

# Breeding Bird Survey of Wyke Farm Estate in 2022

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WYKE FARM  
a biodiversity project

## Summary

Wyke Farm Estate extends over 322.2 Ha (805.5 acres) and comprises a diverse mixture of improved and more species-rich neutral grassland and mixed woodland, some of which is ancient in character. There are smaller quantities of arable land, orchard and wood pasture. There are also six ponds and a 1.1 Ha lake close to Wyke Farm. The main land uses categories are forestry (146 Ha), arable farmland (chiefly temporary grassland) (81 Ha), and permanent pasture (70 Ha) with native breed sheep grazing and cattle grazing.

A biodiversity baseline is currently being established at Wyke Farm. As part of this a Breeding Bird Survey was completed in 2022 focussing on those of highest conservation priority: Nationally Rare species; Red and Amber Listed Species of Conservation Concern; and selected locally uncommon Green Species of Conservation Concern.

Dedicated surveys were made on 13 days between 25<sup>th</sup> March and 16<sup>th</sup> June with approximately 1088km of trackline walked. Common Bird Census methods were used to record signs of territorial breeding birds. Effort related data was supplemented with casual sightings and other bird survey data collected by Rich and Rebecca Taylor, plus Rob and Alex Appleby.

In 2022, a total 75 out of 100 past/present/potential breeding species were searched for, with up to 61 species (>25 % of the total) found to be forming territories (though 4 or more of the 61 may not have actually attempted breeding). Three further species, Kestrel, Crossbill and Hobby formed territories/bred in 2020 and/or 2021.

The total of approximately 60 breeding species is a relatively high in a County context, based on the few comparisons available with other well-known similarly-sized birding hotspots/reserves. These being Cogden/West Bexington managed by DWT/NT, 3.5km<sup>2</sup> 54 species; Lytchett Bay part managed by the RSPB, 4.6 km<sup>2</sup> 43 species).

Of the species found in 2022, two were Nationally Rare (ca2000 breeding pairs or fewer in the UK), 11 were Red Listed (representing nearly a fifth (representing 18% of the regularly breeding UK species total) and 13 Amber Listed (15% of the UK total).

Nationally rare species recorded included Firecrest (4-7 of 2000), whilst Hobby (0-1 of 2050) has been suspected of breeding in recent years and this elusive species may possibly have been missed by the surveys. Information on a further rare species has been withheld. Red List species found forming territories were Cuckoo, Greenfinch, House Martin, House Sparrow, Linnet, Marsh Tit, Mistle Thrush, Nightingale (though not thought to have bred), Skylark (may not have bred), Spotted Flycatcher and Starling.

Amber listed species present during the breeding season were Mute Swan, Sparrowhawk, Common Whitethroat, Reed Bunting, Mallard, Moorhen, Stock Dove, Bullfinch, Song Thrush, Dunnock, Woodpigeon, Wren, Tawny Owl and Kestrel.

A number of species with relatively small national populations were present including Little Grebe (4 of 3300-6650 pairs in the UK), Mute Swan (1 of 6500), Barn Owl (1 of 4000-14000), Nightingale (0-1 of 5550), Raven (1 of 9500), Water Rail (0-1 of 3900) and Tufted Duck (5 of 16-18,000).

The results highlight the value of creating the lake at Wyke Farm for a range of nationally uncommon and/or Amber listed birds such as Mute Swan, Little Grebe, Reed Warbler and Reed Bunting and for boosting overall breeding bird numbers by 20%.

An evaluation of the data found that the woodland supports a good variety of specialist bird species along with national rarities, some benefitting though the ongoing restructuring that has occurred in recent years from dense conifer plantation to a woodland more uneven aged and semi-natural in character. The woodland area is largely private, which helps reduce recreational disturbance and provide breeding habitat for sensitive species.

Vacant habitat exists though for a number of species, especially summer visitors, most likely due to external factors such as survival rates on wintering and migratory grounds (e.g. for Wood Warbler and Tree Pipit) or large-scale drivers such as climate change (Willow Warbler, Nightingale). For other resident species which have gone extinct locally, such as Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and Willow Tit, the causes of decline are unclear though contributory factors could include increased competition, habitat fragmentation, disease and climate change.

A small amount of suitable habitat exists for Nightjar in two areas, though none were seen. Disturbance by logging through the summer in clearfell areas may possibly have prevented a pair establishing, though small clearing sizes may be another explanation for absence.

Farmland areas supported low densities and fewer specialist species, compared with woodland. In particular Skylark, Greenfinch, Whitethroat and Linnet were found in much lower densities than good farmland habitat elsewhere, whilst Yellowhammer is extinct. The high numbers of hedgerow trees and the lack of Spring cereals and other forms of arable cultivation are key factors reducing habitat suitability for these species.

Several farmland species such as Grey Partridge, Willow Tit and Tree Sparrow, which have bred locally in recent decades including possibly also at Wyke Farm were confirmed as being extinct. Likely causes of local extinction include one or more of the following factors: intensification of farming practices (now being reversed at Wyke Farm), habitat fragmentation, climate change and predation.

## **1.0 Introduction**

The Wyke Farm Estate extends over 322.2 Ha (805.5 acres) and comprises a diverse mixture of improved and more species-rich neutral grassland and mixed woodland, some of which is ancient in character. There are smaller quantities of arable land, orchard and wood pasture. There are also six ponds and a 1.1 Ha lake close to Wyke Farm. The main land uses categories are forestry (146 Ha), arable farmland (chiefly temporary grassland) (81 Ha), and permanent pasture (70 Ha) with native breed sheep grazing and cattle grazing.

A biodiversity baseline is currently being established at Wyke Farm. As part of this a Breeding Bird Survey was completed in 2022 focussing on the highest conservation priority species i.e. Nationally Rare; Red and Amber Listed Species of Conservation Concern; and selected locally uncommon Green Species of Conservation Concern.

## **2.0 Methods**

### **2.1 Survey area**

### **2.2 Species selection**

The species surveyed focussed on Red (those with the most rapidly declining populations or under threat of global extinction) and Amber Listed (populations declining at a slower rate) Species of Conservation Concern and selected Green (populations stable or increasing) List species, including those either Nationally Rare (less than 2,000 breeding pairs in the UK), Nationally Scarce (2-10,000 breeding pairs) or locally uncommon (with reference to Dorset and Somerset Bird Club Annual Reports).

The Red, Green and Amber lists are compiled and updated every five years or so, using set criteria devised by the UK's leading governmental and non-governmental bird conservation bodies. The latest assessment in 2021, identified 245 regularly occurring species including 70 Red List (of which 61 regularly breeding) species, 103 Amber List (84 regularly breeding) species and 72 Green List species (61 regularly breeding).

