

## Landscape Recovery Baseline Bird Survey 2024

### Introduction

A survey of the birds recorded in an area bounded by Holmfirth, Meltham and Honley in West Yorkshire, was carried out by nine experienced birdwatchers in the Spring of 2024.

The purpose was to establish which birds are present before trees and hedges, planted in the previous 2 years on farmland as part of the Government's Landscape Recovery, mature. This survey will form the baseline against which future changes will be measured.

### Area Studied

The area is bounded by the following OS grid references; SE 108082; SE 103098; SE 134097; SE 141112. The elevation varies between 194m and 330m AOD. The area was originally broken down into seven patches but the survey actually took place on 6 of these, covering an area of approximately 6 square km. The routes taken were on Public Rights of Way or permissive paths with the lengths covered ranging between 1.7km and 3.2km. Roads were used to complete the circuits, but surveys did not take place on them for safety reasons.

### Protocol

The methodology was discussed with British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and follows the principles and nomenclature of their Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) but with adjustments to suit River Holme Connections (RHC) purposes. This protocol is detailed to enable the survey to be carried out in an identical manner in the distant future. The same route was taken on each visit, recording all birds seen and heard, paying particular attention to singing and possible breeding birds.

Five visits were undertaken on each patch between April and mid-June with start times between 6 and 9am. Visits were spaced out as evenly as possible over this period.

### Habitat Survey

A desk top habitat survey was carried out by RHC staff using habitat maps and knowledge gained during tree planting work. Summaries are added to each patch.

## Summary of Results

A total of 71 bird species were observed with 34 breeding. 6 mammal species were also recorded. The birds are listed in Appendix 1.

In the following tables which set out the results of the survey, breeding has been defined as Confirmed and Probable breeding as set out in Birdtrack (BTO database) plus singing recorded on three or more visits.

Patch No	Patch name	Recorders	Total No. Species	Breeding
1	Oldfield	Paul and Chris Coleman	28	16
2	Netherthong	Stephen Cook	28	34
3	Wolfstone Height	David Butterfield Roger Mitchell	32	40
4	Harden Hill Track	Chris Abell	43	32
5	Swinney Knoll	Ian Ibbotson Dennis Sykes	37	64
6	Honley Moor	Trevor Doherty Alf King	31	19

### Patch 1 Oldfield

The habitat is mostly farmland.

28 species were recorded including Bullfinch, Willow Warbler and Lesser Black-backed Gull.

Mammals seen were Brown Hare and Domestic Cat with evidence of Badgers.

<b>Species</b>	<b>Breeding</b>
Pheasant	1
Robin	1
Blackbird	2
Carrion Crow	2
Duncock	2
Jackdaw	2
Rook	2
Skylark	2
Wren	2

## Patch 2 Netherthong

The habitat at Netherthong is mostly farmland.

28 species were recorded including Spotted Flycatcher, Greylag Goose, and Red-legged Partridge.

Mammals seen included Rabbit, Roe Deer, Fox, Grey Squirrel and Brown Hare.

A pair of Canada geese were seen on 2 occasions showing courtship behaviour.

Species	Breeding
Canada Goose	1
Carrion Crow	1
Collared Dove	1
House Sparrow	1
Willow Warbler	1
Chaffinch	2
Jackdaw	2
Magpie	2
Pheasant	2
Starling	2
Woodpigeon	2
Chiffchaff	3
Robin	3
Song Thrush	3
Blackbird	4
Wren	4

### Patch 3 Wolfstone Heights

The habitat at Wolfstone Heights is mostly farmland habitat but also includes heathland, bog and woodland areas.

32 different species were recorded, including Green and Great Spotted Woodpecker, Redstart and Little Owl.

No mammals were recorded.

Species	Breeding
Chiffchaff	1
Treecreeper	1
Willow Warbler	1
Blackcap	2
Blue Tit	2
Curlew	2
Dunnock	2
Goldcrest	2
Great Tit	2
Blackbird	3
Chaffinch	5
Coal Tit	5
Wren	5
Robin	7

### Patch 4 Harden Hill Track

The dominant habitat at Harden Hill Track is grazed farmland with southern edge rough and wet. There are 2 substantial plantations and the northern edge contains large houses with mature gardens.

43 species were recorded including Lapwing, Snipe, Curlew, all of which were on the fringe of the patch on wet rough pasture which is unlikely to be planted in future. Little Owl was seen twice at the same places (farm buildings and mature tree). A pair of Wheatears were observed in courtship behaviour once in suitable habitat but never seen again. It is assumed they were on passage.

Mammals seen during the visits include the Brown Hare and Fox with Mole hills present in many fields.

Species	Breeding
Carrion Crow	1
Great Tit	1
Lapwing	1
Mistle Thrush	1
Woodpigeon	1
Blackbird	2
Coal Tit	2
Collared Dove	2
Dunnock	2
Willow Warbler	2
Chaffinch	3
Robin	3
Skylark	3
Song Thrush	3
Wren	5

### Patch 5 Swinney Knoll

The habitat is farmland for the majority but also includes wood and scrubland.

