

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

Conducted by:

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PART C A SUMMARY OF BIRD SIGHTINGS AND THEIR NUMBERS ON THE MEADOWS FROM JULY TO OCTOBER 2008

This summary represents an overview of the status of the 58 bird species recorded during the late summer and autumn survey period of July to October 2008. This is the final survey period of this 12 months long bird survey of the meadows.

MS Mute Swan - *Cygnus olor*

The breeding pairs dispersed away from the water systems of the meadows during July and August. During September and October, 1 pair returned to occupy a length of the R. Nadder upstream from Rose Cottage. At the end of October and in addition to this pair, a herd of 7 adults accompanied by 6 immatures took up residence on the R. Avon and the adjoining river bank of Meadow 3.

CG Canada Goose - *Branta canadensis*

After a breeding season away from the meadows, flocks reassembled during September with 66 commuting onto the eastern Meadows 1 and 3. By the end of October, the flock had grown and c.140 were seen in flight over these meadows on 22nd October but headed further on downstream beyond the Trust's meadows. However, it has been reported (John Beckett and Ray Topp) that this flock has reached c.300 in number and has been seen settled on Meadows 1 and 3. These birds fly in at daybreak from the north each morning and return similarly at dusk to roost on the meadows in the Stratford sub-Castle area.

MA Mallard - *Anas platyrhynchos*

During July and August, up to 18 birds including juveniles were seen on the meadows and in the water channels. By the end of August, most of these birds had gravitated onto the main river systems often congregating around the Harnham Mill and Long Bridge bread feeding areas.

PH Pheasant - *Phasianus colchicus*

1 male and 1 female bird have been seen on the meadows during this survey period, but due to the often secretive nature of this species during post-breeding periods, this may well be an under recording of adult numbers. In early August, 5 poults were seen along the thick hedgerow on the north side of Rotary Copse.

LG Little Grebe - *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Absent from the area during the breeding season, 3 birds were seen during October amongst the sedges of the bank of Meadow 3 and on the adjacent R. Avon.

CA Cormorant - *Phalacrocorax carbo*

From August to October, at least 1 bird (not necessarily the same bird) was recorded flying over the meadows heading west and probably going to the Steeple Langford Nature Reserve gravel pits to feed.

ET Little Egret - *Egretta garzetta*

In early July, 4 were seen feeding in the water channels of the meadows. For the remainder of the period, 1 bird was regularly seen usually east of the Town Path.

H Grey Heron - *Ardea cinerea*

During the period, from 1 to 5 birds were recorded on the meadows or flying along the river systems. On occasions, birds were noted flying high over the meadows westwards presumably commuting from the breeding heronry at Britford to reach the good feeding areas at the Steeple Langford Nature Reserve.

SH Sparrowhawk - *Accipiter nisus*

At least 1 bird was seen regularly hunting along the hedgerows of the meadows or soaring high overhead throughout the period.

BZ Common Buzzard - *Buteo buteo*

From the beginning of August, 1 was regularly seen mainly on the meadows to the west of the Town Path and could be seen "static hunting" from the top of fence posts. On 25th September, a group of 7 birds was seen soaring in warm air thermals to an enormous height above Meadow 3.

K Kestrel - *Falco tinnunculus*

Throughout the period, 1 of a pair of birds was seen from time to time hovering and hunting over the meadows.

HY Hobby - *Falco subbuteo*

On 25th July, 1 sighting of this exciting falcon was made as it drifted slowly N.W. over Meadows 1 and 7A.

MH Moorhen - *Gallinula chloropus*

Throughout the period, between 2 and 6 birds were regularly seen along the edges of the meadows adjacent to the R. Nadder and R. Avon, and also in the water channels of the meadows.

CO Coot - *Fulica atra*

During the period, up to 15 birds were seen along the edges of the meadows adjacent to the R. Nadder and R. Avon. On 25th July, at least 3 well grown young were seen.

BH Black-headed Gull - *Larus ridibundus*

Following dispersal away from the meadows for the breeding season, 3 birds appeared on Meadow 1 on 10th July. Numbers then built up to 70 by 28th August. There then followed a rapid decline with only 2 birds seen near Meadow 1 on 22nd October.

LB Lesser Black-backed Gull - *Larus fuscus*

From the end of September, at least 2 birds were seen on some survey days flying over the meadows generally westwards heading for feeding areas west of Salisbury.

