

Three Haggas Wood-Meadow Bird Report 2016

The 2016 Three Haggas bird report includes the records from 50 bird surveys as well as sightings supplied by local residents and visitors. The survey methodology, as set out in the 2014 report, remained unchanged.

Thirty four species were encountered during 2016, including eleven new records for the site, most of which are typically woodland birds. The most frequently seen species in descending order was Kestrel, Pheasant, Wood Pigeon, Carrion Crow, Mistle Thrush. Breeding birds have yet to colonise the site. Details of all the species recorded are set out below.

On 5th May there was a chance sighting of 3 adult Greylag Geese accompanied by two goslings. The young birds had been walked onto the north-western meadow and probably came from a nest site in the old brickworks at the other side of the A19. Naturally, the adult birds were very agitated and one flew off when another calling bird flew over. The parents and young were left in peace and were last seen walking south, probably to Skipwith Common or the Derwent Valley.

Voles continued to be a food source for Heron, Buzzard, Barn Owl and Kestrel though they seemed to have been more plentiful in the second part of the year. There were only a couple of sightings of Herons in the spring but after mid-August they were present during most of the surveys. An adult and a first year bird were present on 18th October and on 12th December a Heron was taking small prey, probably invertebrates, off the northern meadow. Most of the Buzzards seen were fly-overs, however one was perched on the western boundary fence on 18th October and appeared to be in hunting mode. Sightings of hunting Barn Owls were fewer than in 2015 but at 16:20 on 22nd February a bird was seen in full sunlight for twenty minutes as it quartered over the saplings. The owl made four unsuccessful attempts at catching prey before leaving. As noted above Kestrels were the most frequently encountered species in 2016 and single birds were present, either perching on the overhead wires (see Photo 1) and pylons or hunting, in every month. Both males and females were recorded and on 20th July a juvenile was identified. On 24th January a Kestrel was by a mole hill, probably looking for worms whilst in early March another failed in an attempt to catch a Song Thrush that was feeding near the bothey. The Kestrels probably belonged to the pair that breeds at Glade farm to the west of the A19.

Photo 1 A female Kestrel observing the southern grasslands from the edge of the Hollicarrs - December (Pat Bone)



The spring of 2016 was much wetter than usual and a shallow pool formed on the southern meadow west of the bothy. Mallards were attracted to the water and on 4th March three pairs and a drake were present - see photo 2, which captured most of the ducks.

The pool remained into late May and the last Mallards were seen there on the 27th. Earlier on 17th March a drake, probably searching for tadpoles, was flushed off the pond. All of the Mallards were very tame and probably originated from the large numbers that are released locally for shooting purposes.

Photo 2

Mallards on the shallow pool – 04.03.16



Red-legged Partridges were noticeable during March and two pairs and a single bird were present on 29th March. Pheasants occurred more frequently and were recorded in all months except February and July. Both ring-necked and melanistic (black) males appeared to hold territorial areas though breeding was not proven. A freshly shot Woodcock was collected off the central meadow area on 18th February and a Jack Snipe was flushed on 11th November. The Jack Snipe does not breed in Britain, however about 100,000 arrive from northern Europe in the autumn and spend the winter here. They are nocturnal feeders and roost in marshy areas during the day when they are reluctant to fly. As a result they go under reported. The habitat at Three Haggis Wood is not usually used by roosting Jack Snipe but the behaviour of the bird was typical. It was flushed from dense uncut vegetation between the saplings (SE62638:39608) and flew about 70m before landing just inside the eastern boundary.

Stock Doves were recorded during six of the surveys. Most sightings were of single birds though 3 were present on the overhead wires on 29th March. A flock of fifteen Woodpigeons were seen feeding on the southern meadow on 17th March. Afterwards birds were recorded in every month except November though numbers were lower and well down on the 40 or so birds reported in the spring of 2015. The reason for the decline in the number of Woodpigeons is not

clear though spraying may have caused a reduction in the availability of food plants such as trefoil.

Swifts are infrequent visitors to the site. However, during the cool wet spring of 2016 aerial invertebrates were scarce and birds tended to congregate wherever food was available. On 20th June seventeen Swifts were hawking invertebrates emerging from the trees adjacent to the eastern boundary. The first Swallow was recorded on 5th April and one to four birds were seen hunting over the site on most days until the last bird was seen on 16th September. It is thought that most of the Swallows were from nest sites at surrounding properties, especially Approach Farm where cattle are kept.

