

Old Down | Recording | Bird report | April 2010

Since November 2007, ODBWG has been contributing roving records to British Trust for Ornithology's Bird Atlas. Bird Atlas is a national fieldwork survey of the distribution and breeding patterns of birds found in the UK and Ireland. The current Atlas lasts from 2007-2011. <http://www.bto.org/birdatlas/index.htm>

The main recording periods are:

Winter (early) November & December
Winter (late) January & February

Breeding (early) April & May
Breeding (late) June & July

Records for Old Down

	Winter (records contributed)	Breeding (records contributed)
2007/08	30	34
2008/09	59	145
2009/10	83	<i>pending</i>
2010/11	<i>pending</i>	<i>pending</i>

29 species have been seen during winter surveys
37 species during breeding surveys
43 species in total (see appendix 1 for a complete list of species)

Comparison to local and national pictures

There are two main sources of data readily available. Firstly records from neighbouring transects submitted to BTO. These show that Old Down compares equally with the *number* of species in neighbouring 10km areas although the *actual* species vary. This variation is partially due to habitat diversity i.e. in Overton the presence of water means waterfowl species are frequently recorded. This data also shows the following species that are present in neighbouring areas with similar habitats to Old Down that have not yet been recorded on Old Down. NB some species may have been recorded on Beggarwood.

- Marsh tit
- Meadow Pipit
- Nuthatch
- Redwing
- Siskin
- Sparrowhawk
- Tree Creeper

The second source of data is RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch. This takes place annually in January to coincide with BTO's winter survey period and is useful because records to the Garden Birdwatch are contributed more densely than to BTO. It is also of particular importance to Old Down as the site is bordered by private gardens which provide positive habitat additions, food sources and shelter as well as increased threats through nest disturbance and predation

from domestic animals. Data from RSPB is not available at local level but we can compare with the County averages, accessing data from the last 30 years¹.

In **January 2010**, the 10 most common birds recorded in Hampshire gardens were:

- Blue tit
- Blackbird
- House Sparrow
- Woodpigeon
- Starling
- Robin
- Chaffinch
- Great Tit
- Goldfinch
- Long Tailed Tit

January 2009

- Blue tit
- Blackbird
- Woodpigeon
- House Sparrow
- Starling
- Long Tailed Tit
- Great Tit
- Chaffinch
- Robin
- Collared Dove

January 2008

- Blue tit
- Blackbird
- House sparrow
- Woodpigeon
- Starling
- Chaffinch
- Robin
- Collared Dove
- Great tit
- Greenfinch

It is important to recognise that overall numbers have decreased dramatically. The number of birds recorded per garden in 2010 has decreased by over 56% since 1979.

Conservation status

The conversation status of British bird species is communicated using a traffic light system: Red is the highest conservation priority, with species needing urgent action. Amber is the next most critical group, followed by Green.

The birds recorded on Old Down that fall into the Red categories are²:

¹ RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch has taken place annually since 1979.
<http://www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch/index.asp>

² The birds in italics have only been recorded once on Old Down.

Corn bunting
Field Fare
Hawfinch
House Sparrow

Linnet
Skylark
Song Thrush
Starling

Tree Sparrow
Yellow Hammer

The conservation status of all recorded birds together with the criteria used to determine that status is noted in appendix 2.

Breeding records

The following species have successfully bred on Old Down.³

Blue Tit	Long-tailed Tit
Chaffinch	Robin
Goldfinch	Song Thrush
Great Tit	Wren

Additionally, Great Spotted Woodpecker and Skylarks bred successfully on Beggarwood in 2009.

Noted changes

At just over the half way point of the survey, it is too early to draw any definite conclusions. However contributing records to the Atlas will enable ODBWG to look at whether the management of Old Down is decreasing, maintaining or increasing bird species and populations over time as well as provide a national and regional comparison.

Additional monitoring

As factors such as changing habitat, human disturbance, food supplies, weather patterns and predation may impact on the results; informal records of these factors are also useful. For example, autumn 2009 was a good year for berries and this may have supported a greater number of fruit eating birds through the winter. Hedgerow depletion on the Manydown boundary and by Old Down Community Hall in 2009/10 may reduce breeding sites for small birds in 2010.

A winter nest survey has been completed in two areas on the western edge of the site to establish baseline data for comparison in future years. 14 nests were found along the ancient Manydown hedge and 4 in the newer triangular copse of trees.

