

**A BIRD SURVEY OF THE HARNHAM WATER
MEADOWS TRUST AREA FOR THE PERIOD
NOVEMBER 2007 – OCTOBER 2008**

Conducted by:

John Vickerman
46, Mill Road
Salisbury
Wiltshire
SP2 7RZ

Tel: 01722 334770

e-mail N.B. Change of address to:
jvickerman@talktalk.net

PART B A SUMMARY OF BIRD SIGHTINGS, THEIR NUMBERS, AND AN ESTIMATE OF THE NUMBER OF BREEDING PAIRS BY SPECIES ON THE MEADOWS FROM MARCH TO JUNE 2008

This summary represents an overview of the status of the 47 bird species recorded during the Spring and early Summer period of March to June 2008.

List 1 shows an overview of the 27 species which have bred, or may probably have bred, on the meadows in this period.

Confirmed breeding bird species are defined by the presence of nests or the occurrence of young birds.

Probable breeding bird species are defined by singing birds holding territory in suitable breeding habitat over more than one survey visit.

List 2 shows an overview of the occurrences of 20 other bird species recorded which are not considered to have bred on the meadows in this period.

LIST 1 Confirmed Breeding and Territory Holding Potential Breeding Birds on the Meadows in 2008

MS Mute Swan - *Cygnus olor*

3 pairs produced nests. 1 nest was predated before eggs hatched and the other 2 nests produced 4 and 5 young cygnets which departed from the water systems of the meadows following hatching.

MA Mallard - *Anas platyrhynchos*

A maximum of 17 males and 4 females were seen. Juveniles were seen throughout the period confirming breeding success on the meadows from at least 4 different broods based upon size discrepancy of the juveniles. Over 20 juveniles were seen but heavy predation in most wildfowl species means nothing like this number will survive for 12 months.

PH Pheasant - *Phasianus colchicus*

Pheasants were not present on the meadows for several years whilst the meadows held a large population of Foxes (*Vulpes canis*). Measures were taken to reduce Fox numbers, and as a result of such measures, Pheasants returned with numbers peaking at some 40 birds about five years ago and aided by supplementary feeding. These birds probably originated from stock released for sporting purposes by the Wilton Estate, but since the ceasing of this sporting activity and the withdrawal of supplementary feeding, numbers have dwindled annually to little more than a handful at this time. (From information kindly provided by Mr. John Beckett).

During this survey period, 3 males and 2 females were recorded. Thick cover provided by the growing of the long grass in the meadows to the west of the Town Path during this period no doubt caused the actual number of birds present to be under-recorded. Mr. Beckett has seen up to 10 adult birds and 5 poults from his house overlooking the meadows at the end of this recording period thus confirming successful breeding.

MH Moorhen - *Gallinula chloropus*

Up to 7 birds were seen representing 3 or 4 pairs scattered around the perimeter of the meadows. 2 nests were located and 1 juvenile was seen.

CO Coot - *Fulica atra*

Up to 5 birds were seen representing 2 or 3 pairs scattered around the perimeter of the meadows. 1 nest was located but no young were seen.

SD Stock Dove - *Columba oenas*

2 pairs were located. High winds in mid June blew down part of a pollarded Willow (*Salix species*) where 1 of the pairs was suspected to be breeding.

WP Wood Pigeon - *Columba palumba*

Regular counts during the period revealed the presence of 60 to 80 birds present at any time. Many of these birds would have been loafing or feeding in the area so it is impossible to make an accurate assessment of the number of breeding pairs especially as nests can be high up in thick ivy clad trees or amongst other dense foliage thus rendering location of nests very unlikely. Despite this, 2 nests were located and thus breeding certainly does take place and there could easily be 20 pairs breeding on this site.

CD Collared Dove - *Streptopelia decaocto*

Up to 6 birds were seen around the Harnham Mill area and probably 1 to 3 pairs bred in the mature hedgerow on the western side of Meadow 6.

G Green Woodpecker - *Picus viridis*

1 calling bird has frequented the Seven Acre Copse area. The habitat there is suitable for breeding but is not confirmed.

GS Great Spotted Woodpecker - *Dendrocopos major*

A pair has frequented the Scout's Island area where early Spring drumming was regularly witnessed. Breeding there has not been confirmed.

WR Wren - *Troglodytes troglodytes*

At least 8 singing birds were recorded through the period and would reflect a realistic number of possible breeding pairs. Young birds were seen in Rose Cottage garden so breeding in the area can be confirmed.

D Dunnock - *Prunella modularis*

At least 3 were recorded in song through the period. Although not confirmed, this would probably represent a true figure for the number of pairs of this rather secretive species in the area.

R Robin - *Erithacus rubecula*

At least 6 singing birds were recorded through the period. Although not confirmed, this is very likely to be a realistic minimum number of breeding pairs for this area.

