

## Three Haggas Wood-Meadow Bird Report 2017

The 4<sup>th</sup> annual bird report for Three Haggas Wood-Meadow (THWM) includes the records from 43 bird surveys as well as details of sightings supplied by local residents and visitors. The survey methodology, as set out in the 2014 report, remains unchanged.

Thirty one species were encountered during the year, including six new records. The most frequently observed species in descending order were Pheasant, Carrion Crow, Woodpigeon, Kestrel and Meadow Pipit. Breeding birds have yet to colonise the site. Details of all the species recorded are set out below.

Although there was some shallow water in the south during the early winter, Mallards did not frequent the area as they had done in 2016, probably because fewer birds were released for shooting at nearby ponds. The only record of the species was on 16<sup>th</sup> March when a drake was flushed off the pond at a time when the frog spawn was disappearing.

Pheasants, both ring-necked and melanistic, were the only species encountered in every month. The joint maximum count of 5 occurred on 27<sup>th</sup> August and 26<sup>th</sup> September. Five predated eggshells were seen on a sprayed patch close to the A19 entrance on 25<sup>th</sup> May. Incubating Pheasants were not flushed during the surveys therefore it is probable that these eggs were brought by Carrion Crows from a distant nest. Red-legged Partridges appeared less frequently and were restricted to the spring and autumn. Six were present on 6<sup>th</sup> March. Andy Grayson reported a pair of Grey Partridges, which is a new species record for the site, on 9<sup>th</sup> April.

The number of voles trapped during the summer survey was 20% lower than in 2016 and this may partly explain why there were fewer sightings of Herons and other bird species which prey on small mammals.

Most of the sightings of Heron occurred in January and two were seen on the 9<sup>th</sup> as they hunted between the saplings in the northern area. A single bird was flushed from the pond on 3<sup>rd</sup> December. Buzzards were regularly seen over 3HW, especially during February and early March, when pairing was taking place. Alison South reported kettles of 5 on 19<sup>th</sup> February; 6 on the 24<sup>th</sup> and 7 on 2<sup>nd</sup> March. However, there were no records of Buzzards hunting at the site. Sightings of Barn Owls have steadily declined since 2015. In 2017 Susie Brindley observed a bird hunting in full daylight on 23<sup>rd</sup> March. This may well have been the male from the nearest Barn Owl nest site at Glade Farm, where 3

young were ringed on 10<sup>th</sup> June. On 23<sup>rd</sup> June a Barn Owl, probably the female of the pair, was watched for 20 minutes as it hunted over the saplings. Although the bird made five drops on prey these proved to be unsuccessful. A second Barn Owl was perched on one of the north-west boundary posts throughout this period and may have been one of the recently fledged young from the farm. Kestrels were regularly seen perched on the pylons and wires or when hunting over the rough grass between the saplings. A pair also bred at Glade Farm and 4 young were ringed there on 3<sup>rd</sup> June. On 3<sup>rd</sup> July an adult was hunting whilst 2 recently fledged young were perched on the overhead wires. It is likely that one of the adults from the farm was showing the young birds how to hunt. After the summer the frequency of Kestrel sightings declined and was limited to single birds.

Other raptors included Sparrowhawks which occasionally flew across the site, though none were seen to catch prey. On 3<sup>rd</sup> July one was mobbed by 3 Swallows and driven away. A Red Kite flew over on 6<sup>th</sup> January whilst at 18:40 on 12<sup>th</sup> July another hunted unsuccessfully over the eastern side as it flew northwards. This is a new species record for THWM.

Stock Doves were occasionally present on the overhead wires during the first half of the year. A pair was present on 5<sup>th</sup> February and 25<sup>th</sup> May. In 2015 flocks of 30-40 Woodpigeons fed on the trefoil amongst the meadow grasses. However, as the amount of trefoil has declined so too has the number of Woodpigeons. The maximum flock in 2016 was 15 and in 2017 3. The majority of the sightings in 2017 took place in the second half of the year when birds were observed on the overhead wires, though two were feeding on the sheep grazed area in the south during late September. A predated egg was seen on the hay during the 4<sup>th</sup> July survey. Single Collared Doves were present on 9<sup>th</sup> April and 10<sup>th</sup> September.

Swifts continue to be an infrequent summer visitor with singles seen hawking over the meadows on two occasions in June. The number of Swallows feeding over the site reached a maximum of 8 on 3<sup>rd</sup> July. The birds probably bred at nest sites in the surrounding properties, especially Approach Farm where cattle are kept. Damp and windy conditions existed on 10<sup>th</sup> September and a single Swallow along with two House Martins hunted invertebrates blown out of Hurricane Wood. The House Martins were a new site record and the Swallow sighting was the last for 2017.