At a local scale, an inspection of historical record data and expert judgement based on locally unpublished sightings data and knowledge of habitat conditions was used to derive a list of 100 past/current/potential breeding species for the area including 27 Red Listed and 24 Amber Listed species (Table 2). Data sources included Dorset Bird Club Reports, British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) Breeding Bird Atlas surveys (1968-72, 1988-91, 2008-11), the Dorset Bird Club (DBC) tetrad breeding bird survey from 1987-94 (Green, 2004) and unpublished local bird record data collated from local record centres

From the list of 100 species, all Red and Amber List species were surveyed. Additionally, 24 Green List species were surveyed along with Little Owl (an introduced species with Conservation Status is not assessed). The list of species sampled is given in Table 1.

### **2.3 Data collection**

#### **2.3.1 Dedicated surveys**

Repeat visits were made on foot across the whole area over the duration of the breeding season

In total, visits were made on 13 days between 25<sup>th</sup> March and 16<sup>th</sup> June with ca1088km of trackline walked. Common Bird Census methods were used to record signs of territorial breeding birds.

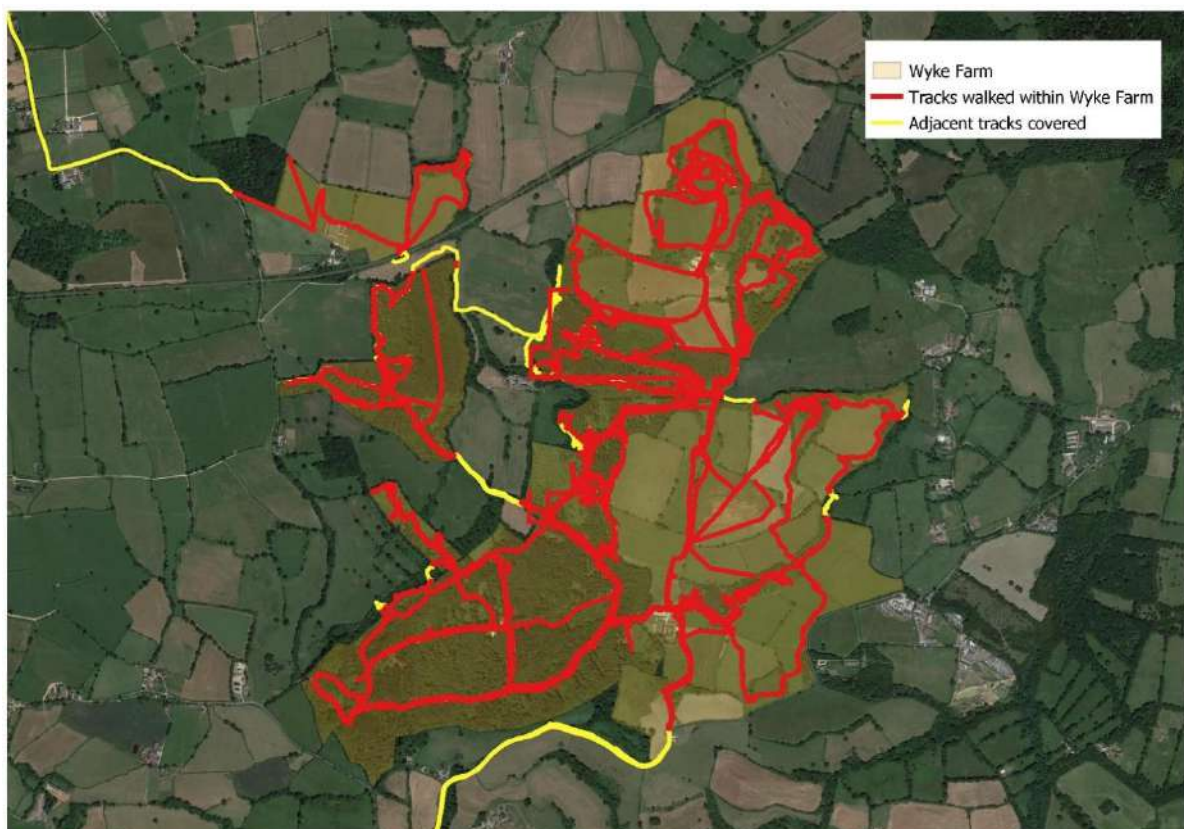
On each visit, the location of each species was mapped and bird behaviour assigned to categories using industry standard Common Bird Census methods (Marchant 1983).

Visits were primarily made during the morning and always in conditions suitable for breeding bird activity (light winds, no more than light rain). Some evening visits were made to detect species which are more active at that time of the day, such as Song Thrush which often sings more actively in the evening than the morning, along with owls and searches for Nightjar.

Species were treated as likely breeding and forming a territory if they exhibited any of the following behaviour: song; alarm call; territorial disputes; pair present in suitable breeding habitat; carrying food; and nest located. A territory was classed as being present if the bird showed these behaviours over a period of five days or more.

Birds which have large feeding territories, were included as being present even if the nest may have been outside the recording area, if for example they were seen displaying. Similarly, birds recorded just outside the recording area (e.g. Barn owl) were also included in as it is likely that part of their breeding territory extended into the area.

In the field the data was captured using a smartphone. Bird behaviour and the GPS position of activity (obtained from Google Maps) was entered into a Google spreadsheet, whilst the spatial location of survey effort was captured using the Strava App (Figure 1).



**Figure 1: Survey effort.**

### **2.3.2 Casual records and public sightings**

Dedicated survey efforts were supplemented by incidental sightings and other ornithological surveys undertaken by Rich and Rebecca Taylor and incidental sightings collected by Rob and Alex Appleby. Historical data was obtained from the sources described in 2.2

### **2.4 Data collation and analysis**

The data from multiple recorders was combined into a single MS Excel spreadsheet of records and imported to QGIS 3.16 Hannover. A GIS layer of survey effort was compiled by combining GPX files of each survey day logged and exported from Strava. Spatial validation checks were completed on all location data (sightings and walked routes) using QGIS, whilst all species data were verified based on species, location and the timing of occurrence.

Discrete territories were identified for each species at each location by professional judgement interpreting the multiple records of behaviour over time and space (visualised in QGIS) and in relation to known territory sizes and mobility data on each species, obtained from a variety of reference sources.

Due to some areas being under-recorded and with the potential that some territories may be duplicates, estimates of the number of territories present for some species was particularly imprecise. For these species, a range was given, with the minimum and maximum numbers of territories presented in parentheses.

The resulting territories for each species were mapped in QGIS 3.16 Hannover and exported as image files.

## 3.0 Results

### 3.1 Overall results

In 2022, a total 75 out of 100 past/present/potential breeding species were searched for, with up to 61 species (>25 % of the total) found to be forming territories (though 4 or more of the 62 may not have actually attempted breeding). Three further species, Kestrel, Crossbill and Hobby formed territories/bred in 2020 and/or 2021.

Of the species found in 2022, two were Nationally Rare (ca2000 breeding pairs or fewer in the UK), 11 were Red Listed (representing nearly a fifth (representing 18% of the regularly breeding UK species total) and 13 Amber Listed (15% of the UK total).

