



# Overview Breeding Bird Survey for Wakelyns Organic Agroforestry

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## Outline of the survey, scope, limitations and discussion:

This is an abridged version of the original report and does not include maps.

This survey was conducted in spring of 2020, (14.04.2020 and 04.05.2020) with the view of providing a baseline survey of the bird life at Wakelyns Organic Agroforestry, Metfield. The survey consists of two transect visits (see map) walking the farm early in the morning and mapping all birds seen and heard. Visit maps are then combined to produce a single map on which birds considered to have breeding territories are marked. This method is based on the breeding bird survey methods used by the BTO. There is a significant degree of interpretation in these results as a two-visit survey is not considered to be an exhaustive search, a 'full' survey would consist of four to six visits, however this should give a good baseline and a repeatable method for future surveys to compare to.

Some very common species are omitted and/or estimates of breeding not attempted, for example for wood pigeon no breeding estimate is made, and gull species and pheasants are ignored. There are also species that this survey will not have recorded (owls for example).

At Wakelyns, a count of 25 breeding species is excellent for a farm of this size. Most species encountered were scrub or woodland nesting specialists – with the busiest parts of the survey along the mature species rich hedgerows.

Organic management and agroforestry practices are clearly providing plentiful insect and seed food along with nesting habitat. Three species of note: turtle dove, bullfinch and willow warbler are benefiting uniquely from this set-up and efforts should be made to retain those habitat elements that these species are reliant on. Opportunities exist to improve things further for wildlife, notes are included at the end of the report with suggestions for these enhancements.

Several of the birds found in the survey are red or amber listed in the current BoCC publication, each of these is dealt with in the notes below.

### Abbreviations used in this report:

BTO – British Trust for Ornithology

BBS – Breeding Bird Survey

BoCC – Birds of Conservation Concern (UK, version 4)

SWT – Suffolk Wildlife Trust

PROW – Public Right of Way

## Results of the survey:

Table 1 below summarises the breeding and non-breeding records made on the two visits. Where breeding activity is confirmed an estimate of the number of territories is made. BoCC red and amber listed species are highlighted in their respective colours and a more detailed assessment of these species is given below.

Overview Bird Survey at Wakelyns Organic Agroforestry, Spring 2020			
Breeding records			
Abbreviation	Species	Territories	Notes
B	Blackbird	6	
BC	Blackcap	3	
BF	Bullfinch	1	In mature scrub around farmyard, a special bird to have.
BT	Blue Tit	3	Will benefit from boxes provided
CC	Chiffchaff	5	
CH	Chaffinch	3	
D	Duncock	2	Hard to survey for as a quiet bird
G	Greenfinch	1	
GT	Great Tit	2	Will benefit from the boxes
GW	Garden Warbler	1	Possibly more, further effort needed to confirm
LI	Linnet	2	In hedgerows, a declining farmland bird
LT	Longtailed Tit	1	Along driveway
LW	Lesser Whitethroat	1	In driveway hedgerow
MH	Moorhen	1	In large pond by sprayer manufacturers yard
R	Robin	2	
RL	Red Legged Partridge	1	Pair seen
S	Skylark	4	In arable around Wakelyns - will be feeding within Wakelyns
SD	Stock dove	2	Using Barn Owl box and farmyard
SL	Barn Swallow	1	Around farmyard - numbers uncertain
ST	Song Thrush	1	In nearby woodland
TD	Turtle Dove	1	In good scrub by meadow and using 1 <sup>st</sup> year leys
WR	Wren	12	
WT	Whitethroat	7	
WW	Willow Warbler	3	Really nice to still have these, suffering due to climate change.
YH	Yellowhammer	1	In old hedgerow to east
Records not confirmed as breeding			
Abbreviation	Species	Visit	Notes
BZ	Buzzard	B	Overhead
MG	Magpie	B	Very likely breeding - active and probably feeding young
WP	Woodpigeon	A + B	Ubiquitous
GO	Goldfinch	B	Only recorded on second visit - likely breeding
GR	Green Woodpecker	B	Flew away on second visit

J	Jay	A	Likely breeding in nearby woodland
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In total 31 species were recorded at or around Wakelyns, breeding number estimates have been made for 25 of these. A survey of greater effort may return a higher species count and more accurate breeding numbers.

