Bullfinch
YH	Yellow Hammer

Introduction to the species accounts

Each species account commences with the common English name, the scientific name and where appropriate, the number of the map on which territories are recorded. The conservation level in the U.K., as recorded in

Birds of conservation concern 3 (2009) is given. Specially protected birds (as designated in Schedule 1 – Part 1 within the Wildlife and countryside Act 1981 and as amended under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000) are also indicated. The general status of each species on Greenham & Crookham commons is given, followed by the results of the 2009 survey. Numbers quoted in the species accounts refer to compartments of the commons as designated by West Berkshire Council. Final comments on the status of selected species in England and the U.K. are given at the end of the relevant accounts.

Species accounts

Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Green listed

Common visitor all year, although generally flying over. Seen throughout the survey period. Not mapped.

Grey heron *Ardea cinerea*

Green listed

Frequent visitor during the survey, usually flying over heading to nearby wetlands but also visiting Crookham Pools (18). Not mapped.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

Amber listed

Occasional visitor. Two feral birds flew over 3E on 30th April. Not mapped.

Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata*

Green listed

Rare visitor. None were recorded on site during the survey, but a pair bred in an owl box in a garden along the southern edge of 4B, raising 11 ducklings. This is the second year running that a pair has bred there. Not mapped.

Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

Amber listed

An uncommon visitor, usually to the Crookham pools (18) in winter. A pair was seen there on 17th May. Not mapped.

Red Kite *Milvus milvus*

Amber listed

Schedule 1

Following the successful reintroduction schemes in the U.K., this species is now a resident bird in the area, which is increasing in numbers. It may only be a matter of time before a pair breeds in one of the wooded sections of the commons.

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

Amber listed

Schedule 1

A rare passage migrant. An adult male crossed the centre of Greenham Common heading north on April 2nd.

Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

Green listed

Resident in small numbers. No nests found but it probably breeds in the woodlands.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

Green listed

Resident and increasing in numbers. Although no nests were found, it has bred in the past and probably still does so. It also breeds in the Bowdown/Baynes Nature Reserve along the northern edge of the commons. This species has experienced an increase in breeding numbers in the U.K. of over 50% during the period 1994 – 2007.

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Amber listed

One to three pairs are resident on the commons, although no nests were found. The most likely areas for breeding are probably in the business park or amongst the old silos.

This species has undergone a 25% - 50% decline in breeding numbers in the U.K. in the period 1994 – 2007.

Peregrine falcon *Falco peregrinus*

Green listed

Schedule 1

Increasing visitor, which may occur in any month. A single bird was seen in 2A on 1st April.

Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Green listed

A common resident. No nests were found but it certainly breeds in the woodlands and in the Bowdown/Baynes Nature Reserve to the north.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

Map 1

Green listed

Schedule 1

A summer visitor, which breeds in very small numbers. Birds began arriving in early April and six territories were occupied during the survey period. Two territories were held on the gravel area close to the fire-plane (16 south), two on the gravel adjacent to the main car park (16 north), one on the gravel by the Crookham pools (18) and one that covered parts of 16 east, 8A and 8B. No nests were found during the survey but chicks were seen in 16 north and 16 south later in the summer. Breeding success at the Crookham pools was not determined.

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

Map1

Amber listed

A summer visitor, which breeds in very small numbers. Birds usually start arriving mid to late March but only two territories appear to have been taken

up in 2009, both on the gravel area close to the fire-plane (16 south).
Breeding was successful in both territories.

European Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*

Amber listed

A reasonably common winter visitor. Lingering birds were seen at Greenham Common throughout early April. Not mapped.

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

Map 1

Red listed

Although birds may be present on site all year round, it is generally commoner during the summer months and has a protracted breeding season. During the survey period only four territories with nests were noted, two on the gravel area close to the fireplane (16 south), one on the gravel adjacent to the main car park (16 north) and one on the gravel by the Crookham pools (18).

Jack Snipe *Lymnocyptes minimus*

Amber listed

An uncommon but regular winter visitor. Singles were present in the marshy area on the southern edge of 12 on 2nd and 9th April. Not mapped.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

Amber listed

An uncommon but regular passage migrant and winter visitor. A single bird was present in the marshy area on the southern edge of 12 on 18th April. Not mapped.

Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*

Map 1

Amber listed

Resident in small numbers but secretive and generally encountered during 'roding' territorial flights at dusk. Probably breeds in the wooded areas along the southern edge of the commons although no nests were found during the survey. 1 – 4 'roding' males were seen in 2A and 2B, 1 – 3 in 3A and 3B, 1 – 2 in 4B and 1 – 2 in 6A.