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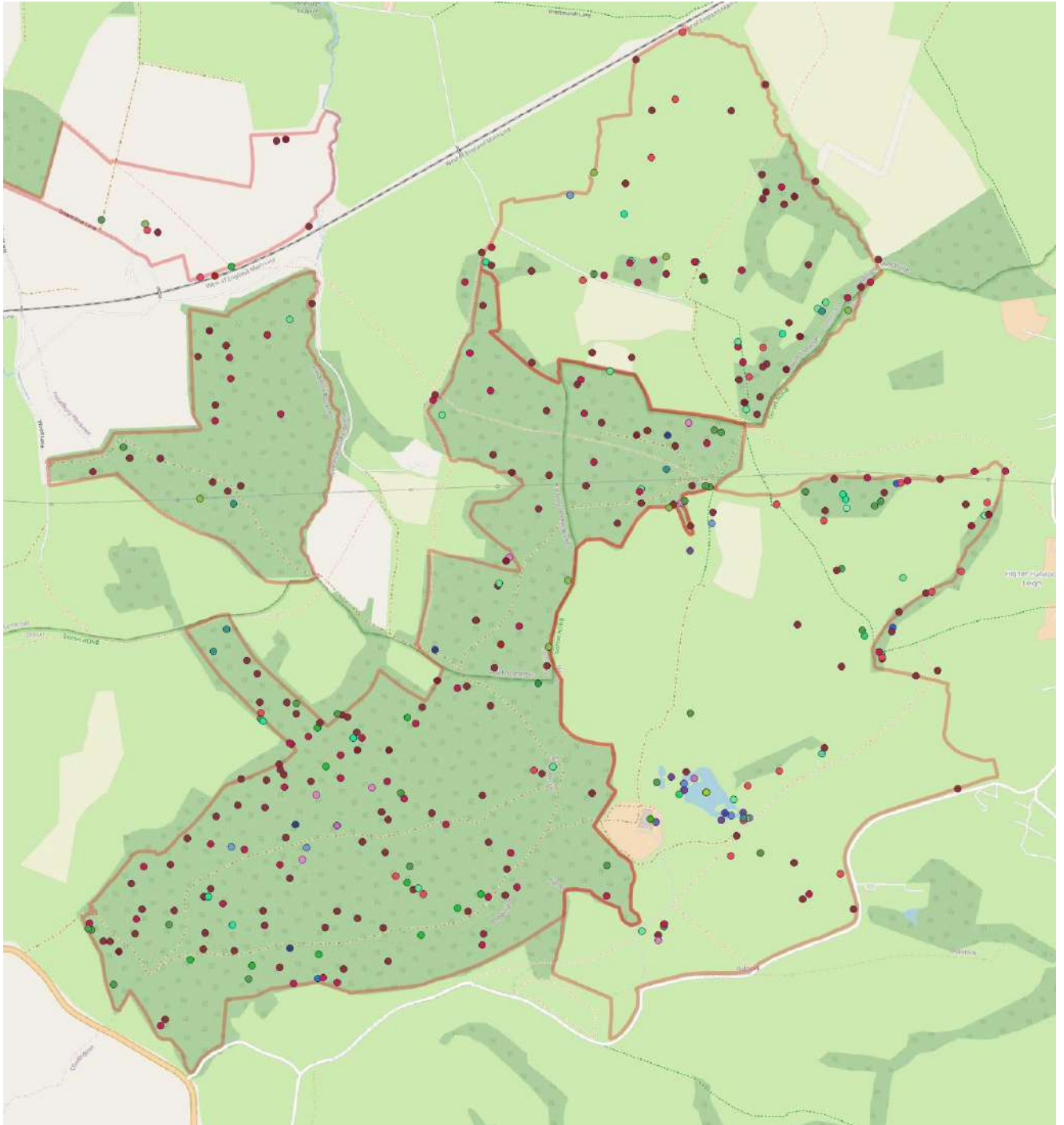
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The full results are summarised in Table 1 and mapped in Figure 2.

**Table 4: Estimates of the number of territories for each species.**

Cons. Status	2021 survey	Species	No. territories	Range	Cons. Status	2021 survey	Species	No. territories	Range	Cons. Status	2021 survey	Species	No. territories	Range
Amber	Full survey	Gadwall	0		Amber	Full survey	Kestrel	0		Amber	Full survey	Song Thrush	14	
Amber	Full survey	Mallard	4		Green	Full survey	Hobby	0	0-1	Red	Full survey	Mistle Thrush	2-3	
Amber	Full survey	Teal	0		Green	No survey	Jay	NC		Red	Full survey	Spotted Flycatcher	4	
Green	Full survey	Tufted Duck	5	5-8	Green	No survey	Magpie	NC		Green	No survey	Robin	NC	
Amber	Full survey	Nightjar	0		Green	No survey	Jackdaw	NC		Red	Full survey	Nightingale	1	
Red	Full survey	Swift	0		Amber	Full survey	Rook	0		Amber	Full survey	Common Redstart	0	
Red	Full survey	Cuckoo	1		Green	No survey	Carrion Crow	NC		Green	Full survey	Stonechat	0	
Green	Full survey	Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon	0		Green	Full survey	Raven	1		Red	No survey	House Sparrow	15	12-25
Amber	Full survey	Stock Dove	6		Green	No survey	Coal Tit	NC		Red	Full survey	Tree Sparrow	0	
Amber	Full survey	Woodpigeon	55	53-60	Red	Full survey	Marsh Tit	10	8-12	Amber	Full survey	Dunnock	22	
Red	Full survey	Turtle Dove	0		Red	Full survey	Willow Tit	0		Green	Partial survey	Pied Wagtail	1	
Green	No survey	Collared Dove	NC		Green	No survey	Blue Tit	NC		Amber	Full survey	Meadow Pipit	0	
Green	Full survey	Water Rail	0-1		Green	No survey	Great Tit	NC		Red	Full survey	Tree Pipit	0	
Amber	Full survey	Moorhen	5		Red	Full survey	Skylark	1		Green	No survey	Chaffinch	NC	
Green	Full survey	Coot	3	3-5	Green	Full survey	Swallow	5		Amber	Full survey	Bullfinch	13	
Green	Full survey	Little Grebe	4		Red	Full survey	House Martin	12		Red	Full survey	Greenfinch	2	
Red	Full survey	Lapwing	0		Green	Full survey	Cetti's Warbler	0		Red	Full survey	Linnet	5	5-9
Red	Full survey	Woodcock	0		Green	No survey	Long-tailed Tit	NC		Green	No survey	Goldfinch	NC	
Amber	Full survey	Snipe	0		Amber	Full survey	Willow Warbler	0		Green	Full survey	Crossbill	0	
Green	Full survey	Cormorant	0		Green	No survey	Chiffchaff	NC		Red	Full survey	Hawfinch	0	
Green	Full survey	Grey Heron	0		Amber	Full survey	Sedge Warbler	0		Red	Full survey	Lesser Redpoll	0	
Green	Full survey	Little Egret	0		Green	Full survey	Reed Warbler	6		Green	No survey	Siskin	NC	
Amber	Full survey	Sparrowhawk	1		Red	Full survey	Grasshopper Warbler	0		Red	Full survey	Corn Bunting	0	
Green	Partial survey	Goshawk	1		Green	No survey	Blackcap	NC		Red	Full survey	Yellowhammer	0	
Green	Full survey	Red Kite	0		Green	Full survey	Garden Warbler	5	4-5	Amber	Full survey	Reed Bunting	2	
Green	No survey	Buzzard	NC		Green	Full survey	Lesser Whitethroat	1		Red	Full survey	Cirl Bunting	0	
Green	Full survey	Barn Owl	?		Amber	Full survey	Common Whitethroat	2						
Amber	Full survey	Tawny Owl	2-3		Green	Full survey	Firecrest	5	4-7					