B Blackbird - *Turdus merula*

After the departure of over-wintering birds in March, a regular count of 7 to 9 singing males were recorded. This would be a realistic estimate of the number of breeding pairs for this area. A nest was reported from the tin shed in Meadow 3, and a fledged juvenile bird was seen elsewhere confirming successful breeding.

ST Song Thrush - *Turdus philomelos*

1 regularly singing bird in the thick hedgerow on the west side of Meadow 7 would indicate an occupied territory. 2 birds likely to have been a pair were also seen on one occasion in the West Nadder Copse, but these birds may have had their nest site across the river in the thick tangle of bushes on the edge of the Churchfields Trading Estate. Therefore, 1, or possibly 2, breeding pairs on the area.

M Mistle Thrush - *Turdus viscivorus*

2 birds were regularly in song from singing posts on the area and 4 birds were seen feeding on the area. Although likely, breeding cannot be confirmed.

RW Reed Warbler - *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

3 separate singing birds were holding reed-bed territories around the edge of the meadows though 1 of these at one site for one visit only. Attempted breeding was unlikely to have been by more than 1 or 2 pairs.

BC Blackcap - *Sylvia atricapilla*

There would appear to have been two breeding attempts. 1 family party was seen in the thick hedgerow at the southern side of Meadow 7A, and a pair was present in Rose Cottage garden.

LT Long-tailed Tit - *Aegithalos caudatus*

2 separate territories appear to have been held and young were seen on Scout's Island. At least 1 pair probably has bred within the meadows' area.

BT Blue Tit - *Cyanistes caeruleus*

Though no breeding successes can be confirmed, territories held numbered 5 or 6. Therefore, breeding on the area would be highly likely.

GT Great Tit - *Parus major*

5 or 6 breeding territories were held, and young fledged birds were located confirming breeding success.

TC Treecreeper - *Certhia familiaris*

1 family party of 2 adults and 2 juveniles was seen at Scout's Island confirming 1 successful breeding pair.

MG Magpie - *Pica pica*

A maximum of 24 birds was seen in March which could equate to 10 to 12 pairs on the area. Young birds were seen confirming breeding success.

C Carrion Crow - *Corvus corone*

At least 3 pairs were located at the meadows and fledged young were seen in June indicating breeding success at the site.

CH Chaffinch - *Fringilla coelebs*

A surprisingly low count of just 5 singing birds were located on the area. This is probably a true reflection of the number of likely breeding pairs though no nests found or young birds seen can confirm this.

GR Greenfinch - *Carduelis chloris*

Up to 9 birds have been seen on the meadows feeding and in suitable breeding areas. However, breeding cannot be confirmed but there may have been 1 or 2 pairs breeding in the thickest hedgerows.

GO Goldfinch - *Carduelis carduelis*

Similarly to Greenfinch, up to 3 birds have been regularly seen in suitable breeding habitat, but actual breeding cannot be confirmed.

LIST 2 Other Species Recorded on the Meadows that are not Considered to be Breeding or Potentially Breeding Birds at this Time

CG Canada Goose - *Branta canadensis*

Up to 2 birds have visited Meadow 1 from time to time.

P/RL Partridge species - *Alectoris rufa* / *Perdix perdix*

Either a Red-legged or Grey Partridge was flushed from Meadow 7A on 26th March but could not be seen well enough to assign to either species.

ET Little Egret - *Egretta garzetta*

Up to 2 birds seen feeding in the water channels of the meadows. These birds almost certainly derive from the breeding colony at Britford.

H Grey Heron - *Ardea cinerea*

1 bird occasionally seen feeding in the water channels of the meadows, and also seen flying high over the area presumably commuting between the breeding colony at Britford and other feeding areas to the west e.g. Steeple Langford Nature Reserve.

SH Sparrowhawk - *Accipiter nisus*

A male and a female were seen hunting through the meadows over this period and thought to be probably nesting in the Harnham Hill area.

K Kestrel - *Falco tinnunculus*

A male and a female were seen hunting over the meadows during this period but probably nested elsewhere near by.

BH Black-headed Gull - *Larus ridibundus*

The over-wintering flock had disappeared by the end of April. A single adult had returned to Meadow 1 at the end of June and was probably a failed breeder from a colony elsewhere.

LB Lesser Black-backed Gull - *Larus fuscus*

2 immature birds were seen in the area of Meadow 1 through the period.

TO Tawny Owl - *Strix aluco*

It has been reported that 1 bird was flushed from the thick hedgerow bordering Meadows 2B and 3 in early April. This species is known to breed in the Cathedral Close and, at times, will almost certainly hunt over the meadows and roost in the area at suitable locations.

SI Swift - *Apus apus*

First seen this year at the end of April and thereafter seen hawking for insects over the meadows with up to 10 being seen in the sky at any given time.

KF Kingfisher - *Alcedo atthis*

Up to 2 birds seen until the beginning of May near Scout's Island. Presumably they dispersed to quieter stretches of river beyond the meadows for breeding.