Curlew *Numenius arquata*

Amber listed

An uncommon passage migrant. One flew southeast over 12 on 18th April. Not mapped.

Redshank *Tringa tetanus*

Map 1

Amber listed

Formerly a common breeding bird, it is now much scarcer with only one or two pairs attempting to nest. During the survey, only one territory was occupied at the Crookham pools (18), but breeding was not proven.

In England, this species has undergone a 25% - 50% decline in breeding numbers during the period 1994 – 2007.

Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Green listed.

An uncommon but regular passage migrant. Four birds flew east over 16 north on 30th May. Not mapped.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

Amber listed

An uncommon but regular passage migrant and winter visitor. A single bird was at the Crookham pools (18) on 3rd April. Not mapped.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

Amber listed

Common visitor at all times of the year, but usually flying over. Several birds were present at the Crookham pools (18) on 28th May. Not mapped.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

Amber listed

Common summer visitor, but usually flying over. Several birds were present at the Crookham pools (18) on 28th May. Not mapped.

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*

Amber listed

Resident in small numbers in woodlands, especially along the southern boundary where it readily occupies nest boxes. Not mapped but a nest was found in 5C.

Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*

Green listed

A very common resident, which breeds in all areas. Not mapped.

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocta*

Green listed

An uncommon resident, which is generally found in gardens along the southern edge of the commons, although birds may be encountered in all habitats. Not mapped.

Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

Red listed

An uncommon summer visitor. Up to seven calling males were located during the survey period, but no females were seen. Not mapped, although generally frequents scrublands and woodland edges.

This species has undergone a 25% - 50% decline in breeding numbers in the U.K. in the period 1994 – 2007.

Little owl *Athene noctua*

Green listed

Rare. No birds were recorded during the survey, but formerly bred in areas such as 16 north.

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*

Green listed

Reasonably common resident in the woodlands. Up to five calling males were heard during the survey and a bird was flushed from a hole in a rotten Silver Birch in 3B on 21st May. Not mapped.

European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*

Map 1

Red listed

An uncommon summer visitor whose numbers are restricted by habitat availability and disturbance from humans, dogs and livestock. Only three territories were located during the survey period, two in 2A and the third in 6A. Numbers were down on previous years with traditional territories in 1C, 3B and 4B apparently vacant during the survey, although a pair were seen in 4B later in the summer.

Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*

Amber listed

A common breeding resident that nests in all wooded areas and may be seen foraging in all habitats. Nest holes were located in many of the woodlands. Not mapped.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopus major*

Green listed

A common breeding resident that nests in all wooded areas. Nest holes were located in many of the woodlands. Not mapped.

This species has experienced an increase in breeding numbers in the U.K. of over 50% during the period 1994 – 2007.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopus minor*

Red listed

Uncommon resident but rarely seen. Only one male was heard 'drumming' during the survey, at the edge of 1D, but this bird apparently moved north of the commons later in the spring. Several others were heard in the woodlands south of the commons during the spring and it also breeds in Bowdown/Baynes Nature Reserve to the north. Old, disused nest holes were found in 5C, 7D and 17D. Not mapped.

Woodlark *Lullula arborea*

Map 2

Amber listed

Schedule 1

Resident in small but stable numbers, although birds may disperse during cold winter spells. Ten territories were held during the survey as follows:- one in 1B/1C; one in the eastern end of 2A; two in 16 south near the fireplane; one in 6A; one in 8A/18 east; one in 8B, one in 16 west and two in 16 north.

Territories appear to be centred on the sparsely vegetated gravel areas and on rough ground with very short heather. No nests were found during the survey, but family parties were seen later in the summer.

Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

Map 3

Red listed

A common resident, although numbers are higher during the breeding season. Thirty-two territories were occupied during the survey period, all of

which were along the central strip of gorse, heath and open gravel areas and at the Crookham pools (18). The map for management compartment 16 gives an overview of territories. Sadly, this ground nesting bird is subject to a great deal of disturbance and all nests found in previous years have failed.

Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Amber listed

Common summer visitor, which almost certainly breeds. Not mapped.

House Martin *Delichon urbica*

Green listed

Common summer visitor, which breeds on old buildings within the business park and on houses along the southern edge of the commons. Not mapped.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*

Red listed

An uncommon passage migrant, which formerly bred in small numbers on the open heathlands. A male passed through 4B, singing occasionally, on 2nd May, but did not stay. Not mapped.

