

# Spring Birds at Sharphill Wood 2021

## Introduction

Sharphill Wood is home to typical birds of deciduous woodland and 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 several visits to the Wood between late March and early June 2021. Similar reports were produced in 2018, 2019 and 2020, although the 2020 report was limited because of Covid-19 restrictions.



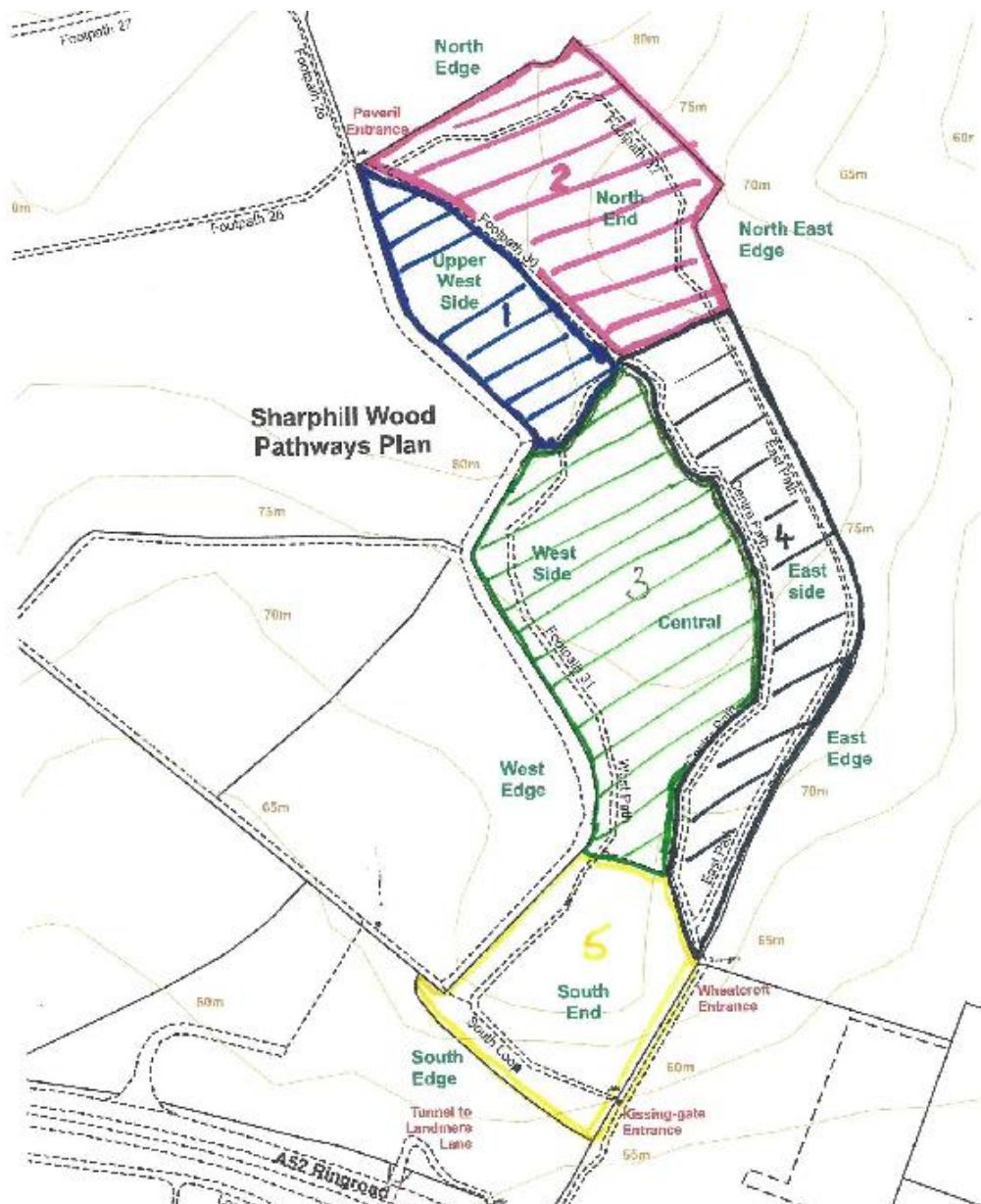
**Eurasian Jay in zone 2 near northern entrance, June 2021**

## Methodology

Data is based on 6 visits to the Wood from late March to early June 2021 (31st March, 12th April, 28th April, 11th May, 24th May and 5th June). Each visit started at approximately 08.30 and lasted about 2 hours. I was assisted on several occasions by either Chrissie or Hilary, who provided an extra pair of eyes and ears and acted as scribe. The same transect was taken on each visit:

- 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 south-eastern gate.

During each visit, locations where avian species were heard or seen were plotted on a map. Results from the 6 visits were then combined in an attempt to gain a more complete picture of which birds were present in different parts of the site, in particular in each of the 5 zones defined in the management plan and shown in the map below. Birds within the Wood or in close proximity to the Wood were recorded.



