

BEXHILL-HASTINGS BYPASS WINTER BIRD SURVEY

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

Ecological Survey & Assessment (ECOSA) was contracted by Acta to carry out a survey of wintering birds along the route of the proposed Bexhill Bypass and through the proposed Pebsham Country Park. The aim of the survey was to identify key areas and numbers of wintering birds within the two survey areas.

1.2 Methods

The survey was based on a transect method, that of the bypass followed the route of the proposed bypass and that in the proposed country park followed a route that bisects the park and takes in key areas of the site. The two transect routes are shown on **Figure 1**.

The two survey routes were walked by two experienced observers on six dates between 9 January and 12 March 2006, at approximately fortnightly intervals. All visits were undertaken during dry and calm conditions. For logistical reasons the bypass route was walked from west to east and the country park route was walked from east to west. Detours were made to sections of the bypass route following requests by landowners or due to impassable watercourses. However, all sections of the route were able to be seen and were scanned using binoculars.

No disturbance was noted apart from clay pigeon shooting in sector 2 of the bypass transect on one date. Much of the valley had become flooded prior to the survey on 26 February, which meant that the observer walking the bypass transect had to make a long detour and could not complete most of sectors 1 and 2 of this route. These were known to be very poor for birds, however, and this did not affect the overall results of the survey.

Key bird species were marked onto field maps using standard British Trust for Ornithology codes and symbols. Birds seen in flight were included in the survey. A survey form was used to log records for each sector and record general visit details.

In general, only species considered to be of conservation concern in the UK were included in the survey, but all wildfowl were recorded, including common species such as Mallard, Moorhen and Coot. Efforts were made to find and record all such key species within 200m of the transect routes, but any identified at greater distances were also recorded. Some incidental observations of mammal species were also made during the survey.

At the end of the survey the count data were checked and transferred to an Excel spreadsheet. This was used to count totals for each visit and calculate maxima for each sector across visits. Summary maps for each species were compiled from the visit maps, denoting the six survey visits as letters A to F.

2.0 RESULTS

2.1 Introduction

The full count data and survey details are presented in **Appendix 1**. The **tables 1-2** show the maximum counts of each species in each sector over the whole survey and the maximum total count for each species during any visit, for each of the survey routes. Distribution maps of selected species are shown in **Figures 2-4**. The results for each route are discussed sector by sector below, particular emphasis is placed on those species of conservation concern.

2.2 Bypass Route (Table 1)

Sector 1

In the woodland along the railway cutting, records included two Bullfinch on visits C and D and one sighting of a Mistle Thrush. At Upper Wilting Farm up to 8 resident House Sparrow were estimated and Dunnock was heard singing twice. There were occasional sightings of thrushes in the fields and adjacent woodland to the west of the farm, and a Green Woodpecker was seen on visit B. Goldcrest was recorded on two visits in the woodland along the stream between sectors 1 and 2.

Sector 2

Green Woodpecker was recorded on four visits within this sector. Birds were heard making territorial calls from within the woodland along the dismantled railway line and from the Alder wood at the eastern edge of the sector. An individual was seen feeding in the grazed field to the east of the railway on visit B. Bullfinch was seen on two occasions. Other species recorded were Song Thrush, Redwing, Dunnock and Yellowhammer.

Sector 3

The sector crosses a large arable field below Hillcroft Farm, which was under winter cereals at the time of the survey. A Bean Goose was flushed from here during visit D and 190 Lapwing were roosting at the top of the field on visit C, along with a flock of gulls. A further 20 Lapwing were seen flying south from the field on this visit and a flock of 64 were seen flying east on visit E. Flocks of Starling were seen flying east on two occasions.

The hedgerow at the southern end of the field held regular Dunnock and Song Thrush, with a Bullfinch seen on visit B and a flock of 7 male Yellowhammers on visit F. These and other passerines (including numbers of Chaffinch) were attracted to a pile of rotting grass cuttings and tree brash in the corner of the adjacent field to the south.

Skylark was regularly seen in this area (usually within the arable field or the adjacent pasture to the south), with records of up to 4 birds on three different visits. There was only one other record of Skylark elsewhere during the survey.

Other records of waterfowl comprised two sightings of Snipe, a pair of Mute Swan on visit B, two records of Moorhen and a single Teal on visit E. All of these were seen in or close to ditches to the south side of the transect route.

Other species recorded included Green Woodpecker, Reed Bunting and Stonechat, with one or two sightings of each. A flock of 150 Fieldfare was present on visit E. Up to 6 Meadow Pipit were recorded on visits B and E.