In England, this species has undergone a 25% - 50% decline in breeding numbers during the period 1994 – 2007.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

Map 4

Amber listed

A common resident, although numbers are higher during spring and autumn migration. Twenty-three territories were occupied during the survey period, all of which were along the central strip of gorse and heath. One nest with 4 eggs was found at the western end of 9, but it was predated shortly after the chicks had hatched. The map for management compartment 16 gives an overview of territories. Sadly, this ground nesting bird is subject to a great deal of disturbance and all nests found in previous years have failed.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

Red listed

Uncommon but regular passage migrant. Three males were feeding amongst cattle in 15 west on 22nd April.

Grey wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

Amber listed

Normally associated with rivers, streams and canals, it's status on the commons remains unclear. Not recorded during the survey period, although several pairs are usually present throughout the summer.

Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba*

Map 3

Green listed

Resident in small numbers. Only three territories were located in open areas near buildings, one in 16 south (near fireplane), one along the edge of 5A and one in 16 north, where a pair usually breed in open fronted nestboxes.

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Map 8

Green listed

Abundant resident. Two hundred and eighteen territories were identified with birds occupying most habitats, although largely absent from open gravel areas and much of the heath and gorse along the centre of the commons.

Dunnock *Prunella modularis*

Map 7

Amber listed

Common resident. Numbers were lower than perhaps could be expected, with only ninety-six territories mapped. Prefers scrubland and woodland edges.

Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

Map 6

Green listed

Abundant resident. An astonishing two hundred and sixty-four singing males were mapped, with territories occupied in all habitats throughout the area.

Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*

Map 3

Amber listed

A breeding summer visitor in small numbers. Ten territories were occupied during the survey, all in areas of thick scrub along the southern parts of the commons. Seven pairs were in 3B, 3C, 3D and 3E around the open gravel area of 16 south, Greenham Common and three were in 5C, 5D and 8C, Crookham Common. Formerly also bred along the northern edges of the commons, but disturbance and loss of habitat appears to have restricted birds to the southern areas in recent years. Numbers here are also reducing, as a result of the break up, by grazing stock, of dense cover used for breeding. In England, this champion songster has experienced a decline in breeding numbers in excess of 50% in the period 1994 – 2007.

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*

Amber listed

Regular passage migrant in small numbers. A male was seen in 10 on 26th April.

European Stonechat *Saxicola torquata*

Map 2

Green listed

Resident in small numbers, although birds may move off the commons during cold winter spells. Only five territories were held during the survey period, which is slightly down on previous years. Two were on the heath/gorse in 9/10 and three in similar habitat in 11/12. Pairs were noted carrying food and juveniles were seen later in the summer.

This species has experienced an increase in breeding numbers in the U.K. of over 50% during the period 1994 – 2007.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Amber listed

A common passage migrant. Birds were seen almost daily in all open areas from 15th April onwards.

Blackbird *Turdus merula*

Map 4

Green listed

Common resident. One hundred and seventeen pairs were located during the survey period, with territories occupied throughout both commons. A variety of habitats were used, although woodlands and woodland edges were preferred.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelas*

Map 5

Red listed

Common resident. Numbers were far higher than expected, with sixty-nine territories located throughout all wooded areas.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*

Map 4

Amber listed

Resident in small numbers. Ten territories were mapped during the survey although numbers may have been under recorded as a result of the early start to this species' breeding cycle. The majority of pairs favoured the woodland along the western and southern edges of the commons and a nest was found in the northern part of 1D.

Grasshopper warbler *Locustella naevia*

Red listed

Rare passage migrant. A male was 'reeling' inside the fencing along the southern edge of the silos on 22nd April.

Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

Green listed

Uncommon passage migrant. A male sang briefly in 5A on 2nd May and a second male was seen and heard in 1B during the evening of 20th May.

Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*

Amber listed

Schedule 1

A recent colonist with only a few isolated records in the 1970's. Now resident in small numbers, although birds may disperse during cold winter spells. Following a period of snow during February, birds were late returning to the commons during the spring and only five territories were eventually occupied, which is slightly down on previous years. All territories were on the central areas of heath and gorse:- one in 9; two in 11 and two in 12. No nests were found during the survey, but three juveniles were seen in one of the territories in 12 later in the summer.

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*

Map 3

Green listed

A breeding summer visitor in very small numbers. Only four territories were occupied in 2009, which is slightly down on recent summers. All territories were along the northern edge of Greenham Common. Disturbance and loss of suitable breeding habitat probably account for the decreasing numbers visiting the commons.

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*

Map 12

Amber listed

Uncommon summer visitor. Only twenty-one territories were located, all in scrubland and the majority on Greenham Common. Numbers appear to be suffering due to the lack of suitable undisturbed habitat. In recent years, grazing livestock have been breaking up the patches of thick scrub, which are used for breeding.