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

The methodology is not precise. Some species have quieter or less distinct songs or calls than other species. Some species are less likely to be seen because they are more secretive in their behaviour or spend a lot of time high in the canopy, and therefore there is a greater dependence on hearing and identifying the call or song. Some species are almost certainly under recorded. Also a single bird can move around, and it is a matter of judgement whether observations from two or more nearby locations represent the same bird or a different bird. Moreover, it is generally only the male that sings, and although females may call, calls are often less distinct or more subject to confusion than songs. For most species, the presence of a singing male or a cluster of sightings is assumed to represent a breeding territory.

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.

Allocation to zones is necessarily imprecise because of movement of birds. In particular, many birds were recorded along the central path on the long border between zones 3 and 4, and it is inevitable

that those birds will frequently cross the path. Therefore allocation to zones in such cases is rather arbitrary.

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 were in full song. 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.

## 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 during survey visits. 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.

### Pheasants, Quails and Partridges

**Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*)**. Not recorded this year.

### Swifts

**Common Swift (*Apus apus*)**. Not recorded this year.

### Cuckoos

**Common Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*)**. There was a report of one calling in or near the southern end of the Wood on 16th May.

### Pigeons and Doves

**Stock Dove (*Columba oenas*)**. Heard and seen on each visit. The main concentration was at the southern end of zone 3, with a few observations further north (including zones 1 and 2), but none in zone 5. Probably several breeding pairs, but difficult to estimate.

**Woodpigeon (*Columba palumbus*)**. Heard and seen regularly in various places throughout the Wood and surrounding areas. No estimate of numbers.

### Birds of Prey

**Common Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*)**. Heard and seen on 3 of the 6 survey visits, on each occasion in the canopy in the southern half of zone 3. They have been observed in this area on other occasions recently.

### 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 or heard drumming or calling on several visits, mostly in the northern half of the Wood. Probably just a single pair.

**Green Woodpecker (*Picus viridis*)**. Heard calling frequently on the first 4 visits, mainly towards the north-west of zone 3, but also in zone 4. It is unclear whether there was more than one pair.

## Falcons

**Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*)**. This species is sometimes seen in the general area. However, it was only seen on one survey visit (5th June), and on this occasion a bird came down into the trial planting area by the main path, half way along zone 3, and took a small mammal as prey.

## Crows

**Eurasian Jay (*Garrulus glandarius*)**. Seen on most visits, generally towards the north (zones 1 and 2), although on one visit there were sightings in zone 5 and the southern end of zone 3.

**Magpie (*Pica pica*)**. Seen on all visits in various parts of the Wood.

**Jackdaw (*Coloeus monedula*)**. Seen or heard on most visits, generally towards the northern end of zones 3 and 4.

**Rook (*Corvus frugilegus*)**. This species had not been encountered during the previous 3 years of this survey, but this year a small number were present in zone 4 on two visits. There is no evidence of a rookery.

**Carrion Crow (*Corvus corone*)**. Heard and seen regularly in various places throughout the Wood and surrounding areas. No attempt has been made to estimate numbers, although on the final visit there were 25 in the field to the north of the Wood.

**Raven (*Corvus corax*)**. Not recorded this year.

## Tits

**Coal Tit (*Periparus ater*)**. Not recorded this year.

**Blue Tit (*Cyanistes caeruleus*)**. Widespread, and easily overlooked, particularly when well away from paths. Observations would suggest at least 10 pairs spread across all zones.

Also nest box monitoring found 5 boxes being used by this species, with varying degrees of success. Allowing for birds using other nest sites, including the northern half of the Wood (where there are no monitored nest boxes), this too would suggest the number of pairs is likely to be at least 10.

**Great Tit (*Parus major*)**. Fairly widespread, although not detected in the central band of the Wood – observations were confined to the northern and southern thirds, with perhaps 3 pairs in the north and 3 pairs in the south.

Nest box monitoring found 2 boxes (in the south of zone 3) being used successfully by Great Tit.

## Larks

**Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*)**. There were 2 singing males over the fields just to the north of the Wood on one survey visit, and a single on two other occasions. On the first visit there was also one singing on the eastern side of the Wood, remarkably close to the housing development.

## Swallows and Martins

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

**House Martin (*Delichon urbicum*)**. Not recorded this year and not regularly recorded in the past.

## Long-tailed Tits

**Long-tailed Tit (*Aegithalos caudatus*)**. Observed twice below the southern gate and heard once on the zone 2 / zone 4 boundary. Although the species is present, there is no evidence of where it breeds (song is very quiet and rarely heard).

## Leaf Warblers

**Willow Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochilus*)**. Not recorded this year and not regularly recorded in the past.

**Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*)**. Heard singing, and occasionally seen, in most parts of the Wood except the north, with particular concentration at the southern end of zone 3. Behaviour of a bird by the western path in zone 3 suggested a possibly nest site by the boundary hedge. There were probably at least 8 singing males.