SD Stock Dove - *Columba oenas*

A pair believed to be the pair displaced by the blowing down of their breeding pollard Willow in mid June was regularly seen around Meadows 3, 4 and 5 throughout July to early October. No second breeding attempt was believed to have occurred.

WP Wood Pigeon - *Columba palumbus*

From 46 to 66 birds were recorded on each survey visit. General feeding and loafing occurred in all thick hedgerows and trees of the meadows.

CD Collared Dove - *Streptopelia decaocto*

The only record of this species on the survey area was of 3 birds in trees of Meadow 6 opposite the Harnham Mill on 25th July.

SI Swift - *Apus apus*

During July, there was obvious southwards migration in line with the usual departure time of this species for Africa. At least 30 passed over on 25th July. Sightings are very uncommon after the second week of August.

KF Kingfisher - *Alcedo atthis*

On 10th July, 2 were seen on trees on the R. Nadder bank below the Harnham Mill. At other times, 1 bird was seen in the same area.

G Green Woodpecker - *Pica viridis*

On 10th September, 2 birds were seen; 1 west of the Town Path and the other east of the Town Path. On other occasions, 1 was seen mainly in the Seven Acre Copse area.

GS Great Spotted Woodpecker - *Dendrocopus major*

1 to 2 birds were recorded each month of this period. On 10th July, 2 juveniles were seen together in trees in the thick hedgerow between Meadows 7 and 7A.

S Skylark - *Alauda arvensis*

On 25th September, the first record for this species during the survey year occurred. 2 birds were flying over the meadows indicating that autumn migration was taking place. During October, at least 6 were seen and heard in 1's and 2's calling as they flew over heading S.W.

SL Swallow - *Hirundo rustica*

Through July and to mid August, a minimum of 30 birds were seen hawking for insects over the meadows. On 28th August, groups of mixed adults and juveniles were seen passing southwards over the meadows feeding as they went off on the commencement of their migration to southern Africa. On 9th October, 1 rather late bird passed low and quickly southwards through Meadows 7E and 7C early in the morning.

HM House Martin - *Delichon urbicum*

During July and August, at least 40 birds were seen hawking for insects over the meadows on any day. Often they were in the company of Swallows. On 28th August, with Swallows, groups of birds were clearly moving southwards. During survey days, the last birds recorded were of a group of 14 moving south over the meadows on 10th September.

MP Meadow Pipit - *Anthus pratensis*

This species was only recorded on autumn migration with a flock of 20 feeding on Meadow 1 on 25th September. 3 were there on 9th October.

GL Grey Wagtail - *Motacilla cinerea*

On 9th October, the only record in this period was of 1 bird flying low over Meadow 3 and heading towards the Cathedral Close area.

PW Pied Wagtail - *Motacilla alba*

On 25th September, the only record in this period was of 1 bird flying over Meadow 7 westwards in the direction of the Churchfields Industrial Estate.

WR Wren - *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Recorded on every survey visit with numbers varying between 2 and 11. On 10th July, a family party was present in Rose Cottage garden.

D Dunnock - *Prunella modularis*

A surprisingly scarce species in the survey area. It was recorded only 3 times in this survey period with 1 in song on 10th July in the thick hedgerow on the north side of Rotary Copse, and on 28th August 2 were seen in Rose Cottage garden with 1 again there on 22nd October.

R Robin - *Erithacus rubecula*

Recorded during every survey visit during this period. In July and August, 2 to 4 birds were noted, but as September progressed, Robins began to sing strongly again as they established autumn and winter territories. During September and October 10 to 14 birds could be heard in song on the survey area.

B Blackbird - *Turdus merula*

Between 2 and 7 birds were recorded on surveys from July to early October. On 22nd October, a flock of 15 birds was located feeding on Hawthorn berries near Rotary Copse and these birds were certainly autumn arrivals from continental Europe probably originating from Scandinavia or western Russia.

ST Song Thrush - *Turdus philomelos*

When not heard in song, this species can be notoriously difficult to locate due to its very skulking habits deep in thick brushwood areas. Only located on 9th October when 2 were seen near Rotary Copse and 1 was seen there on 22nd October.