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*

Map 13

Green listed

A reasonably common summer visitor. Fifty-eight territories were occupied throughout both commons during the survey. All territories were in scrubland and along woodland edges, with breeding birds clearly avoiding woods and the central strip of gorse and heather.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

Map 13

Green listed

A common summer visitor. One hundred and five territories were taken up in the wooded areas and scrublands of both commons. As with the preceding species, breeding birds avoided the central strip of gorse and heather.

This species has experienced an increase in breeding numbers in the U.K. of over 50% during the period 1994 – 2007.

Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*

Red listed

An uncommon passage migrant, which formerly bred in small numbers. A male passed through 4A and 4B, singing occasionally, on 2nd May, but did not stay. Not mapped.

This attractive warbler has experienced a decline in breeding numbers in excess of 50% in the U.K. in the period 1994 – 2007. Of all of the summer visitors to this country which winter in sub-Saharan Africa, this species has suffered the most severe decline in recent years.

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

Map 12

Green listed

A common summer visitor. One hundred and twenty-nine territories were occupied, all in woodlands and along woodland edges.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*

Map 11

Amber listed

A common summer visitor. Although numbers appear to have been decreasing nationally in recent years, seventy-one singing males were located which represents a better than expected total. All territories were in scrubland and along woodland edges.

In England, this species has undergone a 25% - 50% decline in breeding numbers during the period 1994 – 2007.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

Map 7

Green listed

Resident in very small numbers. Only nine territories were mapped during the survey and birds were absent from some areas suitable habitat occupied in previous years. It is quite possible that this species was either under recorded

during the survey, or the population suffered a setback during the cold spell in February.

This species has experienced an increase in breeding numbers in the U.K. of over 50% during the period 1994 – 2007.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*

Map 2

Red listed

An uncommon summer visitor, which almost certainly probably breeds, although no nests were located. Birds started arriving in mid May and eventually, eight territories were occupied by the end of the survey period, which is a far higher number than expected. Most territories were along the southern areas of the commons and one was in the east:- one in 2B; two in 3A; two in 3C; one in 5C, one in 5D and one in 7B.

This species has experienced a decline in breeding numbers in excess of 50% in both England and the U.K. as a whole, in the period 1994 – 2007.

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*

Map 9

Green listed

Uncommon resident. Numbers were lower than expected, with only sixteen territories identified, although possibly under recorded in some areas.

Marsh Tit *Parus palustris*

Map 5

Red listed

Resident in very small numbers, but possibly under recorded. Only four pairs were found in woodlands during the survey, with one in 4A, two at the edge of 5D and 6A and one at the western end of 7D. Several territories occupied in previous years were sadly vacant in 2009. No nests were found despite the large number of nest boxes provided. Several pairs also breed in the Bowdown/Baynes Nature Reserve to the north, where they often nest in old Dormouse boxes.

Coal Tit *Parus ater*

Map 9

Green listed

Common resident. Numbers were far higher than expected, with forty-five territories mapped, all in woodlands and most containing at least some coniferous trees. Seems to avoid using nest boxes both here on the commons and in the Bowdown/Baynes woodlands to the north.

Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus*

Map 10

Green listed

Abundant resident. One hundred and thirty-five territories were counted in the woodlands and thirty-nine nests were monitored in nest boxes, although not all boxes were checked. Numbers may be artificially high due to the large number of nest boxes provided for breeding and the provision of food at several feeding stations in winter.

Great Tit *Parus major*

Map 14

Green listed

Abundant resident. One hundred and seventy-eight territories were counted in the woodlands and thirty-nine nests were monitored in nest boxes, although

not all boxes were checked. As with the preceding species, numbers may be artificially high due to the large number of nest boxes provided for breeding and the provision of food at several feeding stations in winter. This species has experienced an increase in breeding numbers in the U.K. of over 50% during the period 1994 – 2007.

Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*

Map 3

Green listed

A reasonably common resident in all wooded parts of the commons, where it frequently breeds in nest boxes where provided. Twenty-two pairs held territories in 2009 and several nests were located.

This species has experienced an increase in breeding numbers in the U.K. of over 50% during the period 1994 – 2007.

Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*

Map 7

Green listed

Resident in small numbers. Only thirteen territories were identified, all in woodlands. In view of its rather quiet song, it is quite possible that this species was under recorded during the survey, especially at peak times during the dawn chorus.

Jay *Garrulous glandarius*

Map 11

Green listed

Uncommon resident. Fewer birds were recorded than expected, with only six individuals plotted on the map.

Magpie *Pica pica*

Green listed

Common resident. Not mapped.

Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*

Green listed

Resident, although visiting birds out feeding in the open areas are perhaps more frequent. Probably nests in small numbers in the woodlands and certainly does so in the Bowdown/Baines Reserve along the northern edge of the commons. No reports of pairs occupying nest boxes were received. Not mapped.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*

Green listed

Resident, but far more numerous in winter. Not mapped.

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*

Green listed

Reasonably common resident. Several occupied nests were located in the southern woodlands. Not mapped.

Raven *Corvus corax*

Green listed

Uncommon but increasingly regular visitor. Two birds were present in 7B and 7D throughout the survey period. Not mapped.

This species has experienced an increase in breeding numbers in the U.K. of over 50% during the period 1994 – 2007.

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Red listed

Common resident near buildings and homesteads around the edges of the commons. Not mapped.

This species has undergone a 25% - 50% decline in breeding numbers in the U.K. in the period 1994 – 2007

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Red listed

Uncommon resident, generally around buildings. Not mapped.

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Map 15

Green listed

Common resident. Ninety-one territories were identified during the survey, all of which were in woodland, scrubland, along woodland edges or near gardens around the perimeter of the commons. Open gravel areas and the central strip of gorse and heath were largely avoided.

Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*

Map 13

Green listed

Resident in small numbers and a common winter visitor to the feeding stations. Only sixteen breeding pairs were located during the survey, the majority centred close to gardens along the edges of the commons.

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

Map 11

Green listed

Uncommon resident. Only eight territories were mapped during the survey, but this species has a long breeding season and was probably under recorded.

Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*

Map 5

Red listed

Resident, although numbers increase during the breeding season. Thirty-nine singing males were mapped during the survey, with the majority of occupied territories situated along the central strip of gorse and heath. A few pairs preferred the dense stands of gorse at the Crookham pools.

This species has undergone a 25% - 50% decline in breeding numbers in the U.K. in the period 1994 – 2007.

Siskin *Carduelis spinus*

Green listed

Passage migrant and winter visitor. Migrants were seen and heard throughout much of April. Not mapped.

Lesser Redpoll *Carduelis cabaret*

Red listed

Generally a passage migrant and winter visitor, although small numbers may be encountered during the summer months and possibly breeds. Single birds were recorded in the open heathland areas throughout the survey period. Not mapped.

In England, this species has undergone a 25% - 50% decline in breeding numbers during the period 1994 – 2007.

Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

Map 9

Amber listed

Resident in small numbers and a common passage migrant in autumn. Eleven breeding territories were located during the survey, all in scrubland bordering woodland edges.

Yellow Hammer *Emberiza citrinella*

Map 1

Red listed

Scarce visitor that formerly bred. One singing male was inside the fencing around the eastern end of the silos and two singing males held territories in the fields south of 7D, one of which included a song post in the hedgerow along the edge of Crookham Common.

In England, this species has undergone a 25% - 50% decline in breeding numbers during the period 1994 – 2007.

Discussion

Since the official opening of the commons to the public in 2000, the site has experienced mixed fortunes with regards to its biodiversity. The enormous efforts undertaken by West Berkshire staff and their volunteers have greatly increased the extent and variety of habitat on both commons, and as a result, bird life has flourished. On the downside, the sheer volume of human activities on site coupled with a lack of adequate enforcement of byelaws and protection is putting pressure on retaining or increasing the number of breeding birds. Some of these issues began to be addressed in 2009 with two additional wardens being employed on site during the breeding season and increased information being made available to the public by way of strategically placed notice boards. Further consideration could be given to better and more permanent signage at all major entry points to the commons, repairs to fencing and gates where motor vehicles gain illegal access, locking of certain gates during the breeding season, such as the one at the western edge of the main car park, and an increased presence on site of wardening personnel.

With regards to the on-going restoration and conservation work on site, perhaps three criteria should be addressed. Firstly, it would appear that some open gravel areas are becoming increasingly overgrown with ground vegetation and appear to be becoming less suitable to ground nesting waders such as Ringed and Little Ringed Plovers, Lapwing and Redshank. These areas are also the most heavily disturbed by humans and domestic dogs. Secondly, the central areas of open heath are, in places, becoming over run with gorse or overshadowed by mature, tall gorse. Work should continue to try and strike the right balance of heath and gorse. It remains to be seen whether the recent trend of cutting wide swathes through these areas is a good thing,

as they appear to promote increased disturbance from humans, dogs and grazing cattle. Finally, future conservation tasks in the areas of open heathland should be re-evaluated. The almost total removal of gorse, small bushes and trees in some of these areas a few years ago, may well have contributed to the loss of breeding Tree Pipits, a species which is still present in stable numbers at other localities in West Berkshire.

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