

Old Down | Recording | Bird report | April 2011

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 and the results will be published in 2013.

<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	261
2010/11	130	<i>pending</i>

34 species have been seen during winter surveys

43 species during breeding surveys

49 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.

Marsh tit
Meadow Pipit
Nuthatch
Siskin
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.

¹ RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch has taken place annually since 1979.

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch/index.asp>

In **January 2011**, the 10 most common birds recorded in Hampshire gardens were:

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

January 2010

- 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

Conservation status

The conservation 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:

Corn bunting
Field Fare
Grey Partridge
Hawfinch
House Sparrow
Linnet
Redwing
Skylark
Song Thrush
Starling
Tree Sparrow
Yellowhammer

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

Skylark and Yellowhammer are RSPB Birds of Conservation Concern and also listed in both the UK and Hampshire Biodiversity Action Plans. They are additionally mentioned in the Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council Living Landscapes Strategy.

Breeding records

The following species have successfully bred on Old Down.³

Blackbird	Kestrel
Blackcap	Jackdaw
Blue Tit	Long-tailed Tit
Bullfinch	Magpie
Carrion Crow	Robin
Chaffinch	Rook
Chiffchaff	Song Thrush
Goldfinch	Wood Pigeon
Great Tit	Wren
Greenfinch	Yellowhammer
House Sparrow	

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

Noted changes

Now in the final year of the survey, we can conclude that the diversity of species on Old Down has increased from 21 to 49 since 2007. Almost half of these species have red or amber conservation status. The number of species breeding has also increased from 8 to 21 over the same time.

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 and 2010 were good years for berries but also followed by harsh winters. It is also interesting that, although not breeding on Old Down, Red Kites are now seen very

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

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.

regularly in the area with a strong increase in local distribution and numbers over the last four years.

Management actions

Positive management actions carried out by the group that benefit the conservation of bird species on Old Down include:

- Increasing 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 – to support declining species e.g. Sparrows & Dunnocks
- 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

Negative management actions undertaken by landowners include:

- Annual mechanical hedge cutting

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, such as the more sheltered western side of the down.

Recommendations for the future management of Old Down would include:

1. the provision of connective habitats (these will develop as recently planted saplings mature)
2. changing the frequency and method used to cut the A30 hedgerow
3. retaining areas of long, uncut grass to provide habitat for small mammals to benefit Barn Owls and Kestrel in particular which are declining nationally at a rapid rate

Appendix 1: species recorded on Old Down

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

Appendix 2: species by conservation status

Corn Bunting
Fieldfare
Grey Partridge
Hawfinch
House Sparrow
Linnet
Redwing
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
Whitethroat

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 or the above criteria

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

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