M Mistle Thrush - *Turdus viscivorus*

Only recorded in October when on 9th October, a flock of 6 was seen near Scout's Island Copse. These were probably a family party still consorting together. On 22nd October, 1 bird was seen flying over Meadow 7A northwards towards Fisherton Island.

SW Sedge Warbler - *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

On 10th July, 1 was seen in full song in the sedges along the water channel between Meadows 7C and 7D. No further sighting occurred at this spot so it seems there was no breeding attempt. On 28th August, 2 migratory birds were seen; 1 in the sedges along the water channel between Meadows 1 and 2, and 1 in the sedges on the edge of Meadow 1 adjacent to the R. Avon.

RW Reed Warbler - *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

On 10th July, 2 were in song in the reeds opposite Fisherton Mill House, and on 25th July, a third bird was located in the reeds on the bank of the R. Avon near Seven Acre Copse. On 7th August, 1 silent bird was seen in a Willow pollard at the northern end of Meadow 7 adjacent to the R. Nadder.

BC Blackcap - *Sylvia atricapilla*

On 10th July, 1 male was in song in the thick hedgerow between Meadows 7 and 7E. On 7th August, 1 female was seen in the thick hedgerow on the north side of Rotary Copse and again on 10th and 25th September. On 9th October, this or another female was seen in the thick hedgerow between Meadows 7 and 7E.

LW Lesser Whitethroat - *Sylvia curruca*

On 28th August, there occurred the only record throughout the survey year of 1 bird seen in the thick hedgerow on the north side of Rotary Copse. This was clearly a migrating bird passing through and feeding up ready for migration to East Africa.

CC Chiffchaff - *Phylloscopus collybita*

Not present on the meadows during the breeding season, but from 28th August through to the final survey on 22nd October, between 5 and 7 birds were seen in the thick hedgerows of the meadows. These autumn migrants often linger very late into the autumn before finally moving south to southern Europe and North Africa.

WW Willow Warbler - *Phylloscopus trochilus*

On 28th August, there was the only record of this species throughout the survey year when 1 migrating bird was found associating with Chiffchaffs near Rotary Copse.

GC Goldcrest - *Regulus regulus*

A scarce visitor to the meadow's area, this species was only occasionally seen in the thicker hedgerows and at Rose Cottage garden. On 10th July, 3 juveniles were seen foraging in the thick hedgerow of Meadow 6 bordering the R. Nadder, and on 25th September, 1 bird was present there again. On 22nd October, 2 birds were in Rotary Copse amongst a mixed tit flock and 1 was seen in Rose Cottage garden.

LT Long-tailed Tit - *Aegithalos caudatus*

On 28th August, a flock of at least 20 in association with Great and Blue Tits was seen in the thick hedgerow bordering Meadow 6 with the R. Nadder. On 22nd October, 4 were seen in Rose Cottage garden and 14 were seen in the fragmented hedgerow between Meadows 1 and 2. At other times during this survey period, roaming groups of up to 12 birds were seen.

BT Blue Tit - *Cyanistes caeruleus*

Seen on every survey visit with birds roaming around the hedgerows of the area as post-breeding groups and as autumn mixed flocks with other tit species. On 28th August, at least 15 were counted in just such a mixed flock in the thick hedgerow of Meadow 6 bordering with the R. Nadder.

GT Great Tit - *Parus major*

Seen on every survey visit in the thick hedgerows and at Rose Cottage garden. On 9th October, a total of 16 birds was seen scattered around such suitable habitat across the meadows.

TC Treecreeper - *Certhia familiaris*

Just one record for this period of a single bird seen on 28th August near Scout's Island Copse.

J Jay - *Garrulus glandarius*

On 9th October, 1 bird was seen flying over Meadow 3 which probably originated from the Cathedral Close area and disappeared from view beyond Rose Cottage. This may be the first written record of this species from the meadow's area.

MG Magpie - *Pica pica*

Seen on every survey visit with numbers varying generally between 4 and 7, but 17 noted on 9th October.

JD Jackdaw - *Corvus monedula*

Usually up to about 10 seen around Meadows 4 and 5, but on 7th August, a flock of 40 there consisted of a mixture of adult and newly fledged juveniles.

RO Rook - *Corvus frugilegus*

Apart from the odd single bird sometimes seen associating with the Jackdaws, the only significant record was of 8 seen feeding on Meadow 5 on 25th July.