Magpies are irregular visitors and are usually seen perched on the western perimeter fence posts, for example on 14<sup>th</sup> January and 15<sup>th</sup> August. Although Jays are frequently seen as fly between the Hollicarrs and Hurricane Wood

they are not counted as records. However, one was present on the roof of Bodger's Den on 18<sup>th</sup> January. Carrion Crows were the commonest corvid though none were encountered during the surveys after August. Maximum counts of 4 feeding birds occurred during January, March and July.

Wrens established winter territories in the dense uncut areas between the saplings. A maximum of 3 territorial birds were present on 3<sup>rd</sup> January. Numbers then fell away as the grass was cut and none were present in February. Wrens returned to the same areas at the end of the year and 3 were present on 10<sup>th</sup> December.

A field of stubble, 500m south of THWM, provided soil invertebrates for a variety of species well into the New Year. The birds were occasionally flushed and moved away from the field for limited periods. This movement appears to account for the records of Lapwing, Fieldfare and Redwing made by Jim Bone and Alison South. Jim reported that a small flock of about 20 Lapwing arrived from the south in early January and settled for a time on the northern meadow. Lapwing is another new species for THWM. An estimated 100 Fieldfare and 20 Redwing were seen by Jim on 15<sup>th</sup> January whilst Alison reported 12 Fieldfare/Redwing on 9<sup>th</sup> February. None of these species were recorded during the regular surveys.

In 2017 the number of resident Song Thrushes and Blackbirds seen feeding on the meadow was lower than in previous years. Last year a pair of Song Thrushes nested close to THWM and there were regular sightings of the adults feeding close to Bodger's Den but none were recorded in 2017. Up to 5 feeding Blackbirds were encountered in the early months of 2015 and 2016, whereas in 2017 records were restricted to single birds. On the other hand, Mistle Thrushes maintained their presence, especially during the first half of the year when Alison South reported the presence of feeding birds on six occasions. A nest was seen in a Silver Birch close to the western perimeter in Susie Brindley's garden on 24<sup>th</sup> March. The pair successfully bred though the predated remains of two of the young were seen on THWM in the first week of May. At least one other pair of Mistle Thrushes bred in the Hollicarrs and adults were taking food to the nest on 5<sup>th</sup> May and 4<sup>th</sup> July. A family party of 7 flew off the meadow to the overhead wires on 30<sup>th</sup> June and a pair did the same in late October. The abundance of mole hills indicates that there are plenty of worms at depth but the sward was dense and relatively long in 2017 and this may have made them unobtainable to Song Thrushes and Blackbirds whereas the larger Mistle Thrush could still access the prey.

The wintering flock of Meadow Pipits which formed in 2016 continued to be observed well into the New Year when between 20 and 25 birds were present.

The maximum count was 27 on 22<sup>nd</sup> February. Although 24 were counted on 15<sup>th</sup> March, the birds soon dispersed to breeding grounds and were not seen again until the autumn when a smaller wintering flock developed. A maximum of 8 Meadow Pipits were present close to the overhead wires on 8<sup>th</sup> October and 3<sup>rd</sup> December.

A small charm of 6 Goldfinches was seen in early May and they may have been prospecting birds however, the birds did not stay to breed. There was then a gap of several weeks until 3<sup>rd</sup> August when a post-breeding flock of 11 birds was observed whilst they fed on knapweed seed heads. Numbers rose to a maximum of 26 birds on 14<sup>th</sup> July. In previous years Goldfinch numbers declined with the onset of winter but this was not the case in 2017 - see photo - and 22 were recorded on 19<sup>th</sup> December.

A mid-winter Goldfinch - 3.12.17



Other sightings were:

**Great Spotted Woodpecker** - one seen working along the eastern fence posts on 5<sup>th</sup> May.

**Blue Tit** - one recorded close to the north-west boundary on 15<sup>th</sup> August and another at the Alders by the main entrance on 3<sup>rd</sup> December. This is a new species for the site.

**Robin** - present close to the main entrance on 15<sup>th</sup> January and 24<sup>th</sup> March.

**Pied Wagtail** - one seen by Alison South on 1<sup>st</sup> March and a pair, with a newly fledged youngster, was feeding on the southern damp area on 3<sup>rd</sup> July.

**Chaffinch** - one circled the site before perching on the overhead wires on 15<sup>th</sup> November.

**Siskin** - eight were feeding on the Alders by the main entrance on 24<sup>th</sup> January - another new species record.

Several other species were seen or heard at a distance from THWM including,

**Woodcock** - Laurie Campbell reported 2 'roding' over the Hollicarrs at dusk on 2<sup>nd</sup> July.

**Tawny Owl** - one was calling from garden trees to the west on several occasions during the spring.

**Green Woodpecker** - heard in the Hollicarrs on 7<sup>th</sup> March.

**Hobby** - Hobbies were seen hunting and displaying west of the A19 throughout the summer months.

**Greenfinch** - a pair was present in a garden conifer close to the western boundary during the spring.

**DT 12.02.18**