Sector 4

This sector includes several hedgerows, which held numerous Dunnock and Song Thrush. Two Snipe were flushed from the marshy field to the north of Acton's Farm on visit E and a Woodcock was flushed from the adjacent field corner on visit D. Moorhen was heard calling from the field on visit F. The remaining fields of grazed permanent pasture within the sector held feeding flocks of Starlings, Redwing, Fieldfare and Meadow Pipits on various occasions. Highest counts were 41 Starlings on visit A, 116 Redwing on visit B, 30 Fieldfare on visit A and 9 Meadow Pipits on visit A. A Water Pipit was recorded on visit C. The fields are also used for feeding by resident Mistle Thrushes (maximum count of 5). These were heard singing from Acton's Farm and the adjacent woodland to the north-west on visit A.

Sector 5

Two Brent Geese were seen flying west over this sector on visit C, but are unlikely to have been feeding anywhere in the area. No other waterfowl species were recorded, but a Grey Wagtail was seen during visit C. The horse fields at the southern end of the sector regularly supported feeding flocks of thrushes, including 3 Mistle Thrushes and peak counts of 74 Redwing and 80 Fieldfare. Two Starling were present on visit C. Dunnock and Song Thrush were moderately numerous in the sector, with maximum counts of 3 and 5 respectively. A Yellowhammer was present in a mature hedgerow to the south of Acton's Farm on visit B, and three were seen here on visit D, feeding at the edge of a large heap of rotting grass cuttings. Bullfinch was recorded along the dismantled railway near the end of the route on two occasions, and a pair of Goldcrest were present here on four visits. Other records included two sightings of Sparrowhawk near the copse and two Stock Dove flying over here on one visit. The copse held a flock of 29 Siskin on visit A. Three Lesser Redpoll were seen at the edge of the woodland by the railway on visit F.

2.3 Country Park Route (Table 2)

Sector 1

A pair of Mute Swans were present on the reedy pool near the southern end of the sector on visit A, and a single bird was seen on visit D. One or two Mallard were seen on the fishing lake at the start of the route on three occasions and a pair were seen in flight half way along the sector on visit E. This lake also regularly held at least 5 Moorhens.

Up to 6 singing Dunnock were present on visit F, in the Bramble scrub and woodland in proximity to the railway. These areas were also used by Song Thrush, Bullfinch (maximum 4 in one flock), Green Woodpecker (one record) and Goldcrest (one record). A flock of 12 Stock Dove were seen flying north over the wood to the south of the railway on visit B, followed by 2 on visit D.

Reed Buntings were seen on all but one visit, including two sightings from the reedy pool. A Cetti's Warbler was heard calling along the willow carr to the north of the pool on the final visit.

Sector 2

Most of the birds recorded were using the partially flooded grassland to the south of the main dyke. There were a few records from the reedbed areas to the north. Grey Heron was seen flying over the area on two occasions. Snipe were recorded on two visits, with 5 seen on the last visit. A flock of 105 Lapwing were roosting and flying around the area on visit E. A pair of Mute Swan was present on visits A, B, C and F, with a single bird also recorded on three visits. A Barnacle Goose was present on visit D. A Cetti's Warbler was singing next to the dyke from the western end of the sector on the final visit.

Meadow Pipit were recorded on three visits, with a flock of 12 feeding on the north side of the dyke on visit E. A Water Pipit was seen feeding on wet grassland and flying around the area on visit A and a Skylark also flew over on this visit. Other passerines seen in the sector included Song Thrush, Dunnock, Reed Bunting (1 record) and Bullfinch (1 record).

Sector 3

The wet grassland at the northern end of this sector held a pair of Shelduck and a pair of Moorhen on visit E. A total of 11 Teal were flushed from here on the final visit. A Snipe was flushed from a ditch next to a track near the northern end of the sector on five of the six visits, so is likely to have been the same individual each time.

Other species recorded included Dunnock (maximum 2), Song Thrush (maximum 3), Redwing (3 records) and Goldcrest (2 records). A flock of 29 Meadow Pipits flew into a field on the south side of the wood on visit B, with 1 here during visit D. A Stock Dove was seen to fly into the copse on visit C and 2 were recorded in flight near to the wood on visit D.

Sector 4

This is a wooded section of the dismantled railway. The only key birds recorded were Redwing (1 record), Song Thrush (2 records) and Goldcrest (2 records). Other species noted included Treecreeper, Nuthatch and Great Spotted Woodpecker.

Sector 5

Most birds were recorded along the wooded trackway south of Acton's Farm and the adjacent fields. Dunnock and Song Thrush were frequent here and were also recorded in the hedgerow to the south. Highest counts were 4 Dunnocks and 6 Song Thrushes. A Grey Wagtail flew over the trackway on visit A and two Goldcrest were in the hedge to the south on visit B. There were 12 Redwing feeding in nearby permanent pasture on the final visit and three other sightings of single birds during earlier visits. Colonies of House Sparrow occur at the farm, but could not be easily counted. The highest estimate made was 20 birds.