## Notes on key breeding species:

This section provides links (within the titles) to information on the key bird species of conservation concern (BoCC) that over-summer and nest at or close to the farm.

A statement for each species details observations and status at and around Wakelyns based on the survey work.

### Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* (BoCC amber-listed species)

#### **Status/observations at or around Wakelyns:**

Single male heard singing on both visits from dense scrub by farmhouse, utilising similar overgrown scrubby hedge habitat as turtle dove. Bullfinches breed in woods with shrubby undergrowth and in particular woodland pasture, woodland edge, scrub and occasionally tall, thick hedgerows. The provision of scrub habitats at Wakelyns has clearly benefitted this species. Some extension of this habitat in field corners and along the woodland edge would help to secure its future.

#### **What does this species need?**

- Dense scrubby woodland edge, tall thick hedgerows.
- Plentiful seed sources
- Plentiful insect food available in breeding season

### Dunnock *Prunella modularis* (BoCC amber-listed species)

#### **Status/observations at or around Wakelyns:**

Two birds heard independently on surveys – very likely that you have multiple territories. A hard bird to survey as they can be quiet. Benefitting from the denser sections of hedgerow.

#### **What does this species need?**

- Dense scrub or woodland edge nesting habitat, bramble and thorny bushes.
- Plentiful insect food.

### Linnet *Carduelis cannabina* (BoCC red-listed species)

#### **Status/observations at or around Wakelyns:**

Utilising hedgerows (breeding) and a small flock noted on the first survey in fallow agroforestry strip. Linnets will often nest in loose association (semi-colonially), and often utilise areas of low scrub and scattered bushes. They also favour low hedges that are thick at the base, so a diversity of hedgerow heights on the farm would benefit Linnets as well as other hedge-nesting species.

#### **What does this species need?**

- Dense scrub patches for nesting (often nesting semi-colonially) and/or low thick hedges.
- Seed food available all year on fallow land, overwinter stubbles and weedy margins as well as rough grasslands.

- Wild bird cover plots can be useful for Linnet.

### Skylark *Alauda arvensis* (BoCC red-listed species)

#### **Status/observations at or around Wakelyns:**

Only recorded from adjacent arable land, where there appears to be good numbers. Wakelyns itself is likely too enclosed for skylark to utilise readily and in 2020 the fallow had been cut multiple times in the spring which would have had a detrimental effect if they had been utilising it. Skylark will be utilising the organic areas with open aspects for feeding and will certainly benefit at the landscape scale from the organic production model used at Wakelyns as it will provide abundant insect food.

#### **What does this species need?**

- Spring cropping or unsown plots within shorter winter cereal crops for nesting
- Plentiful insect food in foraging areas
- In grassland, nest avoidance if silage making, or later hay making are best, avoid spring cutting.
- Overwintering stubble, or cover cropping to provide winter food resource.

### Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos* (BoCC red-listed species)

#### **Status/observations at or around Wakelyns:**

Bird heard from adjacent woodland where it is almost certainly nesting. Song thrush will benefit from uncut hedges and unmanaged grassy margins for food resource.

#### **What does this species need?**

- Healthy soil with plentiful earthworms and snails. Grazed pasture can be particularly good, as can wetlands and pond margins.
- Woodland with dense understorey or thick and tall hedgerows for nesting, early nesting species so no management after beginning of March.
- Hedgerow fruit for autumn food, hedges managed on rotation are best for this.
- Wild bird cover plots near woodland can be useful winter food sources.

### Stock Dove *Columba oenas* (BoCC amber listed species)

#### **Status/observations at or around Wakelyns:**

Birds heard singing in farmyard and observed using barn owl box. Likely that this was two separate nests, suggesting suitable opportunities. Erecting further Barn Owl box would give both Owls (if present) and Stock Dove additional choices.