C Carrion Crow - *Corvus corone*

Seen on every survey visit with numbers varying between 5 and 8 and mainly to the east of the Town Path.

SG Starling - *Sturnus vulgaris*

The only record of this species during this survey period was of a flock of 10 on 22nd October seen flying west over Meadow 7E towards the Churchfields Industrial Estate.

CH Chaffinch - *Fringilla coelebs*

Surprisingly infrequently recorded during this survey period. Occasionally 1 or 2 seen near Scout's Island Copse. On 22nd October, a flock of 5 was seen in flight heading S.W. over Meadow 6 and were very likely to have been autumn migrants rather than local residents.

BL Brambling - *Fringilla montifringilla*

The first record throughout the survey year occurred on 22nd October when 2 calling birds were seen flying over Meadow 7E heading S.W. and carried on beyond the Churchfields Industrial Estate. These would certainly have been Scandinavian autumn migrants and may represent the first record of this species at the meadows.

GR Greenfinch - *Carduelis chloris*

Noted throughout this survey period with 1 to 4 birds generally frequenting the thick hedgerows on the north side of Rotary Copse and between Meadows 7 and 7E.

GO Goldfinch - *Carduelis carduelis*

On 28th August, 8 birds were seen in a hedgerow tree between Meadows 1 and 2A. Otherwise 3 or 4 birds were seen during October in the thick hedgerow between Meadows 7 and 7E.

SK Siskin - *Carduelis spinus*

On 9th October, an autumn passage movement of a flock of 5 birds flew over Rotary Copse and Meadow 7C and carried on S.W. over the Churchfields Industrial Estate.

BF Bullfinch - *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

The first record for the entire period of the survey year occurred on 22nd October when 1 male bird was seen in the thick hedgerow between Meadows 7 and 7E.

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

The comments and recommendations made as follows are to be taken as further observations as this year long survey project reaches its conclusion. They are in addition to the comments already made in Part "A" on pages 7 - 10 and Part "B" on pages 18 - 24 of this project report.

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

By the end of September, the large flock of sheep were removed from the meadows. A smaller flock of Jacob's Sheep were then maintained and alternated at intervals between the meadows to the east and west of the Town Path.

The reduction in grazing levels compared with a similar time last year, and as the autumn season progressed with plant growth slowing, permitted a significant improvement of the general quality of the meadow's grass and of other plants. In addition, there were fewer degraded muddy areas at animal pinch points such as near gateways.

It is to be hoped that, at the time of the conclusion of this year long survey period at the end of October, this more conservative level of sheep grazing will continue and be maintained in the longer term at this more appropriate level than was the case during the winter of 2007/08 when over-grazing was very obviously having a negative impact on the overall quality of the grazing meadows.

The Future for Grazing and Other Management Developments for Meadow 1

This, by area, is the largest single meadow of the whole Harnham Water Meadows Trust area, but supports the least diversity of bird species even if birds in the hedgerows around this meadow are included.

Apart from the substantial flock of Black-headed Gulls which tend to loaf on the meadow opposite the Queen Elizabeth Gardens and which generally scavenge on these gardens and the adjoining R. Nadder, the only other bird species regularly recorded on this meadow are Coots and Moorhens along the river bank, occasional visits by Meadow Pipits and Pied Wagtails, regular feeding by Wood Pigeons, Magpies and Crows, and irregular visits by the roaming flock of up to 300 Canada Geese.

The diversity of bird life on this meadow would be enhanced by the creation of a shallow scrape area which could be seen as a possible honey pot location for attracting previously breeding birds to the meadows as a whole and as outlined in Part "A" pages 7 - 8 and Part "B" pages 18 - 19.

If cattle are to be considered to be a useful grazing attribute to the meadows, then this Meadow 1 would be the only really suitable meadow for this purpose since there are no water channels or ridges to be degraded and eroded by the heavier weights of these animals.

The Future of the Copses

Requiring immediate attention from this autumn and winter 2008/09 is the issue of managing the copses in such a way so that they will become much more wildlife friendly.

Rotary Copse

As already indicated in Part "A" pages 8 - 9 and Part "B" page 20 of observations made during the progress of this survey year, it is this copse that has the most to offer in terms of its usefulness to bird life in particular, yet is in the most need of immediate management attention.

