

Spring Birds at Sharphill Wood 2020

Introduction

Sharphill Wood is home to birds typical of deciduous woodland and its margins. Resident species are supplemented by a handful of summer visitors. Although birds can be quite difficult to spot in woodland, particularly when trees are in leaf from late April onwards, spring is the time when birds are at their most vocal. Many species use song to establish and defend their territories for breeding. For this reason spring is the best time to survey birds at Sharphill, notwithstanding the fact that a few winter visitors (e.g., Redwing) will be missed. This report is a result of weekly visits to the Wood between late March and early June 2020. A similar report was produced in 2018 and 2019.



Mistle Thrush near northern entrance, April 2020

However, the Covid-19 crisis in 2020 prevented the usual detailed survey visits. Although weekly visits were made, this was in the context of government-allowed daily exercise. Casual observations during such exercise visits were recorded, but detailed plotting of species onto locations and attempts to quantify the number of birds or breeding territories could not be undertaken. Government restrictions were eased somewhat in May, but this was considered too late to revert to usual methods.

Methodology

Data is based on casual observations during weekly visits from 27th March to 5th June. However, a strong wind during the visit on 22nd May prevented anything of note being recorded. Visits typically lasted about 1.5 hours, commencing about 09.00. Government restrictions prevented use of an assistant. The route taken varied slightly, but usually took in the following:

- hedgerow approaching northern entrance;
- main path as far as junction with western path;
- western path down to southern gate;
- southern gate towards A52 and then back to south-eastern gate;
- main path back to junction with western path;
- eastern path from northern entrance towards the south-eastern entrance.

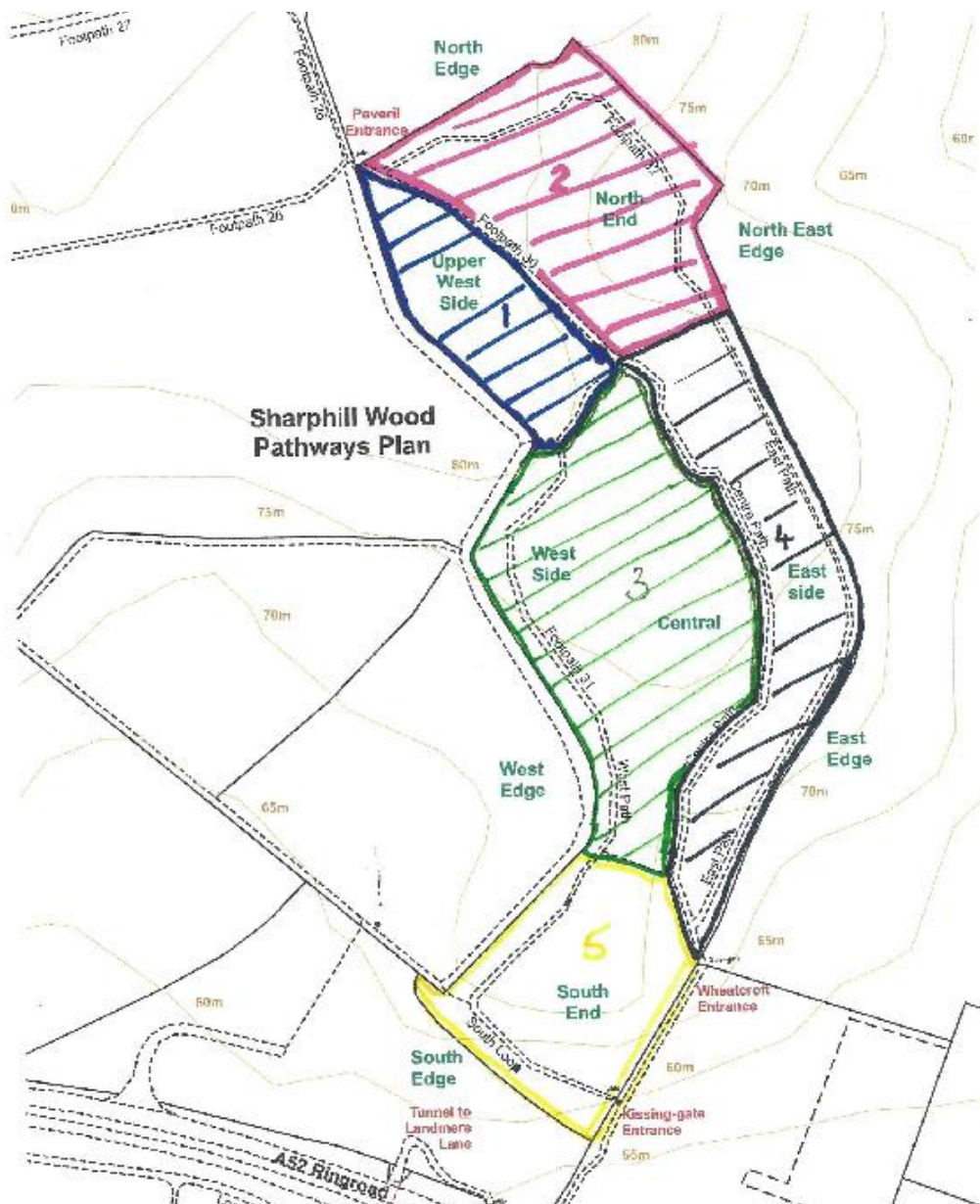
During each visit, avian species seen or heard were noted, but no attempt was made to estimate numbers or plot locations. Birds within the Wood or in close proximity to the Wood (surrounding fields and hedgerows) were recorded.