SL Swallow - *Hirundo rustica*

Following arrival at the end of April, up to 10 birds could be seen hawking for insects over the meadows at any given time.

HM House Martin - *Delichon urbicum*

Following arrival during early May, up to 20 birds could be seen hawking for insects over the meadows at any given time.

GL Grey Wagtail - *Motacilla cinerea*

From the beginning of May, 1 or 2 birds were seen catching insects along the River Avon bank of Meadow 1. Breeding is likely to have taken place somewhere within the Cathedral Close area.

RE Redwing - *Turdus iliacus*

The over-wintering flock had reduced to about 20 birds by the end of March and all had disappeared by the end of April.

GW Garden Warbler - *Sylvia borin*

1 was seen in full song in Rose Cottage garden on 9th May but was not heard or seen again. Clearly a migrant bird passing through, but breeding birds do occupy territories in thick bushy areas adjoining the Churchfields Estate.

GC Goldcrest - *Regulus regulus*

1 was seen in song in Rose Cottage garden on 27th May but was not heard or seen again. Generally a conifer loving species, Goldcrests are unlikely to breed in the meadows' area due to lack of suitable habitat. However, they do breed in the adjoining garden of Fisherton Mill House and birds do occasionally wander elsewhere and onto the meadows' area.

JD Jackdaw - *Corvus monedula*

This species does not presently appear to breed within the meadows' area but birds do use the area for feeding, especially in Meadows 3, 4 and 5, and they do collect discarded sheeps' wool for nesting material from these meadows with breeding occurring elsewhere in the Harnham area. Including fledged birds, a count of 35 birds was made on Meadow 5 at the end of June.

SG Starling - *Sturnus vulgaris*

Up to 4 birds have been seen around Meadows 5 and 6 but they do not appear to breed on the meadows. However, breeding does occur near by in the built up area of Harnham.

HS House Sparrow - *Passer domesticus*

This once very common bird of built up areas has hugely diminished in numbers over the last 20 years. 1 bird was seen in the hedgerow of Meadow 6 bordering the Harnham Mill on 9th May. Birds certainly breed in Harnham and in the Mill Road areas of Salisbury, and they do wander onto the meadows' area for feeding purposes.

COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING THE CONDITION OF THE HARNHAM WATER MEADOWS TRUST AREA AS OBSERVED FROM MARCH TO JUNE 2008

The comments and recommendations made below are to be taken as further observations as this year long bird survey project has progressed. They are in addition to the comments already made in Part "A" of this project covering the period November 2007 to February 2008 as discussed on pages 7 to 10.

The Effects of the Sheep Grazing Regime on the Meadows during this Period

At the beginning of this period, spring plant growth began to assert itself, and there were signs of recovery in the grass growth from the heavy grazing by sheep carried on throughout the winter months.

Grazing sheep were then removed from the meadows on the west of the Town path thus allowing grass to become tall and thick by the end of June.

Sheep remained on most of the meadows to the east of the Town Path throughout this period therefore keeping the grass there much shorter.

The Future for Grazing and Other Management Developments for Meadow 1.

Any animal grazing regime for this meadow may be viewed differently from grazing regimes on the remainder of the meadows due to Meadow 1 having, for the foreseeable future, no prospect of being returned into the main infrastructure of the water meadows' drowning system.

Whilst this meadow could support a shallow water scrape as discussed on pages 7 and 8, this meadow can also be identified as being suitable for supporting an appropriate number of a suitable breed of cattle in conjunction with the creation of a scrape.

Given that one or both of these proposals were considered to be a practical proposition, then it would be necessary to provide certain facilities such as:

1. Watering access for the cattle to the Rivers Nadder and/or Avon would need to be put in place as would a means of protection be required for the river banks from uncontrolled erosion caused by cattle being allowed random access to the rivers from this meadow.
2. If a scrape was to be created on Meadow 1, then a cattle grazing regime would need to be implemented which would remove cattle from the meadow from November to March so as to prevent eutrophication of standing water at this time of year.

In any event, it is likely to be desirable to remove cattle from this meadow for the winter months anyway so that grass and plant growth have a chance to stabilise during this largely non-growing season, and given that water meadows tend to be very wet or flooded in Winter, cattle present at this time may turn the meadow, or significant parts of it, into a quagmire.

Such a programme of introducing both a scrape and cattle to this meadow could help to encourage a range of formerly breeding birds to return once again to these meadows such as Lapwing, Snipe, Curlew and Redshank, and possibly also the Yellow Wagtail which is a breeding summer visitor only and has a close affinity with cattle in the rapidly diminishing damp lowland meadows of the United Kingdom.

Plant Spraying on the Meadows

During the main plant growing period this Spring, some selective plant spraying was carried out throughout the meadows' area. This activity was mainly aimed at killing Stinging Nettles (*Urtica dioica*) and Thistles (*various species*).