Table 1: Summary of Results for Bypass Route, figures are maximum counts for each sector.

Species	1	2	3	4	5	Max visit total
Bean Goose	0	0	1	0	0	1
Brent Goose	0	0	0	0	2	2
Mute Swan	0	0	2	0	0	2
Teal	0	0	1	0	0	1
Sparrowhawk	1	0	0	1	1	2
Moorhen	0	0	2	1	0	2
Coot	0	0	1	0	0	1
Lapwing	0	0	210	4	0	214
Snipe	0	0	1	2	0	3
Woodcock	0	0	0	1	0	1
Stock Dove	0	0	0	0	2	2
Green Woodpecker	1	1	1	1	0	3
Skylark	0	0	4	0	0	4
Meadow Pipit	0	0	3	11	7	11
Water Pipit	0	0	0	1	0	1
Grey Wagtail	0	0	1	0	1	1
Dunnock	1	1	4	4	3	9
Stonechat	0	0	1	0	0	1
Song Thrush	2	2	3	3	5	11
Redwing	27	1	0	116	74	193
Mistle Thrush	2	0	1	5	3	7
Fieldfare	2	0	150	30	80	153
Goldcrest	1	0	0	0	2	3
Starling	0	0	60	41	2	62
House Sparrow	8	0	0	0	0	8
Siskin	0	0	0	0	29	29
Redpoll	0	0	0	0	3	3
Bullfinch	2	2	1	0	2	3
Reed Bunting	0	0	1	0	0	1
Yellowhammer	0	1	8	0	3	9

Table 2: Summary of Results for Country Park Route, figures are maximum counts for each sector.

Species	1	2	3	4	5	Max visit total
Grey Heron	0	2	0	0	0	2
Barnacle Goose	0	1	0	0	0	1
Mute Swan	2	3	0	0	0	4
Shelduck	0	0	2	0	0	2
Mallard	4	1	0	0	0	4
Teal	0	0	11	0	0	11
Sparrowhawk	0	1	0	0	0	1
Moorhen	5	0	2	0	0	7
Lapwing	0	105	0	0	0	105
Snipe	0	5	1	0	0	6
Stock Dove	12	0	2	0	0	12
Green Woodpecker	1	0	0	0	0	1
Skylark	0	1	0	0	0	1
Meadow Pipit	1	12	29	0	1	30
Water Pipit	0	1	0	0	0	1
Grey Wagtail	0	0	0	0	1	1
Dunnock	6	2	2	0	4	10
Song Thrush	3	1	3	1	6	11
Redwing	1	70	2	1	12	83
Mistle Thrush	0	0	0	0	1	1
Cetti's Warbler	1	1	0	0	0	2
Goldcrest	1	0	2	1	2	3
Starling	0	1	5	0	0	5
House Sparrow	0	0	0	10	20	20
Bullfinch	4	1	0	0	0	4
Reed Bunting	1	1	0	0	0	2
Yellowhammer	0	1	0	0	0	1

APPENDIX I**Visit A****Date:** 9 January 2006**Weather:** Overcast, 9°C, still to very light E breeze, slight mist.**Other notes:** Good survey conditions.

Species	Bypass Route Sectors					Total	Country Park Sectors					Total
	1	2	3	4	5		1	2	3	4	5	
Grey Heron						0		1				1
Mute Swan						0	2	2				4
Moorhen						0	5					5
Snipe						0			1			1
Green												
Woodpecker			1			1						0
Skylark						0		1				1
Meadow Pipit				11		11						0
Water Pipit						0		1				1
Grey Wagtail						0				1		1
Dunnock				1		1						0
Song Thrush	2			3	5	10	3	1	1	1	2	8
Redwing	1	1		12		14		1	2		1	4
Mistle Thrush				3		3					1	1
Fieldfare				30		30						0
Goldcrest	1				2	3						0
Starling			6	41		47						0
House Sparrow						0					10	10
Siskin					29	29						0
Bullfinch					2	2	1	1				2
Reed Bunting						0	1					1

Visit B**Date:** 15 January 2006**Weather:** Overcast with occasional bright spells, 9°C, light E breeze.**Other notes:** Excellent survey conditions. Small birds active.

Species	Bypass Route Sectors					Total	Country Park Sectors					Total
	1	2	3	4	5		1	2	3	4	5	
Mute Swan			2			2		2				2
Mallard						0	2	1				3
Stock Dove						0	12					12
Green												
Woodpecker	1	1				2	1					1
Meadow Pipit			1	5		6		1	29			30
Duncock			4	1	1	6		1			1	2
Song Thrush			3	3	3	9	1	1	3		6	11
Redwing	27			116	50	193			1		3	4
Mistle Thrush	1			5		6						0
Fieldfare	2			6	80	88						0
Goldcrest					1	1			1		2	3
Starling				9		9						0
House Sparrow						0					20	20
Bullfinch		2	1			3	4					4
Yellowhammer			1		1	2		1				1

Visit C**Date:** 29 January 2006**Weather:** Clear, sunny, cold 5°, F3-4 NE.**Other notes:** Cold wind may have affected bird activity.

