

Three Haggas Wood-Meadow Bird Report 2018

The 5th annual bird report for Three Haggas Wood-Meadow (THWM) includes the records from 38 surveys as well as some sightings made by visitors. The survey methodology, described in the 2014 report, remains unchanged. Thirty three species were encountered during the year, including four new records, namely: Blackcap, Whitethroat, Tree Sparrow and Reed Bunting. The most frequently observed species in descending order were Kestrel, Carrion Crow, Goldfinch, Pheasant and Woodpigeon. However, the most significant event of the year was the first records of successful breeding made by pairs of Reed Buntings and Red-legged Partridges. In addition, Woodpigeons and Blackbirds constructed nests whilst Pheasants may have produced a brood though they more probably walked young onto the site from elsewhere. Details of all the species encountered in 2018 are set out below.

A pair of Greylag Geese was on Peterken Meadow on 4th May. In previous years surface water in this area had attracted Mallard but none were encountered in 2018, probably because fewer birds were released in the local area. Six Red-legged Partridges were flushed from the grass strip close to the A19 gate on 25th February and there were four there on 6th April. By the end of the month a pair appeared to have established a breeding territory in the south

Photo 1 Red-legged Partridge guarding young 20.07.18



and they were flushed from this area on 9th June. A male was calling from

the fence surrounding Bodgers Den on 4th July and on the 20th an adult with two young were present on the recently cut Peterken Meadow - see photo 1. An adult with one young was seen on 1st August and this proved to be the last sighting of the year. A single Grey Partridge was present 80m. northwest of Bodgers Den on 31st May whilst on 9th June several feathers belonging to this species were seen floating on the pond. Sightings of Pheasant were fewer in 2018 compared with previous years. A ring-necked male, a female and three recently fledged young were flushed off the central area on 9th June and it is possible that breeding took place on THWM.

The number of small mammals trapped in August was well below the totals for 2016 and 2017 and this suggest that prey for raptors, owls and herons were less plentiful in 2018. Despite this sightings of Kestrels were easily the most frequent of any bird species. Most of the encounters were of single hunting birds though two were present on 12th August; 10th and 25th November and 14th December. On 10th November and 14th December a Kestrel was seen to capture a vole and in both cases the prey was taken to one of the pylons and consumed. Like many birds of prey the Kestrel regurgitates a pellet containing sharp bits of bone and teeth which could otherwise damage their digestive system and four of these were found on the ground below the pylons during the autumn (see Photo 2 where they are compared with Barn Owl pellets from elsewhere).

Photo 2

Kestrel and Barn Owl pellets



Each of the Kestrel pellets contained the remains of a Field Vole.

It is likely that all the Kestrels seen at THWM originate from nearby nest sites where broods of three and two were ringed during the summer.

Buzzards are frequently seen flying high over THWM however, birds actively hunting at the site were only recorded during five surveys. Individuals perched on fence post were present in April, November and December, whilst on 15th June one was searching for prey on the cut grass at the Lowland Dry Meadow. Two Buzzards were hunting over the saplings on 29th December whilst a Red Kite passed over the site 9th November. Grey Herons also hunted small mammals during the winter periods with two on 9th February and singles on 4th March, 3rd November and 4th December.

A single Woodcock was flushed from between the larger Alders on Jubilee Copse during 3rd and 25th November.

Woodpigeons were the 5th most frequent sighting. Birds were present in low numbers from April to the end of August with most records relating to 1 or 2 individuals perched on the overhead wires. The largest count was 15 on 7th May when birds were seen feeding on the cut areas between the saplings. Two nest platforms were discovered close to the southern boundary after the understorey had died back. Both nests (Photo 3) were about 1 metre above the ground level. Neither sitting birds nor recently fledged young were seen during the surveys and therefore it is unlikely that any successful breeding took place, though a predated egg was seen near Bodgers Den on 15th June. The remains of a Woodpigeon, probably predated by a Sparrowhawk, were seen on 24th June.