Within the grazing area managed mainly for the benefit of sheep, this action cannot be quarrelled with, but there has to be some concern that spraying was enthusiastically carried out in some areas from which sheep are permanently excluded e.g. Rotary Copse, and also within some of the fenced off recently planted hedgerow lines.

Nettles, thistles and other plants in these non-grazing areas have succumbed to this spraying programme and have thus been lost as potential food sources for insect larvae, foraging birds and small mammals.

The spraying programme was not implemented until the target plants were well grown. Such late application of spray therefore had the effect of not only controlling the target plants, but also effectively killed off a substantial range of other harmless plants that were in the process of establishing themselves in the affected areas and which, due to the lateness of the spray application, had no chance of regeneration.

Therefore, the avoidable loss of meaningful under stories of potential food and egg-laying host plants at Rotary Copse and elsewhere has to be viewed with some concern. Allowing an under story of plants to develop will permit a greater diversity of insect and small mammal life to flourish and is to be encouraged.

It is interesting to note that during none of the survey visits in this period of March to June was any butterfly species seen except for just one Red Admiral (*Vanessa atalanta*) at the end of June at the edge of Scout's Island, and which would have been an incoming immigrant from the continent anyway. Elimination of insects' host plants by deliberate control has had a disastrous effect on much of the insect life of rural Britain with just one aspect of this

being that many of Britain's beautiful butterfly species are becoming increasingly scarce throughout the country.

Non-grazing areas where any plant spraying control is proposed should be carefully assessed for any possible harmful degradation of habitat effects before any remedial action is taken.

The Future of the Copses

Rotary Copse

Urgently required at Rotary Copse this Autumn/Winter is a thinning/removal programme of some of the trees followed by a replant of useful food producing berry-bearing indigenous tree and shrub species. In addition, topping to restrict vigorous vertical growth of some of the trees is necessary.

It is understood and accepted that safe access for, mainly, educational requirements is necessary at Rotary Copse. However, in its present condition, there is precious little there of any useful educational value anyway! For safety purposes, a simple strimmer used periodically would keep a marked pathway clear for trouble-free safe passage through the copse.

The Future of the Hedgerows

Willow Pollards

It is clear that many of the pollarded Willow (*Salix species*) trees need urgent attention. There is some damage to some Willows as a result of excess weight causing tree trunk splitting. There is also some wind blow damage causing collapse.

As part of The Harnham Waters Meadows Trust policy and intention to restore hedgerow lines at the earliest opportunity which includes the maintenance and extension of Willow pollards, any planning consents or other formal permissions that may be required before work can commence will require immediate attention. Hedgerow maintenance and restoration work can then be commenced at the proper time i.e. at the onset of Autumn 2008.

This bird survey period from March to June incorporating the bird breeding season has clearly confirmed, unsurprisingly, that the hedgerow lines provide the main bird breeding areas of the Harnham Water Meadows. It is known that the hedgerow lines, apart from some short and isolated stretches, are in very poor condition and severely fragmented thus presenting year by year a progressive worsening of an already degraded habitat for bird, insect and mammal life in general.

To commence restoring the meadows' hedgerows to rectify this state of affairs should remain an immediate priority for the Trust.

Hedgerow Restoration Proposals - An Overview of Where to Begin.

Since the most bird rich hedgerow stretches are to the west of the Town Path, it would seem sensible, in principle, to consolidate this state of affairs by commencing restoration work in this part of the meadows first in order to develop and expand this reservoir of bird life.

Restoration work would sensibly be carried out from commencement in Autumn 2008 and continue over a number of years subject to available funding and work force.

Commencement of this work should take the form of extending already existing relatively favourable wildlife rich hedgerow stretches so as to have the effect of enlarging those already wildlife rich stretches. The long term effect of this will be that fragmented stretches of existing hedgerow are joined up to create a continuous corridor of habitat providing adequate food and the safe movement of birds and other wildlife within it.

Small birds and mammals do not like crossing open areas; that is when they are most vulnerable to predation. Filling in the smaller gaps first in order to create meaningful lengths of continuous hedgerow would be much more favourable than just creating another fragmented stretch of hedgerow isolated from all the rest.

Apart from the urgent need to attend to a small area of existing Willow to the east of the Town Path near the Long Bridge, the hedgerows east of the Town Path in general can be restored as a following on programme. This aspect of hedgerow restoration to the east of the Town Path is not addressed here except to acknowledge that where some Willow pollards are removed through old age, for safety reasons or whatever, then such removals can be easily and cheaply replaced by the insertion of new green Willow "posts" as and when required.

A number of examples of suitable species of hedging plants are discussed on page 10 of Part "A" of this report and may be used in the restoration recommendations which follow.

It may also be necessary to allow for some gaps or gateways to be placed within these newly restored hedgerows to permit the passage of animals and machinery from one meadow to another.

Attached to this report is a map of the Harnham Water Meadows with suggested proposals marked as to where commencement of restoration work might usefully begin near the Long Bridge and to the west of the Town Path. Four stretches are identified and numbered in perceived order of importance with Number 1 being of greatest urgency of attention.