Being based on casual observations, without recording locations or numbers of birds, the methodology is very imprecise, and therefore the results given below show little more than the presence or absence of different species.

Because the transect was confined to paths, quieter species in areas well away from paths (in particular, the central part of zone 3) were likely to have been missed.

Throughout the entire period of the survey, most bird species that use song were indeed singing, although singing tends to drop off slightly beyond the middle of May. For this reason it was not considered worthwhile continuing surveys beyond early June. The earlier surveys, in late March and early April, were perhaps too early for some summer visitors, although most of the species in the Wood had arrived by then and had started singing. Late arrivals such as Common Whitethroat will have been recorded during the later visits.

Because there were no night-time or evening visits, owls were not detected.



Site map showing zones 1,2,3,4 and 5 and the official paths

Results by species.

The following is a list of species encountered during the survey visits, as well as other species encountered on site at other times and therefore perhaps noticeable by their absence. Species are listed in taxonomic order, in accordance with the British List published by the British Ornithologists' Union, which in turn is based on the taxonomy used by the International Ornithological Congress. Note that the order of some non-passerine families changed at the beginning of this year.

Pheasants, Quails and Partridges

Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*). Heard on a single visit calling from field near south-eastern gate. Surprisingly this species is rarely recorded at Sharphill, although doubtless they exist in the surrounding area.

Swifts

Common Swift (*Apus apus*). Not recorded this year. In the past this has only been seen occasionally, over the fields to the north.

Pigeons and Doves

Stock Dove (*Columba oenas*). Heard on each visit and seen on most visits. This appeared to be present in good numbers.

Woodpigeon (*Columba palumbus*). Heard and seen on each visit.

Birds of Prey

Common Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*). Recorded only once during survey visits (over the central part of the wood), but fairly common in the area and frequently seen or heard over the site in the recent past. There is anecdotal evidence of a possible territory within the Wood, and when it was seen during the visit on 1st May it appeared to be flying out of the canopy.

Owls

Because there were no night-time or evening visits, owls were unlikely to be recorded, and indeed they were not. It is probable that **Tawny Owl (*Strix Aluco*)** is present.

Woodpeckers

Great Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos major*). Seen and/or heard drumming or calling on just over half the visits.

Green Woodpecker (*Picus viridis*). Seen and/or heard calling on just over half the visits.

Falcons

Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*). Seen in the surrounding area or flying over on three visits. On the final visit there were two birds perched on the Wheatcroft buildings and making the occasional flight. However, it was not possible to see if one was a juvenile.

Crows

Eurasian Jay (*Garrulus glandarius*). Seen on 4 visits.

Magpie (*Pica pica*). Recorded on most visits.

Jackdaw (*Coloeus monedula*). Recorded on most visits.

Rook (*Corvus frugilegus*). Not recorded, and generally not encountered at Sharphill, although doubtless there are birds in the broader area.

Carrion Crow (*Corvus corone*). Recorded on most visits.

Raven (*Corvus corax*). Not recorded during visits, and generally not encountered at Sharphill. However, during the February work party a bird was heard calling over the Wood, and a minute or so later was seen flying off in a south-easterly direction.

Tits

Coal Tit (*Parus ater*). Not recorded this year. In the past it has been seen only during early spring and it is thought unlikely this species stays to breed, particularly as the woodland is mainly deciduous.

Blue Tit (*Cyanistes caeruleus*). Seen on most visits, and almost certainly is always present, although not particularly vocal later in the spring. Government restrictions prevented the usual programme of nest box inspections this year, so evidence of breeding is limited. However, young were seen on the final visit.

Great Tit (*Parus major*). Seen on most visits, and almost certainly is always present, although not particularly vocal later in the spring. Government restrictions prevented the usual programme of nest box inspections this year, so evidence of breeding is limited. However, young were seen on the penultimate visit.

Larks

Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*). Singing males heard and sometimes seen over the fields just to the north of the Wood on most visits, and there were at least two singing males on one occasion.

