

Spring Birds at Sharphill Wood 2022

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 2022. Similar reports have been produced annually since 2018, although the 2020 report was limited because of Covid-19 restrictions.



Chiffchaff in zone 3 on western boundary, June 2022

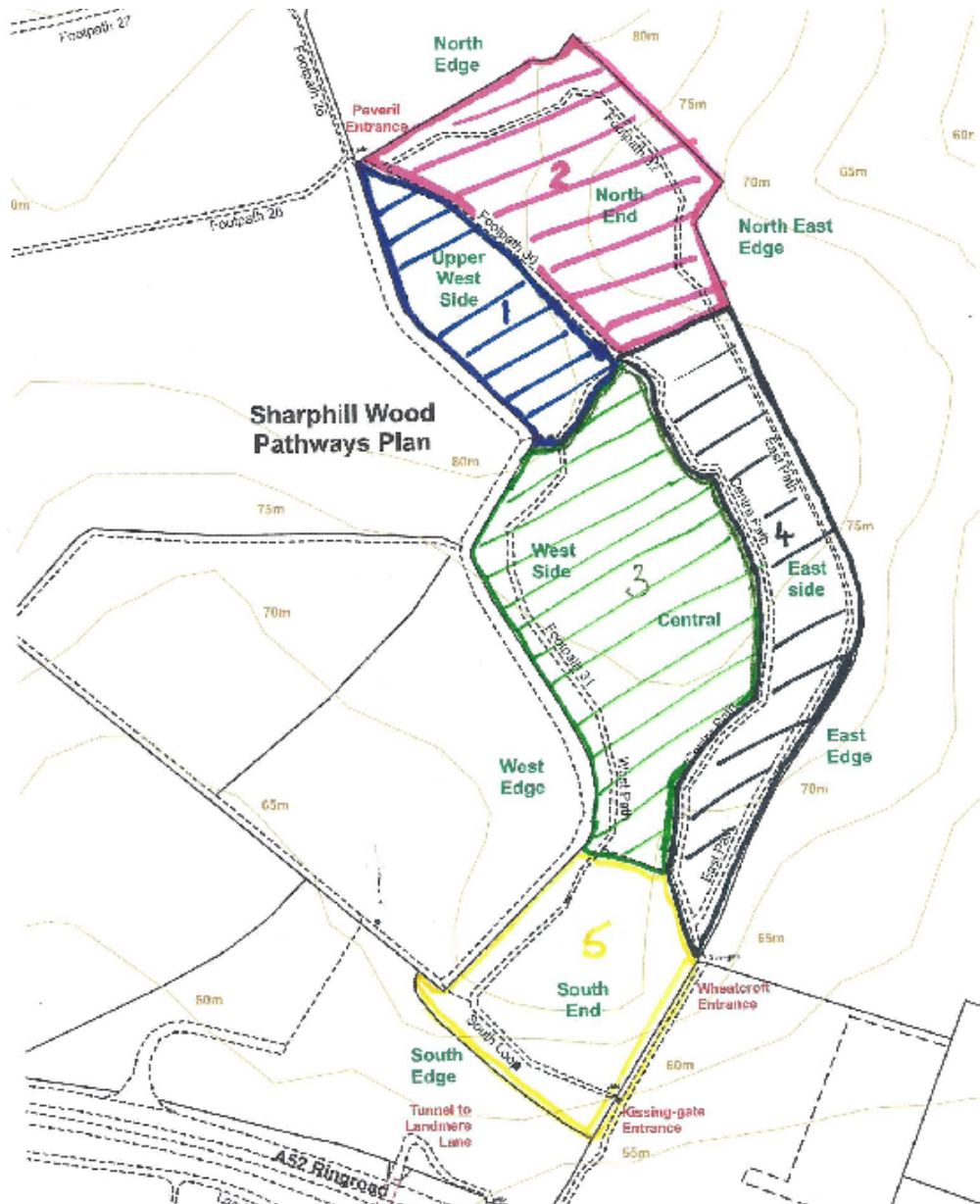
Methodology

Data is based on 6 visits to the Wood from late March to early June 2021 (25th March, 9th April, 21st April, 4th May, 18th May and 2nd June). Each visit started at approximately 08.30 and lasted between 2 and 2.5 hours. I was assisted on several occasions by either Chrissie or Hilary, and on one occasion by both Hilary and Jenni. Having extra pairs of eyes and ears and somebody to act as scribe on those occasions was useful. The same transect was taken on each visit:

- hedgerow approaching northern (Pevenil) entrance;
- central path as far as junction with west path;
- west path down to southern (kissing-gate) entrance;
- southern entrance towards A52 and then back to south-eastern (Wheatcroft) entrance;
- central path back to junction with west path;
- east path from northern entrance southwards to the point where it starts to converge with the central path.