Topping of the most appropriate trees that are growing ever more tall and leggy as a result of inappropriately close planting within the copse at the outset plus the complete removal of some of the least appropriate trees and shrubs, are now urgent actions required.

New planting of wildlife-useful berry bearing and seed producing trees and shrubs to complement the remaining larger trees would transform this copse very quickly into a very useful food source, nesting area and cover break for a wide range of birds.

Ground clumps of residual branches and twigs from general maintenance of the copse placed strategically around the edges of the copse will provide an additional and regularly renewable source of shelter, cover and nesting opportunities for bird species such as Wrens, Robins and thrushes, and also act as cover for small mammals. Continually decaying wood materials are also essential ingredients for maintaining a large range of insects and other invertebrate creatures.

Stinging Nettles (*Urtica dioica*) in this copse can be controlled so as to be contained to specific parts of the copse, but **NOT** eradicated completely since this plant is an essential food plant for the larvae of some butterfly species e.g. Red Admiral (*Vanessa atalanta*), Small Tortoiseshell (*Aglais urticae*), Peacock (*Inachis io*) and Comma (*Polygonia c-album*), and many other insect larvae.

West Nadder and Seven Acre Copses

Both of these copses will benefit from judicious topping and some removals, and then careful replanting with appropriate berry and seed bearing tree, shrub and plant species along the same lines as for Rotary Copse.

Scout's Island Copse

A mature copse of many years standing, it does not appear that any imminent benefit of any kind would be derived from extensive maintenance to it in the near future.

The Future of the Hedgerows

Willow Pollards

During the period of July to October, further wind damage has degraded yet more of the Willow (*Salix sp.*) pollards and caused the necessity for removal of some of them completely.

Clearly, many of the remaining Willows need to be pollarded afresh with immediate urgency. This exercise will provide the ideal opportunity to use some of the removed branches to be used for replacement planting of removed pollards or to infill as new pollards where required, especially where there are pollard gaps along the old hedgerow lines which are long overdue for reinstatement.

Hedgerow Restoration Proposals

The proposals for commencement of hedgerow reinstatement have been addressed at some length in Part "B" pages 21 - 23 of this survey project.

Suffice it to say in this Part "C" that growing evidence continues to show in the data collected through this project from its inception and on through to this final period, the existing thick hedgerow areas are by far the most bird rich parts of the present hedgerow systems of the meadows.

If the degraded and severely fragmented parts of the hedgerows are to be rejuvenated and reinstated, and new planting is to commence along old hedgerow lines currently bare of any hedgerow growth at all, then work to commence this exercise needs to be addressed now without further delay.

It is important to stress again that hedgerow reinstatement in line with the proposals already made and submitted with Part "B" will do more to enhance the numbers and diversity of bird and other wildlife of the meadows than any other single exercise.

Proposals for Renewing a Breeding Birds Nest Box Scheme on the Meadows

Proposals were presented in Part “A” on page 10 for action to be taken during last autumn and winter, 2007/08, concerning this important method of enhancing bird breeding numbers across the meadows. No action ensued to bring this recommendation into play to benefit the bird breeding season of 2008.

However, these proposals and recommendations remain valid and it is urged that before March 2009, a range of a suitable variety of nest boxes is dispersed around the meadow’s area to benefit the bird breeding season of 2009.

Vermin Control

Occasional and entirely legal measures of vermin control have helped to keep numbers of Magpies, Carrion Crows and Grey Squirrels from becoming too invasive across the meadows. It is desirable to ensure that such controls continue appropriately.

In addition to controls of the vermin species mentioned above, there are also negative impacts on the meadows to the quality of the grass for grazing purposes and general intimidation to other bird species caused by the large flock of up to 300 Canada Geese that descend upon Meadows 1, 2 and 3 from time to time. This autumn, appropriate measures to scare off and disperse these birds are presently being addressed. More robust methods of dissuading these birds from feeling too comfortable on the meadows may need to be considered.

Forward Planning Strategy Document

Since much habitat improvement work “on the ground” would actively be progressed during the months of October to March, an accountable and achievable programme of such work covering the next five years needs to be addressed, costed and agreed by the Management Committee. Such projected work must be formally documented in a Strategy Document and measured against work actually achieved, be reviewed annually and adjustments made accordingly.

John Vickerman

30th October 2008.