**Figure 2: Map of all bird territory records**

### **3.2 Species accounts**

In the following accounts, historical data on Breeding Status was described with reference to unpublished local bird record data, the Birds of Dorset (2004) by George Green, Dorset Bird Reports by Dorset Bird Club, National Census data (BTO and partners) and three published Breeding Bird Atlas studies compiled by the BTO. The Atlas recording periods were 1968-72, 1988-91 and 2007-11 and made at a hectad scale (SY49 10 X 10 km square). Population trend data described related to changes in breeding bird numbers at a UK scale and was obtained from the BTO.

**1. Red-legged Partridge (*Alectoris rufa*) Green List**

Occasionally recorded during the preceding winter. Captively bred and released in large quantities for shooting on country estates located and a candidate future breeding species, if the area of arable land is extended.

**2. Grey Partridge (*Perdix perdix*) Red List**

A breeding species in ST40 and ST50 in 1968-72 and a probable/possible breeder in 2008-11, though not recorded in these squares on the Dorset side in the 1987-94 tetrad survey by DBC. None recorded during the survey and suitable habitat does not exist. The nearest regular breeding area is Maiden Castle near Dorchester. Grey Partridge is Red Listed due to a severe decline of 93% since 1970.

**3. Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*) Green List**

A widespread species that was not censused but frequently encountered. Captively bred and released in large quantities for shooting on country estates around the recording area. A recent study showed that, at their peak in August (when they are released en masse) Pheasant and Red-legged Partridge represent about half of all wild bird biomass in the UK.

**4. Quail (*Coturnix coturnix*) Amber List**

Though not recorded in previous Atlas studies a possible former breeder. None seen or heard and very little suitable habitat currently exists. The Quail is rare in the UK, with the population estimated at 355 Males in 2013–17.

**5. Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*) Green List**

An increasing breeding species nationally and a recent colonist to Wyke Farm, with three pairs breeding at the Lake.

**6. Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*) Green List**

A single pair bred raising 5 young. For such an iconic and familiar bird, they are surprisingly uncommon with only 6500 pairs estimated in the UK by the last census. The UK population is likely to be considerably reduced now due to bird flu.

**7. Gadwall (*Mareca strepera*) Amber List**

No breeding season records, though a regular winter visitor and a potential breeding species, with suitable habitat present and having bred locally at Sutton Bingham Reservoir.

**8. Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) Amber List**

At least four territories were detected at the lake. Mallard is on the Amber List because of a recent decline in the wintering population.

**9. Teal (*Anas crecca*) Amber List**

No breeding season records, though a regular winter visitor and a potential breeding species, with suitable habitat present and having been recorded as a possible breeding species at nearby Sutton Bingham Reservoir over the period 1987-94.

**10. Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*) Green List**

A total of 5-8 pairs were present at the lake, with five broods totalling 19 chicks seen on two dates - 26/6 & 9/7. This is an excellent series of records, qualifying the lake as one of the most important breeding sites in Dorset. Tufted Duck is a local species in the UK, with an estimated 16-18,000 breeding pairs.

**11. Nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*) Amber List**

Recorded as a probable breeding species in Chedington Woods in 1987-94. Suitable woodland clearing habitat was present in 2022 though there was no evidence of occurrence. Possible reasons for absence, were that clearings were on the small side and that the most suitable one was subject to disturbance through removal of felled trees, or simply there was no surplus population to enable colonisation.

**12. Swift (*Apus apus*) Red List**

Considerable efforts are being made to encourage Swifts to nest at Wyke Farm around the main house through the provision of Swift nest boxes and by playing attraction calls of screaming Swifts through the arrival adult period and subsequent breeding season, when late or non-breeding birds may turn up prospecting for next year. There were occasional records through the spring and summer, though there was no evidence of breeding. Swift moved to the Red List in 2021 due to a population decline of 58% between 1995 and 2018. The UK population was 59,000 in 2016.

**13. Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*) Red List**

Encouragingly a single bird was present for much of the breeding season, in and around Chedington Woods, though it was unclear if breeding was successful. Cuckoos are Red Listed due to a 53% decline since 1970. They have also declined alarmingly in Dorset.

**14. Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon (*Columba livia*) Green List**

There were occasional sightings of flyover birds, though no evidence of breeding.

**15. Stock Dove (*Columba oenas*) Amber List**

Stock Dove is a hole-nesting species, that sometimes nests in derelict buildings. During the survey 6 territories were located, mostly in woodland edge areas and hedgerows with mature broad-leaved trees. The UK population was estimated at 320,000 pairs in 2016, which is ca20% of the European population. The species is Amber Listed due to this International Importance.

**16. Woodpigeon (*Columba palumbus*) Amber List**

A healthy Woodpigeon population exists at Wyke Farm with ~55 territories located. Favoured nest site includes within Ivy surrounding tree trunks. Woodpigeon has recently been added to the Amber List, due to the UK holding an Internationally population (10% of the European total).

**17. Turtle Dove (*Streptopelia turtur*) Red List**

Present as a breeding species in the ST40 and ST50 in 1968-72 and ST50 in 1988-91, with occasional records in recent years (per Rob Appleby). There were no records in 2023 and recolonisation is highly unlikely in the coming years, given a lack of suitable feeding habitat and the species declining status in south west England. The Turtle Dove has declined in the UK by a truly shocking 98% since 1970 due to multiple pressures including agricultural intensification and hunting on migration, making it the UKs most severely declining species.

**18. Collared Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*) Green List**

Present around Wyke Farm and Whitevine Farm through the year where likely breeding, though no accurate assessment of status was made.

**19. Water Rail (*Rallus aquaticus*) Green List**

Several are present each winter around the lake and a small amount of suitable reedbed breeding habitat is present. A possible juvenile was seen along the lake edge in July This nationally scarce species has a stable UK breeding population of 3900+ pairs. Probable/possible breeding was recorded in 1968-72 and 1988-91 in ST50, presumably at Sutton Bingham Reservoir. There was also possible breeding in several tetrads 1987-92 in ST40 and ST50, though of course not at Wyke Farm because the pond had not developed at that time.