## Sylviid Warblers

**Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*)**. Singing males were heard throughout the Wood and below the southern entrance. There were probably about 10 singing males.

**Garden Warbler (*Sylvia borin*)**. Not recorded since before these annual surveys began.

**Whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*)**. A pair appeared to be occupying the scrub below the southern entrance on the final two visits. This year there were none in the hedgerow north of the Wood.

## 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 throughout the Wood and below the southern entrance. Probably about 15+ pairs evenly distributed, and therefore probably the most numerous species on site.

## Nuthatches

**Nuthatch (*Sitta europaea*)**. Heard in zone 2 on one visit and at the southern end of zone 3 on another visit. One or possibly two pairs.

## Treecreepers

**Treecreeper (*Certhia familiaris*)**. Seen in zone 1 on the one visit and a pair seen by the western path in zone 3 on another visit. Although the quiet call and song of this species makes it very difficult to hear and can lead to under-recording, it is unlikely that the site supports more than 1 or 2 pairs.

## Thrushes

**Blackbird (*Turdus merula*)**. Heard singing and often seen throughout the Wood but particularly in the northern part (zones 1 and 2). Probably at least 6 pairs.

**Song Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*)**. Heard singing on all visits, mainly at the northern and southern ends of zone 3 and in zone 5. Also seen on one visit below the southern gate. The song carries a long way, so there may have been only 2 or 3 singing males.

**Mistle Thrush (*Turdus viscivorus*)**. Not observed on any of the survey visits.

## Chats

**Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*)**. Frequent sightings and singing throughout the Wood. Probably about 10 pairs distributed across all zones.

## Sparrows

**House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)**. Not recorded this year (other than near residential areas).

## Accentors

**Dunnock (*Prunella modularis*)**. Only a handful of observations, mostly around the southern end of the main path (zones 3, 4 and 5), plus single observations in zone 1, the northern end of zone 4 and below the southern gate. Probably about 4 or 5 pairs, but perhaps under-recorded.

## Finches

**Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*)**. Common throughout the Wood and also seen below the southern gate. Probably 10 or more pairs across all zones.

**Bullfinch (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*)**. This species has not been recorded since the 2018 survey.

**Greenfinch (*Chloris chloris*)**. Present on all visits at the southern end of zone 4. Probably a single breeding pair.

**Linnet (*Linaria cannabina*)**. Pair seen on 4th and 5th visits below southern gate, but not on final visit.

**Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*)**. Sighting at the northern end of zone 2 on one visit, and below southern entrance on another visit. There was no evidence of breeding.

## Buntings

**Yellowhammer (*Emberiza citronella*)**. Not recorded since 2019, and almost certainly lost from the hedgerow below the south-eastern entrance now that housing development is so close.

## Conclusions

This was the fourth year that such a survey has been conducted, although the 2020 survey was less detailed. It gives a broad picture of birds present at the site during the breeding season, although any estimates of numbers of pairs are just estimates and could differ significantly from reality.

The most numerous small birds for which estimates of breeding pairs have been made were Wren, Chaffinch, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Blackbird and Robin. There were also small numbers of Stock Dove, Song Thrush and Dunnock. No attempt was made to count Magpies, Carrion Crows or Woodpigeons, which were mobile and in all zones.

Some other species were recorded in low numbers, probably indicative of breeding in most cases, including Great Spotted Woodpecker, Green Woodpecker, Jay, Skylark (outside the Wood), Long-tailed tit, Common Whitethroat (just outside the Wood), Nuthatch, Treecreeper, Greenfinch and Linnet (just outside the Wood). Other birds seen or heard in, around or over the Wood but probably not breeding there included Common Cuckoo, Common Buzzard, Kestrel, Jackdaw, Rook and Goldfinch.

Birds were spread fairly evenly over the 5 zones, although zone 1 perhaps had a lower density of birds, and likewise the southern end of zone 5.

The quantity and diversity of birds recorded this year was not significantly different from recent years. Although several species recorded in the past were not recorded this year, every species

recorded annually since 2018 were recorded again this year. The table below shows which species were recorded each year since these surveys began.

Species	2018	2019	2020	2021			
Pheasant			√				
Common Swift	√	√					
Common Cuckoo				√*			
Stock Dove	√	√	√	√			
Woodpigeon	√	√	√	√			
Common Buzzard	√	√	√	√			
Great Spotted Woodpecker	√	√	√	√			
Green Woodpecker	√	√	√	√			
Kestrel		√	√	√			
Eurasian Jay	√	√	√	√			
Magpie	√	√	√	√			
Jackdaw		√	√	√			
Rook				√			
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		√					
<b>Total species</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>30</b>			

\* Heard on one occasion, but not during a survey visit.

Thanks to Chrissie and Hilary for helping with some of the visits. I plan to run a similar survey in 2022, beginning at the end of March.

John Elwell, on behalf of Friends of Sharphill Wood, June 2021