Magpies are irregular visitors to Three Haggis Wood and the sighting of 4 perched on fence posts on 9th February was unusual. Although Jays are present more often they are usually seen crossing the site to and from the Hollicarrs and Thyme Wood, and therefore do not count as a record. The first known record of a Jay feeding on the meadow occurred on 19th May when a bird was present close to the north-west corner. On the other hand Carrion Crows fed on the site regularly, especially during the first half of the year. Most records were of one or two birds taking invertebrates from the meadows though a family party of five was present on 20th July.

Wrens were seen for the first time in 2016. A single bird was present at the bothy on 4th March but sightings did not become regular until the end of the year. During November three birds established winter territories and sang from dense vegetation between the saplings in the north-east, centre and south central parts of the site.

In the early part of 2015 many Fieldfares and Redwings fed on the grassland areas during but sightings in 2016 were restricted to a single Fieldfare on 24th January. However, resident thrushes were well represented, especially until the end of May after which time the soils dried out and worms became unavailable. Blackbirds bred in the gardens close to the western boundary and adults collected food for young from the grassland. Five birds were hunting on 1st May. Song Thrushes were also seen for the first time in 2016. A bird sang from a mature tree just beyond the main entrance on 24th January. Afterwards up to three birds fed close to the bothy and may have been taking food to a nest site in the Hollicarrs. Mistle Thrushes were also present from late January. A pair bred in Thyme Wood and the birds regularly collected food for the young from the nearby meadow. After the breeding season family parties of Mistle Thrushes often flock together and this behaviour was noted on 20th July when 18 birds were seen feeding on the recently cut grass.

Prior to 2016 only one Meadow Pipit had been recorded (17th July 2014) at Three Haggas Wood. In 2016 a wintering flock formed in November and remained until the end of the year. The maximum count was 35 birds on the 28th. The birds fed in a loose flock on many areas and when flushed often went to the overhead wires - see photo 3. As dusk approached the birds usually collected together on the wires before dropping down to roost in the vegetation around the saplings. The origin of the birds is unknown. They may have been drawn from the small local breeding population but are more likely to have arrived from upland areas where winters are too cold for them to survive.

Photo 3 A Meadow Pipit perched on one of the overhead wires in December (Pat Bone)



As in previous years Goldfinches arrived during the summer to feed on flower seeds, now mainly Knapweed. The maximum of 12 was recorded on 20th July and the charm contained a number of juveniles. The maturing Alders close to the main entrance have started to produce large numbers of cones and on 30th December 3 Goldfinches were extracting seeds from them.

Occasional sightings of species recorded in previous years included a Great Spotted Woodpecker on the main pylon above the bee hotel (20th July); a small flock of 8 Starlings feeding on the cut grass (20th July); a Robin occasionally

present close to the main entrance in winter and spring and a Pied Wagtail on the roof of the bothy on 15th April.

Six of the eleven new site records have already been described; the other five were:

Great Tit - There were three sightings, including a pair feeding on the large Alders in the far south on 9th May.

Willow Tit - A bird was seen in the same area by Jim Bone on 10th April.

Willow Warbler - Singles were also present amongst the Alders on 18th May and 13th June.

Chaffinch - A male was perched on the main pylon on 14th October.

Bullfinch - A pair was present close to the A19 entrance on 20th June

The remains of several predated birds were seen during the year:

Red-legged Partridge - 1st May near the western entrance

Woodpigeon - 17th March (NE); 1st May (NW) and 18th August (near pylon)

Blackbird - 1st June (A juvenile near the western boundary)

Mistle Thrush - 1st June (A juvenile also by the western boundary - see photo 4)

Goldfinch - 14th October (100m south of the overhead wires)

Photo 4 **Remains of a young Mistle Thrush - 01.06.16**



The Red-legged Partridge was taken by a Fox whilst all the others appeared to have by been predated by a Sparrowhawk, though Kestrel cannot be ruled out, especially in the case of the Goldfinch. Sparrowhawks have been seen to fly over Three Haggis Wood but as yet none have been reported feeding on prey.