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 or over 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 too early for some summer visitors, although most of the species had arrived on site 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 and grouped by family, in accordance with the British List published by the British Ornithologists' Union (<https://bou.org.uk/the-british-list/>), which in turn is based on the taxonomy used by the International Ornithological Congress (<https://www.worldbirdnames.org/new/classification/family-index-2/>).

Species that are on the Birds of Conservation Concern 5 (December 2021) Red List or Amber List (https://www.bto.org/our-science/publications/birds-conservation-concern?dm_i=IG4%2C3WSRE%2CJVPF4R%2CE3H05%2C1) are marked as such.

Note that fly-pasts of species clearly not associated with the woodland and its immediate surroundings are not included in the species accounts. For example, a Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*) was seen flying past the south-eastern edge of the wood on one survey visit.

Pheasants, Partridges and Quails (*Phasianidae*)

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

Swifts (*Apodidae*)

Common Swift (*Apus apus*) – RED LIST. Several seen above the Wood on the final survey visit.

Cuckoos (*Cuculidae*)

Common Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*) – RED LIST. Not recorded this year.

Pigeons and Doves (*Columbidae*)

Stock Dove (*Columba oenas*) – AMBER LIST. Heard and seen on each visit, in each part of the Wood except zones 1 and 5. Probably several breeding pairs, but difficult to estimate.

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

Birds of Prey (*Accipitridae*)

Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*) – AMBER LIST. Although probably reasonably common in the area and likely to be present in the Wood from time to time, this species is not normally encountered. There was a possible brief sighting on the final survey visit.

Red Kite (*Milvus milvus*). Seen flying north of the Wood in south-westerly direction on 18th May.

Common Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*). Surprisingly this was observed only on 2 visits: over zone 1 on 25th March and in flight, south of the southern entrance, on 9th April. In the past they have often been seen in or above the canopy, but that can easily be overlooked if they don't call and when the canopy is in leaf. They are regularly sighted in the area, including from Rushcliffe Country Park.

Owls (*Strigidae*)

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*) – AMBER LIST** is present.

Woodpeckers (*Picidae*)

Great Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos major*). Seen or heard drumming, tapping or calling on several visits, only in the northern half of the Wood (zone 2 and northern part of zones 3 and 4). Probably just a single pair.

Green Woodpecker (*Picus viridis*). Seen on first visit and heard calling frequently on other visits, in most parts of the wood except zones 1 and 5. Probably just a single pair.

Falcons (*Falconidae*)

Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) – AMBER LIST. Not recorded this spring, and based on casual sightings appears to be more scarce in the area this spring than normal.

Crows (*Corvidae*)

Eurasian Jay (*Garrulus glandarius*). Seen or heard on 4 visits, always in the northern half of the Wood. Probably just a single pair.

Magpie (*Pica pica*). Surprisingly this was only recorded in or near the Wood on 2 visits, although they are known to be plentiful in the general area.

Jackdaw (*Coloeus monedula*). Seen or heard on most visits, in various parts of the Wood.

Rook (*Corvus frugilegus*) – AMBER LIST. Not recorded this spring.

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 2nd visit there were around 60 in the field to the north of the Wood.

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

Tits (*Paridae*)

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

Blue Tit (*Cyanistes caeruleus*). Widespread, and easily overlooked, particularly when well away from paths.

Nest box monitoring found about 12 boxes used by this species (mostly successfully), and a natural nest site (in a cavity) was also found near the southern end of zone 4. Given that most natural nests would not have been found, this suggests there were well over 12 pairs in the Wood. The poor breeding season last year did not seem to impact the abundance of this species.

The fact that all 6 newly installed nest boxes towards the northern end of the Wood (Zones 1, 2 and the northern end of 3) were used by Blue Tit suggests there was perhaps a lack of natural nest sites in this area. In previous years we did not have any monitorable boxes at this end of the site.

Great Tit (*Parus major*). Fairly widespread, with the majority of observations being towards the southern end of zones 3 and 4 and near the southern entrance (zone 5), although there were several random observations further north. There were perhaps 6 or more pairs, although this species is easily overlooked when not singing or when well away from paths, and therefore may be under-recorded.

Nest box monitoring found only 2 nest boxes occupied by Great Tit (towards the southern end of zone 3 and zone 4 respectively). A natural nest site was also found towards the southern end of zone 4.

Larks (*Alaudidae*)

Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*) – RED LIST. There was a singing male over the fields just to the north of the Wood on most survey visits.

Swallows and Martins (*Hirundinidae*)

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*) – RED LIST. Not recorded this year and not regularly recorded in the past.

Long-tailed Tits (*Aegithalidae*)

Long-tailed Tit (*Aegithalos caudatus*). Observed on only a single occasion (9th April) below the southern entrance, where 2 individuals were seen, and likewise in zone 3 on the same day.