Photo 3 Woodpigeon nests close to the southern boundary



There were eight Stock Dove sightings six of which were of single birds on the overhead wires. A pair was also present on the wires on 20th January and the same, or another pair, was feeding on Peterken Meadow on 9th February. Summer migrant species which hawk aerial invertebrates appeared less frequently during 2018 than in previous years. Four Swifts and a House Martin were feeding high over the site on 24th June. Four Swallows were exploring Bodgers Den on 24th June and later a single was seen on 20th July whilst three were present on 12th August. Other summer migrants observed were Blackcap and Whitethroat both of which were new site records. A female or juvenile Blackcap was seen with a small flock of Blue Tits on 17th July. A male Whitethroat was present near the A19 entrance on 31st May and was later heard singing on several occasions from the garden hedges adjacent to the western boundary. The same bird was singing on THWM on 17th July before returning to a hedge where breeding may have taken place.

Carrion Crows were the second equal most frequent sighting. Most of the records were of 1 or 2 birds either feeding on the meadows or perched on the overhead wires. The maximum count of seven occurred on 21st July when the small flock was seen taking invertebrates off the areas of cut grass. Other corvids included Jay and Magpie. Jays frequently fly across the site and are therefore not registered as a sighting however, on 19th January one was seen on a pylon with a prey item before it flew off to Hurricane Wood. There were five

Photo 4 Blackbird nest at the base of a Hazel sapling 17.12.2018



sightings of Magpies most of which were of perching birds on boundary fence posts. Two were present on 9th June and 21st July and on 14th December one was feeding amongst the sheep which were grazing Peterken Meadow.

Other local resident species recorded were:

- **Blue Tit** - There were four sightings during the year with two in both the summer and late winter. The maximum count was six juveniles seen on 17th July when they were feeding on the Jubilee Copse Alders.
- **Great Tit** - Three records included an adult and two juveniles with the Tree Sparrow flock on 15th June.
- **Wren** - A singing bird was at Jubilee Copse on 19th January.
- **Tree Sparrow** - A post breeding flock of 18 worked their way south along the western boundary on 15th June. They were feeding on Sorrell and other plants just inside the fence. The nearest breeding colony is at Glade Farm west of the A19.
- **Pied Wagtail** - On 7th May an adult was seen collecting food from the damp patch on Peterken Meadow and taking it to an off-site nest.
- **Chaffinch** - On 14th December two females were amongst the passerine flock feeding on the Jubilee Copse Alders.
- **Bullfinch** - An adult male was with the Tree Sparrow flock on 15th June.
- **Goldfinch** - Until August the number of birds present was below average. The maximum count during this period was 10 seen taking Knapweed seeds on 14th February. As the vegetation between the saplings was cut this food source was reduced and Goldfinches became scarce, however a pair was seen eating Alder buds on 19th April. Post breeding flocks appeared in August and 50 feeding on Knapweed seeds were present on the 17th. After this time numbers steadily declined though 30 were still present on 25th November. By the end of the year most of the Knapweed seed had been consumed and the birds began to feed on the new Alder cones and 22 were present at Jubilee Copse during 14th December.

Finally, Reed Bunting deserve a special mention because not only was it a new species for the site but it was also one of the first proven breeders. On 24th June two male Reed Buntings were reported to have flown into Orchard Copse. During the survey on 17th July it was discovered that a pair were present and therefore a breeding attempt was suspected. On 20th July the female of the pair was seen carrying food to an undiscovered nest site, whilst the male appeared to escort a fledged young away from the area. Reed Buntings were not seen early on the 21st and a search was made to find the nest. The empty nest was eventually found near the base of a Hawthorn sapling - see photo 5. It is likely that the last chick left the nest during the evening of the 20th July or at

dawn on the following morning. There were no further sightings of either the adults or juvenile birds. That Reed Buntings arrived to breed on THWM was not totally unexpected. Although the species favours endangered reed beds and marshy areas they have recently colonised field margins and other drier sites.

Photo 5 Reed Bunting nest in Hawthorn at SE62680:39560 on 21.07.18



As a result national numbers have steadily risen and the species has been removed from the Red list of birds of conservation concern.

David Tate 12.03.19