**20. Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*) Amber List**

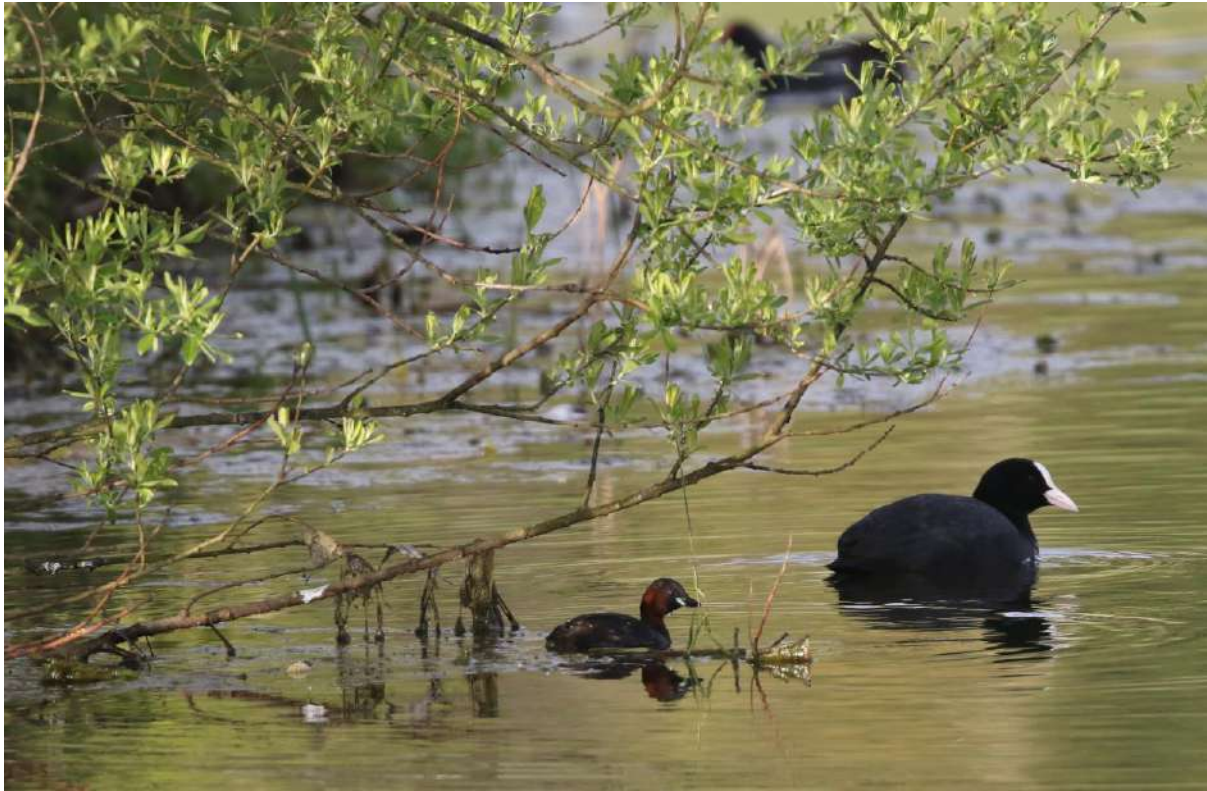
Approximately five pairs were estimated to have bred at the lake, with another pair at the eastern end of Ashland Coppice. The species was added to the Amber List in 2021 due to a moderate decline in the breeding population.

**21. Coot (*Fulica atra*) Green List**

The lake held at least three breeding pairs. Coots are fiercely territorial so the lake population is probably at maximum carrying capacity. The UK population is stable and has been estimated at 26,000+ breeding pairs.

**22. Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) Green List**

Four pairs were present during the breeding season on the lake. This is an excellent total, as the UK breeding population is only between 3300 and 6650 pairs. Dorset Bird Club reports show that only about 10 sites per annum report Little Grebe as breeding in the county.



*Little Grebe and Coot at the lake*

**23. Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*) Red List**

A farmland and marshland breeding species with breeding confirmed in the 1968-72 and 1988-91 BTO Breeding Atlas periods but not 2008-11. Breeding was detected in adjacent tetrads in 1987-94. Wyke Farm has occasional winter records, but there were no signs of breeding in 2022. Lapwing is Red Listed and shows an acute decline of 64% since 1970. With the population in decline in the south west and relatively high numbers of Lapwing predators at Wyke Farm (Fox, corvids), future breeding is unlikely.

**24. Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*) Red List**

A regular winter visitor to Wyke Farm, which provides good woodland roosting and farmland foraging habitat. Detected as a possible breeding species in ST40 and ST50 in 1968-72, ST50 in 1988-91 and a surrounding tetrad in 1987-94, it seems likely that Woodcock has bred in Chedington Woods in the past. Unfortunately, this species is Red Listed due to a rapid recent decline, with Dorset marking the species south western range margin as a breeding species in Britain and there was no evidence of breeding season presence in 2022.

**25. Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*) Amber List**

Wyke Farm is now an important wintering site of County significance for Snipe. The species has declined considerably in the south west as a breeding species and may now be extinct in Dorset. Small amounts of marshy grassland occur at Wyke Farm though they are insufficient in extent to support breeding birds.

**26. Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) Green List**

Cormorants are irregularly recorded foraging at the lake. The species is a possible future breeding colonist, should woody vegetation around the lake continue to mature

**27. Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*) Green List**

A potential breeding species, as it occasionally nests in single pairs across Dorset. Birds are occasionally recorded at the lake, but there was no indication of breeding.

**28. Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*) Green List**

A potential colonist, with a small amount of suitable breeding habitat present. Birds are occasionally recorded during the breeding season, but there have been no signs of territorial activity.

**29. Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*) Amber List**

At last one territory was present in Chedington Wood. The species is on the Amber list because of a recent moderate decline. Across the UK, the most recent population estimate is 31,000 pairs.

**30. Red Kite (*Milvus milvus*) Green List**

Red Kites are occasionally recorded at Wyke Farm hunting over farmland areas or just passing through. There was no evidence of territorial activity in 2022, but this is an expanding species which has recently started breeding in West Dorset. Suitable breeding habitat is present at Wyke Farm and it is a candidate colonist over the next decade.

**31. Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*) Green List**

An established resident breeding species at Wyke Farm. Not censused in 2022.

**32. Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*) Green List**

Barn Owls are not thought to be breeding within the Wyke farm Estate, though they are occasionally recorded during the breeding season and likely under-recorded given their nocturnal nature. The species forms large territories (350 Ha) so it is almost certain that the estate forms part of one or more territories of local breeding birds.

**33. Tawny Owl (*Strix aluco*) Amber List**

An estimated 2-3 Tawny Owl territories were located during the survey. The species is Amber listed due to a recent moderate range contraction. The UK population is estimated at 50,000 pairs.

**34. Little Owl (*Athene noctua*) Not assessed**

Little owl has been lost from a number of localities in West Dorset over the last decade and there were no records in 2022. The most recent documented sighting at Wyke Farm was in June 2015 in ST5007.