Species	Bypass Route Sectors					Total	Country Park Sectors					Total
	1	2	3	4	5		1	2	3	4	5	
Brent Goose					2	2						0
Mute Swan						0		3				3
Mallard						0	1					1
Sparrowhawk				1	1	2						0
Moorhen						0	5					5
Lapwing			210	4		214						0
Snipe						0			1			1
Stock Dove					2	2			1			1
Green												
Woodpecker		1	1	1		3						0
Sskylark			4			4						0
Meadow Pipit					7	7		1			1	2
Water Pipit				1		1						0
Grey Wagtail					1	1						0
Dunnock	1	1		1	1	4			2		4	6
Song Thrush	1	2	2	2	2	9	1		1			2
Redwing	1			8	4	13				1		1
Mistle Thrush				4	3	7						0
Fieldfare				1		1						0
Goldcrest	1				2	3			2			2
Starling			60		2	62						0
House Sparrow	8					8				5	7	12
Bullfinch	2					2	2					2
Reed Bunting						0	1					1

Visit D**Date:** 5 February 2006**Weather:** Cold, warm later (6°C at start, 10°C at finish), light N-NE, hazy sun.**Other notes:** Lots of birdsong. Clay-pigeon shooting, sector 2 of bypass transect, may have caused local disturbance.

Species	Bypass Route Sectors					Total	Country Park Sectors					Total
	1	2	3	4	5		1	2	3	4	5	
Bean Goose			1			1						0
Barnacle												
Goose						0		1				1
Mute Swan						0	1	1				2
Sparrowhawk	1				1	2		1				1
Moorhen			2			2						0
Coot			1			1						0
Snipe			1			1		3	1			4
Woodcock				1		1						0
Stock Dove						0	2		2			4
Green												
Woodpecker		1				1						0
Meadow Pipit						0	1	3	1			5
Grey Wagtail			1			1						0
Dunnock	1	1	1	3	2	8			1			1
Stonechat			1			1						0
Song Thrush			1	1		2		1	2		1	4
Redwing					74	74						0
Mistle Thrush	2		1	1	3	7						0
Goldcrest					2	2			1			1
House Sparrow	4					4					12	12
Bullfinch	1					1						0
Reed Bunting						0	1					1
Yellowhammer					3	3		1				1

Visit E**Date:** 26 February 2006**Weather:** Very cold, 3°C, overcast but bright, F1-3 N.**Other notes:** Flooding in valley caused access problems to bypass route. Sector 2 and part of sector 1 not surveyed.

Species	Bypass Route Sectors					Total	Country Park Sectors					Total
	1	2	3	4	5		1	2	3	4	5	
Mute Swan			1			1						0
Shelduck						0			2			2
Mallard						0	4					4
Teal			1			1						0
Moorhen						0	5		2			7
Lapwing			65			65		105				105
Snipe			1	2		3			1			1
Skylark			3			3						0
Meadow Pipit			3			3		12				12
Duncock	1			4		5	2				3	5
Song Thrush			1	3		4	1				1	2
Redwing					39	39						0
Mistle Thrush				2	2	4						0
Fieldfare			150	3		153						0
Goldcrest						0	1					1
Starling				5		5		1				1
House Sparrow	8					8				10	8	18
Bullfinch					1	1	1					1
Reed Bunting			1			1	1	1				2

Visit F**Date:** 12 March 2006**Weather:** Cold, 3-4°, milder later, overcast at first, but mainly sunny later, F1-3 SE.**Other notes:** Good survey conditions.

Species	Bypass Route Sectors					Total	Country Park Sectors					Total
	1	2	3	4	5		1	2	3	4	5	
Grey Heron						0		2				2
Mute Swan						0		3				3
Mallard						0		1				1
Teal						0				11		11
Moorhen			1	1		2						0
Snipe						0		5	1			6
Green												
Woodpecker		1				1						0
Skylark			1			1						0
Dunnock			2	4	3	9	6	2	1		1	10
Song Thrush	1	2	2	2	4	11	2		1	1	2	6
Redwing					8	8	1	70			12	83
Mistle Thrush					2	2						0
Fieldfare	1					1						0
Cetti's Warbler						0	1	1				2
Goldcrest						0				1		1
Starling				4		4			5			5
House Sparrow	4					4				6	10	16
Redpoll					3	3						0
Bullfinch		1				1						0
Reed Bunting						0	1					1
Yellowhammer		1	8			9						0