Hedgerow Restoration Proposals - Stretch 1

Marked in purple as “1” on the attached map, this is a relatively short stretch of Willow at the junction of the Town Path Water Channel with the River Nadder and immediately downstream east of the Long Bridge.

It has to be recognised that this Willow stretch, due to continuing unmanaged and uncontrolled vertical growth over the years, is now causing a severe blockage to the nationally well known view of the cathedral from the Long Bridge and requires urgent attention.

This short stretch, when water levels permit, very urgently needs laying to an appropriate height, and the gap between the Willows on the bend of the Town Path Water Channel at the point where it joins the River Nadder needs infilling with a newly laid part of this hedgerow.

Such appropriate management of this short stretch may also encourage the return of the Cetti's Warbler, a nationally rare Schedule 1 breeding bird, to this particular patch where it bred for some years about 10 - 15 years ago before there was a partial and unfortunate removal of some of this Willow stretch.

Hedgerow Restoration Proposals - Stretch 2

Marked in green as “2” on the attached map, this is a fragmented hedgerow the line of which runs from the River Nadder opposite Fisherton Island southwards to a point which joins the east to west hedgerow to the west of Rotary Copse.

This hedgerow line thus divides Meadows 7 and 7A. Existing fragments of this hedgerow need relaying, and open stretches need infilling together with the planting of new Willows at appropriate intervals to create future pollards.

Hedgerow Restoration Proposals - Stretch 3

Marked in blue as “3” on the attached map, this hedgerow line has all but disappeared except for a few Hawthorn bushes in very poor condition spaced at odd intervals along this stretch.

This hedgerow line needs completely restoring for all its length from the relatively newly planted West Nadder Copse to meet with the also relatively newly planted hedgerow that divides Meadows 7 and 7E at the gateway, and also with the established and thick hedgerow that forms the southern boundary of Meadows 7 and 7A. Incorporated in this exercise, a short 15 yard new stretch needs planting to extend the already relatively newly planted hedgerow westwards that divides Meadows 7B and 7C, and would thus link with the new plant from West Nadder Copse.

Hedgerow Restoration Proposals - Stretch 4

A newly planted, but isolated, hedgerow lies between Meadows 7B and 7C. A short link extension westwards of this hedgerow is discussed in Stretch 3 above. To the south side of Rotary Copse, this newly planted hedgerow can be extended further eastwards, as marked in brown as "4" on the attached map, to the corner of the hedgerow line where there are a few old Ash trees which had probably been laid many years ago and which, at that point, turn northwards.

From these Ash trees, a new hedgerow can extend northwards to join with the already existing and established east to west hedgerow at the bridge which crosses the water channel on the south side of Meadow 7A.

From the bridge, there are two established but very fragmented hedgerow lines which consist of poor quality old Hawthorns spaced at irregular intervals either side of the tail drain that runs eastwards to the Town Path. These two hedgerow lines need relaying and infilling where appropriate.

At the same time that these two short stretches of hedgerow lines are restored either side of the tail drain, it would be essential to dig out and remove the many years of accumulated silt from the tail drain to permit the free running of the tail drain water into the Town Path Water Channel.

Summary of Hedgerow Restoration Benefits

The achievement of restoring these hedgerow lines as outlined in Stretches 1 to 4 above would create a good network of interlinking hedgerows to the west of the Town Path and would improve and significantly add extra valuable wildlife habitat to this part of the Harnham Water Meadows Trust area.

Vermin Control

In the recent past, there had been a major imbalance in the wildlife of the meadows caused, in part, by the predatory activities of a plague of Foxes (*Vulpes canis*). This issue has been addressed very successfully, and ongoing measures should ensure that Fox numbers are constantly reviewed with appropriate action being taken when deemed necessary.

Similarly, Magpies, Carrion Crows and Grey Squirrels (*Scirurus cinereus*) are voracious predators of small birds and their nests. Efforts to provide habitats to encourage greater numbers and diversity of small bird species can be compromised if the numbers of such predators are not kept in check. Legal control measures reducing numbers of these three species of predator should be considered and implemented when necessary.

Forward Planning Strategy Document

There appears to be an overall long term view by the Harnham Water Meadows Trust of how various wildlife, grazing and local amenity demands may be met in the future, and in conjunction with the reinstatement of the infrastructure and workings of the water courses of the ancient water meadows.

However, there appears to be no agreed short to medium term plan of action to be set in motion and with agreed target completion times during the next five years.

The preparation of a Strategy Document laying out a planned and agreed course of action over the next five years covering such infrastructure work and costed accordingly in relation to perceived funds and labour resources available, and establishing time frames for such works to be completed, has to be part of any project of this nature which is ongoing.

Although it is understood that new developments or necessary but unforeseen works can impinge upon the effective meeting of any time scales, the preparation and agreement of a declared strategy of “what to do next” over the next five years needs to be addressed, agreed with commitments made, and with progress being regularly monitored against the objectives set in a Strategy Document.