Swallows and Martins

Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*). Not seen in the vicinity during any of the survey visits, although occasionally seen over the surrounding fields in the past.

House Martin (*Delichon urbicum*). Not generally observed on site, but several were feeding over the Wheatcroft field to the south-east of the Wood on the final visit.

Long-tailed Tits

Long-tailed Tit (*Aegithalos caudatus*). Recorded on two visits.

Leaf Warblers

Willow Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochilus*). This is not a regular species at Sharphill, and is not a species of mature woodland. However, one was singing in the north-east corner on 10th April. This was probably a new arrival that had still to move on to more suitable habitat.

Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*). Seen or heard on all visits.

Sylviid Warblers

Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*). Seen or heard on most visits, although surprisingly they appeared to be absent until mid-April.

Garden Warbler (*Sylvia borin*). Not recorded this spring, but has been observed in the past.

Whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*). Singing male heard and sometimes seen in the hedgerow near the southern gate on most visits from late April, although for a fairly conspicuous species it was surprisingly not observed on all visits after its initial arrival. Also a singing male held territory for a couple of weeks in May in the hedgerow leading north from the Wood, as was the case in 2019.

Goldcrests

Goldcrest (*Regulus regulus*). Not recorded during visits, but most previous observations have been during autumn and winter.

Wrens

Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*). Abundant and widespread. Heard on all visits and seen on most.

Nuthatches

Nuthatch (*Sitta europaea*). Seen and/or heard on 3 visits.

Treecreepers

Treecreeper (*Certhia familiaris*). Seen on 4 visits.

Thrushes

Blackbird (*Turdus merula*). Seen on all visits.

Song Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*). Seen or heard on most visits.

Mistle Thrush (*Turdus viscivorus*). Seen or heard on 3 of the earlier visits, but was not recorded beyond the end of April.

Chats

Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*). Seen or heard on all visits.

Sparrows

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*). Observed in hedgerow leading north from the Wood from early May onwards.

Accentors

Duncock (*Prunella modularis*). Seen or heard on all visits.

Finches

Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*). Seen or heard on most visits.

Bullfinch (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*). Not recorded. This species was not recorded during 2019 visits and was recorded only once during 2018 visits.

Greenfinch (*Chloris chloris*). Recorded only on a single visit (1st May) near the south-eastern gate.

Linnet (*Linaria cannabina*). Not recorded. This species has been recorded south of the southern gate in recent years.

Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*). Not recorded. This is not a regular species in spring, although a foraging party was observed on one visit in 2019.

Buntings

Yellowhammer (*Emberiza citronella*). Not recorded. This species was observed last year and in some other years on the hedgerow leading down the hill from the south-eastern gate.

Conclusions

This was the third year that a survey has been conducted on a regular basis throughout spring, although this year, because of government restrictions, the survey was less detailed, and hence this

report lacks most of the quantitative information and some of the location information that was to be found in the 2018 and 2019 reports. It gives a broad picture of birds present at the site during the breeding season.

Of the species generally found inside the Wood in spring, all seemed to be present this year. However, there were a few notable absences among species often found in the immediate surroundings: Linnet, Yellowhammer and Swallow were not observed this year. Whether they really are absent, and if so whether the building developments are having an impact, is not known.

The table below shows the species recorded each year since these surveys began.

Species	2018	2019	2020				
Pheasant			√				
Common Swift	√	√					
Stock Dove	√	√	√				
Woodpigeon	√	√	√				
Common Buzzard	√	√	√				
Great Spotted Woodpecker	√	√	√				
Green Woodpecker	√	√	√				
Kestrel		√	√				
Eurasian Jay	√	√	√				
Magpie	√	√	√				
Jackdaw		√	√				
Carrion Crow	√	√	√				
Coal Tit	√	√					
Blue Tit	√	√	√				
Great Tit	√	√	√				
Skylark	√	√	√				
Swallow							
House Martin			√				
Long-tailed Tit	√	√					
Willow Warbler			√				
Chiffchaff	√	√	√				
Blackcap	√	√	√				
Garden Warbler			√				
Whitethroat	√	√	√				
Goldcrest							
Wren	√	√	√				
Nuthatch		√	√				
Treecreeper	√	√	√				
Blackbird	√	√	√				
Song Thrush	√	√	√				
Mistle Thrush		√	√				
Robin	√	√	√				
House Sparrow			√				
Dunnock	√	√	√				
Chaffinch	√	√	√				
Bullfinch	√						

Greenfinch	√	√	√				
Linnet	√	√					
Goldfinch		√					
Yellowhammer		√					
Total species	27	32	31				

I plan to run another survey in 2021, beginning at the end of March, hopefully along the lines of the 2018 and 2019 surveys.

John Elwell, on behalf of Friends of Sharphill Wood, June 2020