37 species were recorded including Tawny Owl, Whitethroat, and Sparrowhawk.

A pair of Buzzards was reported by an interested farmer as having an active nest in the centre of the patch and was regularly seen there. There was further evidence suggesting breeding of Buzzards which related to birds from adjacent areas.

There was evidence of these mammals: Roe Deer, Badger, Brown Hare and Grey Squirrel.

Species	Breeding
Buzzard	1
Dunnock	1
Goldcrest	1
Treecreeper	1
Blue Tit	2
Coal Tit	2
Goldfinch	2
Long-tailed Tit	2
Nuthatch	2
Stock Dove	2
Blackcap	3
Skylark	3
Willow Warbler	3
Jackdaw	4
Robin	4
Blackbird	5
Chaffinch	5
Chiffchaff	5
Woodpigeon	5
Wren	5
Song Thrush	6

Patch 6 Honley Moor

The habitat at Honley Moor is predominantly farmland.

31 species were, including Jay, Mistle Thrush and Lapwing

The only mammal seen was the Brown Hare.

<b>Species</b>	<b>Breeding</b>
Blackcap	1
Magpie	1
Robin	1
Blackbird	2
House Sparrow	2
Pied Wagtail	2
Willow Warbler	2
Pheasant	3
Wren	5

## Storage

Paper copies of the protocol, maps and survey information are held at the RHC offices in Honley. Digital copies are stored on the RHC SharePoint for future reference. Data from the survey has been entered into a database "Nature's Holme Bird Survey Database," also stored on the RHC SharePoint.

## Improvements and Recommendations

Surveys are better carried out by two people for ease of watching, recording and safety.

The recording sheets were provided as a guide, but some observers used different ways of recording. This worked and is acceptable as long as the principles set out in the protocol are followed.

The division of patches into individual transects is only necessary for consistency and the observers benefit. Results should be aggregated at patch level.

Focus should be on breeding birds, particularly to distinguish between possible/probable/actual breeding as defined by BTO Birdtrack. Singing as possible breeding should only be counted if recorded at the same place on 3 or more visits.

**When recording breeding behaviour in the field, the type, as defined within the Birdtrack categories Probable and Confirmed, should also be added.**

Recorders should be asked to estimate the breeding pairs on their patch and a blank table (as in patch summaries above) should be included in the Protocol.

The Protocol should be reviewed with the aim of simplifying the amount of data collected focusing on the output tables as included within this report.

The number of birds on farmland is generally low, with breeding birds mainly found in gardens and existing woods.

Care should be taken not to double record where circuits overlap.

Although the roads used are only minor, they are narrow and remarkably heavily trafficked. Recording should not be carried out on them for safety reasons.

The invaluable baseline data provided from this will inform the impact of habitat creation and land management on breeding bird populations and behaviours.

**It is recommended that this survey be repeated at 5 yearly intervals to assess how these interventions may have affected bird populations.** However, it should be noted that external factors such as climate change will have an effect.

## Acknowledgements

Thanks are due those their helpers who carried out the surveys during a cold wet spring in exposed conditions.

Thanks also to James Heywood of BTO, Mike Denton, Mike Wainman and Alf King who gave valuable advice when setting up the survey.

Thanks are due to the staff and Trustees of RHC who have supported this project throughout using their expertise to both advise and to carry out specialist tasks. Special mention must go to Rachel Horton, a year in industry student from Aberystwyth University who has entered and analysed all the data.

Chris Abell  
November 2024

## **Appendix 1**

List of species recorded where breeding is defined as Confirmed and Probable breeding as set out in Birdtrack (BTO database) plus singing recorded on 3 or more visits.

<b>Species</b>	<b>Breeding</b>
Canada Goose	1
Greylag Goose	
Mute Swan	
Whooper Swan	
Mallard	
Tufted Duck	
Goosander	
Pheasant	6
Red-legged Partridge	
Swift	
Cuckoo	
Rock Dove	
Stock Dove	2
Woodpigeon	8
Collared Dove	3
Moorhen	
Coot	
Oystercatcher	
Lapwing	1
Curlew	2
Snipe	
Black-headed Gull	
Common Gull	
Lesser Black-backed Gull	
Grey Heron	
Sparrowhawk	
Buzzard	1
Little Owl	

Tawny Owl	
Great Spotted Woodpecker	
Green Woodpecker	
Kestrel	
Jay	
Magpie	3
Jackdaw	8
Rook	2
Carrion Crow	4
Raven	
Coal Tit	9
Blue Tit	4
Great Tit	3
Skylark	8
Swallow	
House Martin	
Long-tailed Tit	2
Willow Warbler	9
Chiffchaff	9
Blackcap	6
Whitethroat	
Goldcrest	3
Wren	26
Nuthatch	2
Treecreeper	2
Starling	2
Song Thrush	12
Mistle Thrush	1
Blackbird	18
Spotted Flycatcher	
Robin	19
Redstart	

Wheatear	
House Sparrow	3
Dunnock	7
Grey Wagtail	
Pied Wagtail	2
Meadow Pipit	
Chaffinch	15
Bullfinch	
Greenfinch	
Linnet	
Goldfinch	2