John Vickerman
13th July 2008.

PART A A SUMMARY OF BIRD SIGHTINGS AND THEIR NUMBERS ON THE MEADOWS FROM NOVEMBER 2007 TO FEBRUARY 2008

This summary represents an overview of the status of the 45 bird species recorded during the winter survey period November 2007 to February 2008.

- MS **Mute Swan** - *Cygnus olor* Off the R. Nadder, up to 6 seen in the water channels.
- CG **Canada Goose** - *Branta canadensis* From time to time, a flock of about 60 visit the meadows, usually to meadows 1 and 3.
- MA **Mallard** - *Anas platyrhynchos* About 20 birds frequent the Long Bridge area and another 20 frequent the Harnham Mill area as regular feeding occurs there. On the water channels of the meadows, up to 6 birds have been seen.
- PH **Pheasant** - *Phasianus colchicus* 3 males and 2 females have been recorded ranging all over the meadows. These birds are of introduced stock during the last 2 years and are intended to replace the original stock that was exterminated by the plague of foxes present on the meadows up until about 3 years ago.
- CA **Cormorant** - *Phalacrocorax carbo* 1 to 2 high flying birds have occasionally been seen over the area presumably commuting between the Steeple Langford gravel pits and the R. Avon south of Salisbury.
- ET **Little Egret** - *Egretta garzetta* Up to 2 birds regularly seen feeding along the water channels of the meadows.
- H **Grey Heron** - *Ardea cinerea* Perhaps surprisingly, only recorded once with 1 bird in mid December feeding in meadow 6.
- SH **Sparrowhawk** - *Accipiter nisus* Occasional sightings of probably 2 different birds judging by size variation - males are smaller than females - which hunt over the meadows.
- K **Kestrel** - *Falco tinnunculus* Occasionally seen with 2 present at the end of January.
- PE **Peregrine** - *Falco peregrinus* 1 seen in mid November over-flying westwards. Presumably a roosting bird from the cathedral heading off on a hunting foray.
- MH **Moorhen** - *Gallinula chloropus* Maximum of 4 birds seen in mid December. An often elusive species which can lurk unrecorded in dense riverside vegetation.
- CO **Coot** - *Fulica atra* Maximum of 12 birds seen off the main river systems and grazing on meadow 1.
- SN **Common Snipe** - *Gallinago gallinago* Occasionally seen with 3 being the maximum seen in mid December.
- GE **Green Sandpiper** - *Tringa ochropus* 1 seen in mid November in the water channel dividing meadows 7C and 7D.
- BH **Black-headed Gull** - *Larus ridibundus* Numerically, the most abundant species. A semi-permanent over-wintering colony frequenting the river and loafing on meadow 1. Maximum count of 80 at the end of February.

- HG **Herring Gull** - *Larus argentatus* 1 seen associating with the Black-headed Gulls at the end of February on meadow 1.
- WP **Wood Pigeon** - *Columba palumbus* Numerically, the third most abundant species. A fairly constant presence of up to about 50 birds recorded in all parts of the meadows.
- CD **Collared Dove** - *Streptopelia decaocto* 1 to 2 birds recorded in November and December on and near Scout's Island.
- KF **Kingfisher** - *Alcedo atthis* 1 seen along the water channels through the middle of the meadows throughout the winter.
- GS **Great Spotted Woodpecker** - *Dendrocopos major* Not more than 1 bird seen on any survey, but twice identified as a female. Sightings have ranged from West Nadder copse in the west to Scout's Island.
- MP **Meadow Pipit** - *Anthus pratensis* 2 seen in November on meadow 7C. Likely to have been late autumn passage migrants.
- PW **Pied Wagtail** - *Motacilla alba* Sometimes, 1 seen over-flying the meadows. In late December, 8 seen feeding together on meadow 1.
- WR **Wren** - *Troglodytes troglodytes* Always an elusive and skulking species, but up to 7 individuals located at the end of December in the denser hedgerow stretches.
- D **Dunnock** - *Prunella modularis* Just 3 records at meadow 6 and near Rotary Copse.
- R **Robin** - *Erithacus rubecula* Up to 11 birds located across the meadows in the hedge areas.
- B **Blackbird** - *Turdus merula* Up to 30 birds located at the end of December. Some of these are most likely to be over-wintering birds of continental origin.
- ST **Song Thrush** - *Turdus philomelos* Occasionally located with a maximum of 3 birds found in mid December in the thicker hedgerows.
- RE **Redwing** - *Turdus iliacus* Numerically, the second most abundant species. Throughout the period, a loose flock of at least 50 birds has spent the winter roaming around the meadows foraging mainly amongst the hedgerows and under trees. Winter visitors only.
- M **Mistle Thrush** - *Turdus viscivorus* Regularly seen with 4 birds present on the meadows with 2 in and near Scout's Island, and 2 between Rotary Copse and West Nadder Copse.
- CW **Cetti's Warbler** - *Cettia cetti* Not located on any of the designated survey visits. However, it is important to report that 1 was heard in song in the willow/reed-bed area immediately down stream of the Long Bridge during the first week of January. This area will be carefully monitored to attempt to verify any breeding attempt of this vulnerable Schedule 1 protected species.
- GC **Goldcrest** - *Regulus regulus* 1 located in Rose Cottage garden at the end of November.
- LT **Long-tailed Tit** - *Aegithalos caudatus* Seen on most visits. Up to 6 birds located at the end of December in the thicker hedgerow tangles.