**35. Long-eared Owl (*Asio otus*) Green List**

Nationally under-recorded, Long-eared Owl is a potential past (especially in the years after blanket coniferisation) and current breeding species, as the area contains stands of breeding habitat - dense coniferous woodland. However, there are no records for Wyke Farm and none were seen or heard in 2022.

**36. Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) Green List**

Kingfisher is occasionally recorded at Wyke Farm in all seasons in the vicinity of the lake, though there is no evidence of breeding. The water course which flows through Wyke Farm are probably too narrow and shady at present to support breeding Kingfisher. Kingfisher is uncommon nationally, with the population estimated at 5100 pairs. The population is considered stable and in 2021, the birds was moved from the Amber to the Green List

**37. Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (*Dryobates minor*) Red List**

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was recorded as a probable breeding species at Chedington Wood in the 1987-94 DBC tetrad survey. There are no recent records from Wyke Farm. This bird has decline severely in West Dorset since the 1990s, and may now be extinct.

**38. Great Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos major*) Green List**

The Great Spotted Woodpecker is well distributed across the estate. The UK population has increased by 351% since 1970.

**39. Green Woodpecker (*Picus viridis*) Green List**

This woodpecker can often be heard calling on the fringes of the town centre or seen on regular feeding journeys from Hyde Hill, Allington Hill and the Millennium Green. Due to its mobility between feeding sites and because the early part of the 'drumming' season was missed, Green Woodpecker proved a difficult species to census. In total, eight territories were found, though possibly as many as 20 may have been present.

**40. Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) Amber List**

The Kestrel box near the lake was damaged this year, hence no breeding attempt was made. A pair nested in the Kestrel box in 2020.

**41. Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*) Green List**

Hobby was suspected of breeding in woodland near Whitevine in 2021, though this was not replicated in 2022 despite good breeding and foraging habitat being present. This is an elusive species forming large territories (mean size 750 Hectares) and searches were not extensive, so breeding presence may have been overlooked. Hobby is a nationally rare species with 2050 breeding pairs.

**42. Jay (*Garrulus glandarius*) Green List**

Jays are well spread through the Recording Area in areas of scrub, thick hedgerows with taller trees, tree lines and mature woodland. The UK Jay population has increased by 10% since 1970 and stands at 170,000 pairs.

**43. Magpie (*Pica pica*) Green List**

A common species at Wyke Farm, not surveyed in 2022. The UK population is stable, with 610,000 pairs present.

**44. Jackdaw (*Coloeus monedula*) Green List**

A common species at Wyke Farm, though breeding status is unclear. The UK Jackdaw population is increasing and is currently estimated to be 1.6 million pairs.

**45. Rook (*Corvus frugilegus*) Amber Listed**

Absent as a breeding species, though suitable habitat is present and regularly recorded.

**46. Carrion Crow (*Corvus corone*) Green List**

A common species across the estate. Not surveyed in 2022. The UK population is in excess of 1 million pairs and is increasing.

**47. Raven (*Corvus corax*) Green List**

One Raven territory was located in Chedington Wood. Raven is a nationally scarce breeding species with the population last estimated at 10,000 pairs, though the species is increasing hence its Green List classification.

**48. Coal Tit (*Periparus ater*) Green List**

A common species across the estate, especially in Chedington Woods. Not surveyed in 2023. The UK population is in excess of 1 million pairs and is increasing. Coal Tit is on the Green List having increased in abundance by 24% since 1970, corresponding to the spread in coniferous woodland across the UK landscape.

**49. Marsh Tit (*Poecile palustris*) Red List**

The survey confirmed that Wyke Farm is a local stronghold for the Marsh Tit, with 8-12 territories detected. The species is still widespread but thinly spread in West Dorset, but nationally it has declined by 75% since 1970 and is Red Listed.

**50. Willow Tit (*Poecile montanus*) Red List**

Willow Tit was a breeding species at Wyke Farm and adjacent tetrads in the 1987-94 DBC survey. The UK population has been in freefall in recent decades, with a 94% decline detected since 1970. There have been no observations in recent years at Wyke Farm and Willow Tit is now almost certainly extinct in Dorset, having been present in 25 10-km squares in both the 1968-72 and 1988-91 Atlas surveys.

**51. Blue Tit (*Cyanistes caeruleus*) Green List**



A common breeding bird across Wyke Farm. Though the population was not fully censused in 2022, 17 nest were monitored which produced 127 fledged young.

**52. Great Tit (*Parus major*) Green List**

A common breeding bird across Wyke Farm. Though the population was not fully censused in 2022, nine nests were monitored producing 54 fledged young.

**53. Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*) Red List**

One territory was detected at Great Mead, currently the most suitable breeding habitat for this species on the Estate. Skylark is a casualty of the intensification of farmland and is Red Listed having declined by 56% since 1970.

**54. Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) Green List**

The survey yielded at least five territories, in the farm buildings at Wyke Farm, with the young ringed at one nest and five fledging. Nationally, the Swallow population fluctuates considerably from year to year, and the overall trend is considered stable at around 700,000 pairs.

**55. House Martin (*Delichon urbicum*) Red List**

At least 12 pairs bred at Wyke Farm, with the colony centred around the cottage nearest to the lake. House Martins are in sharp decline nationally, so the presence of this thriving colony is welcome. Since 1970, the UK population has declined by 53% and the species was added to the Red List in 2021,

**56. Cetti's Warbler (*Cettia cetti*) Green List**

Cetti's Warblers are occasionally recorded at Wyke Farm during the winter and on migration. There was no evidence of breeding, though a small amount suitable habitat is present. The UK population is small at 3450 pairs, but this is an expanding species attributable to climate change, with a 100% population increase logged over the last decade.

**57. Long-tailed Tit (*Aegithalos caudatus*) Green List**

A common breeding bird across Wyke Farm. Not censused in 2022. The Long-tailed Tit is doing well in the UK, having increased by 100% since 1970.

**58. Willow Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochilus*) Amber List**

Willow Warbler is a regular autumn migrant to farmland hedgerows and scrub around the lake. Sadly, there were no breeding records this year, an alarming state of affairs for this once abundant West Dorset bird. Willow Warbler has declined in abundance by 43% since 1970, particularly in southern Britain linked to climate change.

**59. Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*) Green List**

The Chiffchaff is common and widespread at Wyke Farm, though numbers were not assessed. The UK Chiffchaff population is 1.75 million and there has been a 104% increase since 1970.

**60. Sedge Warbler (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*) Amber List**

Sedge Warbler is a scarce passage migrant at Wyke Farm. Suitable breeding habitat exists at the lake, though no territories were detected. Sedge Warbler has declined by 34% since 1970 in the UK and was added to the Amber List in 2021.

**61. Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*) Green List**

Six territories were located in reedbed habitat around the lake. The species has increased nationally and across Dorset in recent decades.