Leaf Warblers (*Phylloscopidae*)

Willow Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochilus*) – AMBER LIST. 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, although there were fewer observations north of the point where the west path joins the main path. There were probably at least 8 singing males.

Sylviid Warblers (*Sylviidae*)

Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*). Singing males were heard, and occasionally seen, throughout the Wood. There were probably about 10 singing males.

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

Whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*) – AMBER LIST. A pair appeared to be occupying the scrub below the southern entrance on the last three visits. On one occasion (18th May) there was a singing male in the hedgerow north of the Wood, but that was not detected subsequently.

Goldcrests (*Regulidae*)

Goldcrest (*Regulus regulus*). Seen on 9th April by western boundary where zones 1 and 3 meet. Most previous observations of this species have been in autumn or winter, and (although the species can be hard to detect in spring), it is probable that this individual left the site for the summer, favouring conifer habitat.

Wrens (*Troglodytidae*)

Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*) – AMBER LIST. Abundant and widespread throughout the Wood. Probably about 15+ pairs evenly distributed, and therefore probably the most numerous species on site.

Nuthatches (*Sittidae*)

Nuthatch (*Sitta europaea*). Heard in zones 1 and 3 on 25th March and in zones 2 and 3 on 9th April, but not detected subsequently. Probably only a single pair.

Treecreepers (*Certhiidae*)

Treecreeper (*Certhia familiaris*). Seen in zone 1 on 25th March, and although not seen on subsequent survey visits, it was seen on 2 other visits during the period, always towards the northern end of the Wood. Probably just a single pair.

Starlings (*Sturnidae*)

Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – RED LIST. Although common in the local residential area, this species is not normally observed on site.

Thrushes (*Turdidae*)

Blackbird (*Turdus merula*). Heard singing and seen throughout the Wood, and also in the scrub below the southern entrance. Observations were surprisingly few for such an easy bird, although they increased during the last two visits. Probably about 5 pairs.

Song Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*) – AMBER LIST. Heard singing and/or seen on most visits, a couple of times in the north and the remaining occasions in the south, including once south of the southern entrance. Perhaps only 1 or 2 pairs.

Mistle Thrush (*Turdus viscivorus*) – RED LIST. Not observed on any of the survey visits. However, one was seen during the dawn chorus walk on 30th April, heard singing on another visit during the period, and had been heard singing on several occasions in early winter.

Chats (*Muscicapidae*)

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

Sparrows (*Passeridae*)

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) – RED LIST. Although present in the nearby residential area, this was recorded on site only once, in the hedgerow north of the Wood.

Accentors (*Prunellidae*)

Dunnock (*Prunella modularis*) – AMBER LIST. Only a handful of observations, mostly in the north-central area, with one further south and, on one occasion, a bird singing in the hedgerow below the south-eastern entrance. This suggests only a few pairs, although perhaps under-recorded.

Finches (*Fringillidae*)

Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*). Common throughout the Wood. Probably about 10 pairs.

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

Greenfinch (*Chloris chloris*) – RED LIST. One or more at the southern end of zone 4 and a pair south of the southern entrance, both on 5th May. Otherwise not recorded, and therefore they may just have been passing through.

Linnet (*Linaria cannabina*) – RED LIST. Present in scrub below southern entrance on all visits from 9th April onwards. On that first occasion a flock of c.15 was seen at that location, and on 21st April there appeared to be 3 birds: 2M and 1F. On 5th May a pair was seen, one bird carrying nesting material, so a breeding attempt almost certainly took place.

Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*). Not recorded this year.

Buntings (*Emberizidae*)

Yellowhammer (*Emberiza citrinella*) – RED LIST. 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 fifth 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, Robin and (although seemingly in fewer numbers) Blackbird. 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 and the surrounding area.

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 Swift, Red Kite, Common Buzzard and Goldcrest.

Birds were spread fairly evenly over the 5 zones, although zone 1 perhaps had a lower density of birds. Woodland specialists, including the woodpeckers, Jay, Nuthatch and Treecreeper, all seemed to favour the northern half of the Wood, which therefore had a greater diversity of birds. Species that are more at home in scrub or hedgerow habitat, including Whitethroat and Linnet, were found to the north and south of the Wood.

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	2021		
Pheasant			√				
Common Swift	√	√			√		
Common Cuckoo				√*			
Stock Dove	√	√	√	√	√		
Woodpigeon	√	√	√	√	√		
Red Kite					√		
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		√					
Total species	27	32	31	30	31		

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

Thanks to Chrissie, Hilary and Jenni for helping with some of the visits. I plan to run a similar survey in 2023, beginning at the end of March.

John Elwell, on behalf of Friends of Sharphill Wood, June 2022