- BT **Blue Tit** - *Cyanistes caeruleus* Up to 10 birds located. This population could well be expanded by the provision of nest boxes.
- GT **Great Tit** – *Parus major* Up to 12 birds located. Another species which could undergo a population expansion with the provision of nest boxes.
- TC **Treecreeper** - *Certhia familiaris* A furtive and thus elusive species to locate. 1 was seen on Scout's Island at the end of November, and 1 was in song - possibly the same bird - in the hedgerow trees between meadows 2B and 3 in mid February.
- MG **Magpie** - *Pica pica* Maximum count of 19 birds at the end of February. Birds ranged widely over all meadows during all surveys.
- JD **Jackdaw** - *Corvus monedula* 1 to 2 birds recorded over-flying the meadows.
- RO **Rook** - *Corvus frugilegus* Not recorded except for a flock of about 50 birds in early January over-flying the western part of the meadows heading towards Harnham Hill.
- C **Carrion Crow** - *Corvus corone* Up to 6 birds seen probably representing 2 pairs occupying the area to the east of the Town Path and 1 pair to the west of the Town Path.
- SG **Starling** - *Sturnus vulgaris* Occasionally recorded. The only foraging flock recorded was a flock of 20 on meadow 6 at the end of December.
- CH **Chaffinch** - *Fringilla coelebs* Up to 9 birds located scattered along the hedgerows and at Scout's Island.
- GR **Greenfinch** - *Carduelis chloris* Up to 19 birds roaming widely along the hedgerows and at Scout's Island.
- GO **Goldfinch** - *Carduelis carduelis* Up to 11 birds associating with the Greenfinches in the hedgerows.
- SK **Siskin** - *Carduelis spinus* Recorded once. A flock of 7 feeding in an Alder tree near Scout's Island at the end of January. A winter visitor only.
- RB **Reed Bunting** - *Emberiza schoeniclus* 1 recorded regularly in the willows of the R. Nadder west of Fisherton Mill House, and in the thick hedges surrounding meadows 7 and 7A.

COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING THE CONDITION OF THE HARNHAM WATER MEADOWS TRUST AREA AS OBSERVED FROM NOVEMBER 2007 TO FEBRUARY 2008

The Effects of the Sheep Grazing Regime on the Meadows during this Period

Sheep, and to a certain extent cattle, are very much a traditional part of the ecosystem and management of ancient water meadows, but the number put out to graze and the timings of their grazing need to be very carefully monitored.

Until mid January, a large flock of sheep continually grazed the meadows. It would appear that significant over-grazing occurred with the grass being cropped very short. Despite generally mild and damp weather conditions throughout this period, the grass could not regenerate itself quickly enough to feed the large number of sheep present.

The result was that several parts of the meadows became very muddy and totally devoid of any grass or other vegetation of any kind. This has been particularly apparent at and near gateways and bridges over the water channels. It will be many months before some parts can recover from such churned up areas.

Such a sustained period of heavy grazing during this period of the year without the ability of the grass and other plants to slowly grow and stabilise to an acceptable height and density rendered the meadows in general to be unsuitable for cover and for feeding for winter birds e.g. for Snipe, and there were no records at all of Lapwing or Curlew.

It would appear that winter grazing by so many sheep maintained for the length of time that they were present on the meadows during this period was unsustainable and needs to be reviewed for future winters.

A Proposal for some Development to Meadow 1

It is understood that this meadow will never be suitable for regeneration back to the condition whereby it could be integrated back into the ancient water meadows system and as a part of the rest of the meadows.

Therefore, it is not unreasonable to consider how else this large meadow may be managed in a somewhat different way to the other meadows but so as to still be an important wildlife rich part of the whole.

Mention has already been made in a previous report (The Canada Goose by John Vickerman, 2007) that a shallow water scrape, or water flash, with very gently shelving muddy edges in this meadow and covering some 1000 square yards in area could have a major positive influence in encouraging back

previously breeding birds of the water meadows such as Lapwing, Curlew and Redshank.

To best achieve this objective, it would be necessary to review the entire management of this meadow. The Canada Goose situation would need to be addressed as would the grazing regime for any animals in this meadow. Over use by both would lead to eutrophication of any essentially wet area thus rendering necessary invertebrate life non-existent plus degradation of the area surrounding the wet area caused by the feet of animals churning up this area.