Management actions

No specific management actions have been carried out by the group to support the conservation of bird species on Old Down. Locally, wildlife groups have undertaken a range of actions, including the following:

- Access restriction – prevention of human / animal footfall during the breeding season to support and encourage ground nesting birds
- Food sources – planting that increases the range of food available for birds throughout the year either directly or by encouraging insects in the food chain
- Hedgerow restoration / layering – to support threatened species e.g. Sparrows & Dunnocks

³ The criteria for confirmed breeding are records of adults tending nests with eggs or fledged young – other species have exhibited breeding behaviour and may be successfully breeding on Old Down.

- Nest boxes – primarily for apex species such as Barn Owls and Kestrels
- Shelter belts – planting that enhances the diversity of microclimates that in turn supports food chain species
- Tree planting – to ensure a future supply of mature trees as nest sites and roosts
- Wilderness creation – retaining unmanaged areas that form dense thickets
- Woodland management – including coppicing, the retention of standing dead wood

Many of these actions are not suited to Old Down and may conflict with other activities. Others may additionally support the conservation and habitat provision of other species.

Learning

Aside from the quantifiable data provided by the surveys, the recording has also increased the groups' knowledge about bird behaviour on Old Down. Certain areas of the site are used more frequently by birds and patterns in behaviour during certain types of weather have also been noted.

It is possible to confidently suggest that actions on Old Down are supporting the conservation of birds. For example, the triangular copse and the western end of the new woodland planted when the site was first converted from arable farmland is supporting a number of small bird species including Great Tits, Greenfinches and Goldfinches. These two areas are sufficiently close to provide connective habitats and could be further encouraged by strengthening the hedgerow. Further areas like this could be replicated across the site.

Appendix 1: species recorded on Old Down

Barn Owl
Blackbird
Blackcap
Blue Tit
Bullfinch
Buzzard
Carrion Crow
Chaffinch
Chiffchaff
Coal Tit
Corn Bunting
Dunnock
Fieldfare
Garden Warbler
Goldfinch
Great Spotted
Woodpecker
Great Tit
Greenfinch
Green Woodpecker
Grey Heron
Hawfinch
House Martin
House Sparrow
Jackdaw
Jay
Kestrel
Linnet
Long-tailed tit
Magpie
Mistle Thrush
Pied Wagtail
Red Kite
Robin
Rook
Skylark
Song Thrush
Starling
Swallow
Swift
Tree Sparrow
Woodpigeon
Wren
Yellow Hammer

Appendix 2: species by conservation status

Corn Bunting
Fieldfare
Hawfinch
House Sparrow
Linnnet
Skylark
Song Thrush
Starling
Tree Sparrow
Yellow Hammer

Red list criteria

- Globally threatened
- Historical population decline in UK during 1800–1995
- At least 50% decline in UK breeding population over last 25 years, or longer-term since 1969
- At least 50% contraction of UK breeding range over last 25 years, or since 1969

Barn Owl
Bullfinch
Dunnock
Green Woodpecker
House Martin
Kestrel
Mistle Thrush
Red Kite
Swallow
Swift

Amber list criteria

- Species with unfavourable conservation status in Europe (SPEC = Species of European Conservation Concern)
- Historical population decline during 1800–1995, but recovering: population has more than doubled over last 25 years
- Moderate (25-49%) decline in UK breeding population over last 25 years, or since 1969
- Moderate (25-49%) contraction of UK breeding range over last 25 years, or since 1969
- Moderate (25-49%) decline in UK non-breeding population over last 25 years, or since 1969
- Rare breeder: 1–300 breeding pairs in UK
- Rare non-breeders: less than 900 individuals
- Localised: at least 50% of UK breeding or non-breeding population in 10 or fewer sites (not applied to rare breeders or non-breeders)
- Internationally important: at least 20% of European breeding or non-breeding population in UK

Green list

Species that occur regularly in the UK but do not qualify under any of the above criteria

Blackbird
Blackcap
Blue Tit
Buzzard
Carrion Crow
Chaffinch
Chiffchaff
Coal Tit
Garden Warbler
Goldfinch
Great spotted woodpecker
Great Tit

Greenfinch
Grey Heron
Jackdaw
Jay
Long-tailed tit
Magpie
Pied Wagtail
Robin
Rook
Woodpigeon
Wren