#### **What does this species need?**

- Hole nesting opportunities in mature trees, old buildings or larger bird boxes (e.g. barn owl boxes)

- Available seed food.

### Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* (BoCC red-listed species)

#### **Status/observations at or around Wakelyns:**

Bird heard singing on first visit and reported to remain thereafter. Birds are thought to reduce singing when breeding so this should be a good sign. Turtle dove are a species requiring urgent conservation action having been lost from much of the country. The dense overgrown scrub at Wakelyns will provide suitable nesting opportunities, safeguarding this by creating further suitable nesting areas would be good. The first year fallow agroforestry rows looked to be providing ideal feeding habitat for turtle dove, with bare ground and early seeding plant species, effort should be made to ensure there is an element of this feeding habitat available each spring – ideally established the preceding autumn. Opening ponds and ensuring they have shallow sloping access would also help.

#### **What does this species need?**

- Large dense overgrown hedgerows and scrub areas for safe nesting
- Sparse and open vegetation areas with early available seed food for returning birds in the spring.
- Access to water, used to create a 'milk' fed to chicks.
- Low levels of disturbance

### Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* (BoCC amber listed species)

#### **Status/Observations at or around Wakelyns:**

Three birds holding territories is a great result here, clearly the habitat is suitable and the birds were in each case utilising the agroforestry rows. Suggest that a combination of good nesting opportunity along with plentiful food and potentially a cooler microclimate is working in the favour of Willow Warbler.

#### **What does this species need?**

- Scrub for nesting
- Insect food in summer, fruit and berries in autumn.

### Yellowhammer *Emberiza citronella* (BoCC red-listed species)

#### **Status/observations at or around Wakelyns:**

Single breeding bird in old hedgerow to the west of the farm, most likely the nest was on the outside of this hedgerow. Hedgerow is associated with a ditch which seems to benefit yellowhammer. They nest on the ground in long grasses, so maintaining generous uncut area adjacent to the hedgerows might encourage them 'in'. The further development of low scrub with scattered bushes would benefit this species.



***What does this species need?***

- Short dense thick hedgerows and scrub patches with tall grasses at base for nesting, often tracksides and ditch-sides are preferred.
- Plentiful seed resource throughout the winter, wild bird cover can be important for yellowhammer, as can supplementary feed in the 'hungry gap'.
- Insect food available in summer to feed young, tall grasses and mature hedgerows free of chemical spray.

## Notes on Management at Wakelyns:

Generally, Wakelyns is providing much better foraging and nesting resources than a conventional farming system, as evidenced by the species using the farm. Some of the existing planned improvements – introducing grazing for example – will add to these elements, but there is a risk of over-management and my impression of the agroforestry system is that it can be very neat, perhaps by necessity, which reduces its usefulness to wildlife. Opportunities to enhance the farm for the birds identified here will also have knock on benefits for invertebrates, mammals, amphibians, and bats.

- Development of new areas of scrub in less favourable field corners – separate from agroforestry production area which appears to be managed rather neatly. For the benefit of most of the priority species above. Idealised scrub management diagram is included below, note however that given the presence of turtle dove I would not recommend embarking on this type of management in your existing scrub areas until there was established alternative habitat available.
- Manage for open ground within fallow areas and encourage some agricultural ‘weed’ species which can be very good as early seed source. For the benefit of turtle dove and other seed eating species. Retaining generous fallow provision is desirable.
- Consider relaxing mowing regime, especially in spring, to protect possible skylark nests and provide abundant flowers as nectar and forage resource.
- Clear out old pond along PROW, for the benefit of many wildlife groups including birds. See separate pond report for specific recommendations.
- Leave generous tussocky grass margin adjacent to hedges to provide both foraging resource for insectivorous birds and nesting habitat for yellowhammer.
- Consider planting specific winter bird food crops in some agroforestry rows – this could double as a cover crop and would increase seed resources through the winter.
- Assess large hole nesting opportunities for stock dove and barn owl and consider provision of additional box.

Example of rotational management