In essence, a much more limited grazing regime, or other means of vegetation management allowing taller and denser vegetation through the winter than exists at present and on through the bird breeding season, would be required. A healthier and more diverse vegetation would encourage insect and other invertebrate life to flourish on this meadow which could in turn sustain target bird species such as Lapwing, Curlew and Redshank with the objective of aiding their return as breeding birds to, at least, this part of the meadows system.

The Future of the Copses

There are three copses which were planted some 10 - 15 years ago, namely, West Nadder Copse, Rotary Copse and Seven Acre Copse.

The presence of all three copses seems to be a feature which is out of keeping with the traditional make-up of a typical ancient water meadows system.

Moreover, the tree species chosen to be planted in establishing these copses have very limited ornithological benefits as defined by their poor or nil ability to bear suitable seed or berries to provide food for birds, or to sustain a good diversity of insect life, and the tree structure is such that safe bird nesting opportunities are poor. In their present state, these copses have little benefit except as refuges for Wood Pigeons, Magpies and Crows. So what is to be done with these copses?

There would appear to be two obvious options:

1. Remove the copses in their entirety and return the areas they cover to the original water meadows system,

or,
2. Remove about half of the trees selecting for removal the thinner, leggy and least wildlife useful ones, and replace with useful berry bearing trees and bushes. At the same time, top the remaining trees to a manageable height so as to encourage a more spreading shape rather than a vertical dash for light as has been their growing habit so far by

dint of their being too closely planted at the outset. Action along these lines could bring added benefits to the whole of the meadows area as indicated later in this report.

There is a fourth copse, namely, Scout's Island which adjoins the R. Nadder across the river from the Harnham sports field. This copse was created several decades ago and is now a mature area.

Fenced and thus free from sheep, this small yet well wooded area has a good density of fairly mature trees including Alders (*Alnus glutinosa*) which are especially useful as seed bearing feed trees in winter for tits and finches.

There is also a good under story of brushwood and plants allowing useful ground cover and foraging capability for birds and small mammals, and for insect life.

Minimal, or no active management would seem desirable at this time.

The Future of the Hedgerows

It became very clear in the early part of this survey that the hedgerows - such as they are - were vital feeding and cover areas for many of the bird species recorded. However, the hedgerows are in a generally very poor condition though a few stretches are usefully thick.

There are some thick tangles e.g. on the north side of Rotary Copse, the north/south stretch of some 50 yards between meadows 7 and 7E and the riverside boundary hedge west of Scout's Island towards Harnham Mill. These three separate short stretches do hold a reasonable density of several bird species.

However, no significantly long and connecting stretches of hedgerow exist - the whole hedge network is woefully fragmented.

Hedgerow management within the meadows has to be urgently addressed. There is a compelling case for the immediate restoration of hedges to fill in the gaps in existing hedges, and to extend the hedges along their former lines so as to provide a connecting network of hedgerows throughout the meadows. This one single commitment to restoration would hugely enhance the existing bird densities and allow additional species to flourish, e.g. various warblers, finches and buntings.

Additional benefits of such a commitment to hedgerow restoration would be an expected proliferation of small mammal and insect life with all elements combining together to provide a well balanced bird, small mammal and insect rich habitat.

In restoring hedgerows, great care must be exercised in the selection of traditional hedge species to be used. An appropriate mix of such species as

Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), Field Maple (*Acer campestre*), Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and a corner or two of Elder (*Sambucus nigra*) are all good traditional hedging species. Intersperse at sensible intervals with stand alone trees allowed to mature above the hedge height such as Oak (*Quercus robur*), Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*), Silver Birch (*Betula pendula*), Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) and Willow species (*Salix* sp.). Then add in some trailing plants such as Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*), White Bryony (*Bryonia dioica*), Black Bryony (*Tamus communis*), Honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*) and Traveller's Joy (*Clematis vitalba*). These are all traditional hedging species and associated plants found in old hedgerows which provide good cover, and fruit and berry food for birds, small mammals and insects.

Proposals for Renewing a Breeding Birds Nest Box Scheme

Careful placement of various types of nest boxes in a given area often provide an extra boost to bird populations by offering additional breeding sites.

Kestrels, owls, tits and Robins are all examples of species that can take advantage of additional sites created in this way. Nest boxes would need to be in place by the end of February in any given year to permit optimum take up of such additional breeding sites during the same year.

Strategically placed nest boxes in hedgerows, hedgerow trees and, as indicated in a previous paragraph discussing the future of the copses, placed in retained and modified copses could tip the balance of the argument in favour of retaining the three copses in question rather than removing them completely.

In addition, nest boxes always have a huge human interest value and benefit in educational terms. When children become involved during educational visits, viewing of the comings and goings of parent birds to and from nest boxes never fails to capture their interest.

Such provision of nest boxes in the modified copses could create a new, if not typical experience in an ancient water meadows landscape, but would never the less, provide a harmless yet immensely beneficial educational experience for young and old alike.