**62. Grasshopper Warbler (*Locustella naevia*) Red List**

Grasshopper Warbler is a potential breeding species to reedbed margins and clearfell compartments within woodland areas and may possibly have bred in the past at Chedington Wood, especially at the time of initial clearfelling. Grasshopper Warbler was a breeding species in ST40 and ST50 in 1968-72 and ST50 in 1988-91, though there were no local records in the 1987-94 tetrad survey. There were no records on the estate in 2022.

**63. Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*) Green List**

Blackcap is common and widespread at the estate, though numbers were not assessed. Blackcap is doing well in the UK due to national increases in scrub and secondary woodland cover, with abundance up by 335% since 1970 and the population is now estimated at 1.65 million pairs.

**64. Garden Warbler (*Sylvia borin*) Green List**

Similar in song to the Blackcap (though a little faster, scratchier and without the musical finish), the Garden Warbler is much scarcer both nationally and in south west Dorset. It was therefore noteworthy to detect five widely scattered territories in scrub and woodland areas.

**65. Lesser Whitethroat (*Curruca curruca*) Green List**

A single territory was found in the butterfly strips. Across the UK Lesser Whitethroat has a fluctuating pollution trend, with an estimated 79,000 pairs present.

**66. Common Whitethroat (*Curruca communis*) Amber List**

Only two Common Whitethroat territories were detected by the survey, one of which may have related to a migrant bird. Common Whitethroat is Amber listed due to a moderate decline since 1970.

**67. Firecrest (*Regulus ignicapilla*) Green List**

One of the highlights of the survey was locating 4-7 Firecrest territories in Chedington Wood, with the nest seen of one of the breeding pairs. The preferred habitat here and elsewhere is tall spruce trees enveloped by dense ivy around the trunk. The species is nationally rare, with the population estimated at 2,000 pairs, though it is likely under-recorded. Firecrest first bred in Dorset in 1970, with the population increasing to 26 pairs by 2016.

**68. Goldcrest (*Regulus regulus*) Green List**

Goldcrest is well distributed in woodland areas, though no census was made. Rather surprisingly given the increase in extent of coniferous woodland in the UK, Goldcrest show an 18% decline since 1970, though the ten-year trend is upward.

**69. Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*) Amber List**

Wren was proven to be the most abundant of all species surveyed, with approximately 114 territories found. Wren is also the UK's most abundant wild bird with an estimated 11 million pairs. Wren was added to the Amber List in 2021 because the UK is internationally important for the species.



*Wren territories in 2022*

**70. Nuthatch (*Sitta europaea*) Green List**

The hole-nesting Nuthatch is found at in all areas at Wyke Farm with mature broad-leaved trees, though no estimate was made of numbers. The species appears to be doing well on the estate and has increased by 289% across the UK since 1970.

**71. Treecreeper (*Certhia familiaris*) Green List**

Treecreepers were found across the estate in broad-leaved woodland habitats, with an estimated seven territories present. The UK population is stable at 225,000 pairs.

**72. Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) Red List**

A single tree nesting Starling territory was found on farmland. Starling has declined nationally, by a worrying 82% since 1970.

**73. Blackbird (*Turdus merula*) Green List**

A common species across the estate. Not surveyed in 2022.

**74. Song Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*) Amber List**

The survey detected 14 Song Thrush territories, located in both farmland and woodland areas. The Song Thrush moved from Red to Amber List in 2021 due to a recent improvement in fortunes, though the UK population is still only half of what it was in 1970.

**75. Mistle Thrush (*Turdus viscivorus*) Red List**

Mistle Thrush is Red Listed having declined by 57% since 1970. There were two to three territories present of this wide-ranging thrush.

**76. Spotted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*) Red List**

The Spotted Flycatcher is one of the UKs most rapidly declining species, with a drop in abundance of 88% since 1970. It has become scarce in Dorset, with the trend for the south west showing a 61% decline over the last 20 years. It is now too rare for a south west trend to be calculable. In this context it was highly encouraging to locate four territories in Chedington Wood.

**77. Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*) Green List**

A common species found across the estate. Not surveyed in 2022.

**78. Nightingale (*Luscinia megarhynchos*) Red List**

The Nightingale is in steep decline in south west England, with probably now less than 10 pairs in Dorset. Consequently, one of the highlights of the observation of a non-singing bird in suitable breeding habitat in Knowle Hill Wood in April. There were no further breeding season records, though one was caught and ringed around the lake in August

**79. Common Redstart (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*) Amber List**

Common Redstart is a scarce breeder in Dorset with perhaps less than 15 pairs per annum. The species was recorded as a breeding species in ST50 in 1969-72 and 1988-91. Breeding was also confirmed at nearby Melbury Park 1987-94. Marginally suitable habitat exist on the estate, especially the wood pasture are at Whitevine though none were recorded in the breeding season. Common Redstart is Amber listed due to a moderate decline since 1970.

**80. Stonechat (*Saxicola rubicola*) Green List**

Stonechat is a regular winter visitor to farmland areas, where it is a candidate breeding species, though there was no evidence of breeding. It has increased in recent years in the UK due to a run of mild winters and the population now stands at 65,000 pairs.

**81. House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) Red List**

The building around Wyke Farm support a healthy population of House Sparrows estimated at 15 pairs, with 50 or more present post-breeding. House Sparrows have declined in abundance by 65% since 1970 leading to Red List status. According to recent research, Europe has 247 million fewer house sparrows than in 1980.

**82. Tree Sparrow (*Passer montanus*) Red List**

Tree Sparrow is sadly extinct as regular breeding species in Dorset, though there are sporadic breeding record in Dorset and South Somerset, most recently at Portland Bill in 2018 as a result of creating winter bird food and other beneficial options through a Countryside Stewardship agreement.

**83. Dunnock (*Prunella modularis*) Amber List**

The survey located 22 Dunnock territories, with three-quarters of those in farmland hedgerows and tree lines. In the 2021 review, Dunnock moved from the Red to the Amber List as the rate of population decline has slowed and now stands at 33% since 1970.

**84. Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*) Amber List**

Grey Wagtail was occasionally recorded at the lake and around farm buildings, but there was no indication of breeding. Grey Wagtail moved off the Red List to Amber in 2021, with the long-term population decline now 43%

**85. Pied Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*) Green List**

One Pied Wagtail territory was located at Wyke Farm around the farm buildings. More than half a million pairs breed in the UK.

**86. Meadow Pipit (*Anthus pratensis*) Amber List**

Meadow Pipit is a declining species of open grass, heath and marshland that is most abundant in upland areas of northern Britain. It is Amber Listed and from 1994-2019 declined by 27% in south west England. Though a common passage migrant and regular winter visit, there was no evidence of breeding. The species may have bred in the past, with probable breeding recorded in the Chedington Wood tetrad 1987-94.

**87. Tree Pipit (*Anthus trivialis*) Red List**

There have been records of Tree Pipit breeding in ST40 and/or ST50 in each of the three BTO Atlas periods. Suitable clearfell breeding habitat was present in Chedington Woods in 2022, though none were seen. The bird, however is a regular flying migrant in August and September. Tree Pipit is on the Red List and has declined by 74% since 1970.

**88. Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*) Green List**

Chaffinch is widely distributed as breeding bird on the estate, though was not fully censused in 2022. There are an estimated five million Chaffinch pairs breeding in the UK, with the population stable.

**89. Hawfinch (*Coccothraustes coccothraustes*) Red List**

Hawfinch is a scarce breeding bird in Dorset and is on the Red List due to a UK distribution decline of more than 75% since 1970. Wyke Farm was found to be the most important site in Dorset for this bird in winter 2021/22 with a flock of over 35 birds in Pryme Plantation, which is dominated by Hornbeam, the seeds of which are the birds preferred food source. It was a little disappointing that the birds didn't linger into the breeding season and subsequently none were seen in winter 2022/23. Recent studies have shown that breeding success is good at remaining western Britain sites, and that Jays are the most frequent nest predator, with no evidence of predation by Grey Squirrels.

**90. Bullfinch (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*) Amber List**

The Bullfinch population has been stable in south west England over the last 25 years, though it remains on the Amber List because of a moderate decline across the UK since 1970. The survey found 13 widely scattered territories on the estate

**91. Greenfinch (*Chloris chloris*) Red List**

During the survey just two Greenfinch territories were detected. This species has recently been added to the Red List due to a sharp 64% decline since 1970. The decline is attributable to an outbreak of trichomonosis disease (canker) in 2006. The disease is caused by parasites which contaminate water and food preventing the birds from feeding properly. It is believed bird tables and baths contributed the majority of the infections.

**92. Linnnet (*Linaria cannabina*) Red List**

The Linnnet is a widespread bird of open country in southern UK, but has declined markedly by 45% since 1970 and is Red Listed. The survey uncovered 5 (5-9) territories on farmland.

**93. Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*) Green List**

This delightful bird is an established breeding species on the estate, but numbers were not assessed. Though on the Amber list in 1996, it is now doing well across the UK, with a 197% increase since 1970.

**94. Crossbill (*Loxia curvirostra*) Green List**

Crossbill is an eruptive breeding species in the UK, with numbers highly variable from year to year depending on conditions in core Taiga forest breeding areas of Eurasia. The species is frequently recorded at Wyke Farm during the winter months. Two territories were present in 2021, though none were found in 2022, which was not a good year for Crossbill immigration.

**95. Lesser Redpoll (*Acanthis cabaret*) Red List**

Lesser Redpoll is a potential breeding species, as marginally suitable habitat is present on the estate and in Dorset it sporadically breeds well away from the core breeding area of Poole Basin with past records for West Dorset (e.g. at Rampisham/Lower Kingcombe). None were recorded in the 2022 breeding season. Ringing data reveals passage and wintering birds have occurred from breeding sites on Dartmoor.

**96. Siskin (*Spinus spinus*) Green List**

The Siskin is a characteristic bird of mixed conifer plantations and is well established as a breeding species at Wyke Farm. No censused in 2022.

**97. Corn Bunting (*Emberiza calandra*) Red List**

Corn Bunting is a farmland specialist that has declined by a shocking 89% across the UK since 1970, with the decline mirrored in Dorset during the 1980s to 2000s. The UK population of this Red Listed bird is estimated at only 11,000 pairs. No suitable breeding habitat currently exists, though breeding was recorded in ST50 1988-91.

**98. Yellowhammer (*Emberiza citrinella*) Red List**

The Yellowhammer is another specialist farmland bird that is in serious decline. Since 1970 the UK population has tumbled by 60%, whilst in south west England Yellowhammer has fallen by 40% over the last 25 years. The species is occasionally recorded, but no breeding activity was observed in 2022.

**99. Reed Bunting (*Emberiza schoeniclus*) Amber List**

Two Reed Bunting territories were present at the lake, which is also an important local roosting site in the winter months. Reed Bunting is on the Amber List due to a 28% decline since 1970, but in south west England the trend is stable over the last 25 years.

**100. Species data withheld**

Breeding data withheld

## **4.0 Discussion**

### **4.1 Evaluation of the Breeding Bird Survey results**

The total of approximately 60 breeding species is a relatively high in a County context, based on the few comparisons available with other well-known similarly-sized birding hotspots/reserves. These being Cogden/West Bexington managed by DWT/NT, 3.5km<sup>2</sup> 54 species; Lytchett Bay part managed by the RSPB, 4.6 km<sup>2</sup> 43 species).

Bird species-richness was relatively high due to the combination of good quality woodland and wetland habitats alongside mixed farmland in close proximity. despite intensive land use, due to the wide variety of urban, rural and coastal habitats present in a generally favourable climate.

The results highlight the value of creating the lake at Wyke Farm for a range of nationally uncommon and/or Amber listed birds such as Mute Swan, Little Grebe, Reed Warbler and Reed Bunting.

An evaluation of the data found that the woodland supports a good variety of specialist bird species along with national rarities, some benefitting though the ongoing restructuring that has occurred in recent years from dense conifer plantation to a woodland more uneven aged and semi-natural in character. The woodland area is largely private, which helps reduce recreational disturbance and provide breeding habitat for sensitive species.

Vacant habitat exists though for a number of species, especially summer visitors, most likely due to external factors such as survival rates on wintering and migratory grounds (e.g. for Wood Warbler and Tree Pipit) or large-scale drivers such as climate change (Willow Warbler, Nightingale). For other resident species which have gone extinct locally, such as Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and Willow Tit, the causes of decline are unclear though contributory factors could include increased competition, habitat fragmentation, disease and climate change.

Farmland areas supported low densities and fewer specialist species, compared with woodland. In particular Skylark, Whitethroat, Greenfinch and Linnet were found in much lower densities than good farmland habitat, whilst Yellowhammer is extinct (Table 2). The high numbers of hedgerow trees and the lack of Spring cereals and other forms of arable cultivation are key factors reducing habitat suitability for these species.

Several farmland species such as Grey Partridge, Willow Tit and Tree Sparrow, which have bred locally in recent decades including possibly also at Wyke Farm were confirmed as being extinct. Likely causes of local extinction include one or more of the following factors: intensification of farming practices (now being reversed at Wyke Farm), habitat fragmentation, climate change and predation.

## **5.0 Bibliography, data sources and weblinks**

BTO Common Bird Census Methods

<https://www.bto.org/sites/default/files/u31/downloads/details/cbc.pdf>

2021 Birds of Conservation Concern Listings

<https://www.bto.org/our-science/publications/birds-conservation-concern/status-our-bird-populations-fifth-birds>

Bird population trends

<https://www.bto.org/sites/default/files/publications/state-of-uk-birds-2020-report.pdf>

<https://www.bto.org/our-science/data/what-data-are-available>

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BTO regional bird population trends

<https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/bbs/latest-results/trend-graphs>



BTO Bird Atlas 2007-11 presence in SY49

<https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/birdatlas/results/mapstore>

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## **6.0 Acknowledgements**

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