

# Spring Birds at Sharphill Wood 2024

## 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 2024. Similar reports have been produced annually since 2018, although the 2020 report was limited because of Covid-19 restrictions.



**Great Tit at Sharphill Wood, April 2024**

## Highlights

The main points of interest compared with preceding years were as follows:

- very low numbers of Chaffinch recorded;
- four species that had not been recorded during previous surveys (Sparrowhawk, Spotted Flycatcher, Reed Warbler and Lesser Whitethroat);
- Goldcrest heard during casual visits in early June, whereas previously this species tended to be recorded only in very early spring, presumably before leaving for summer quarters.

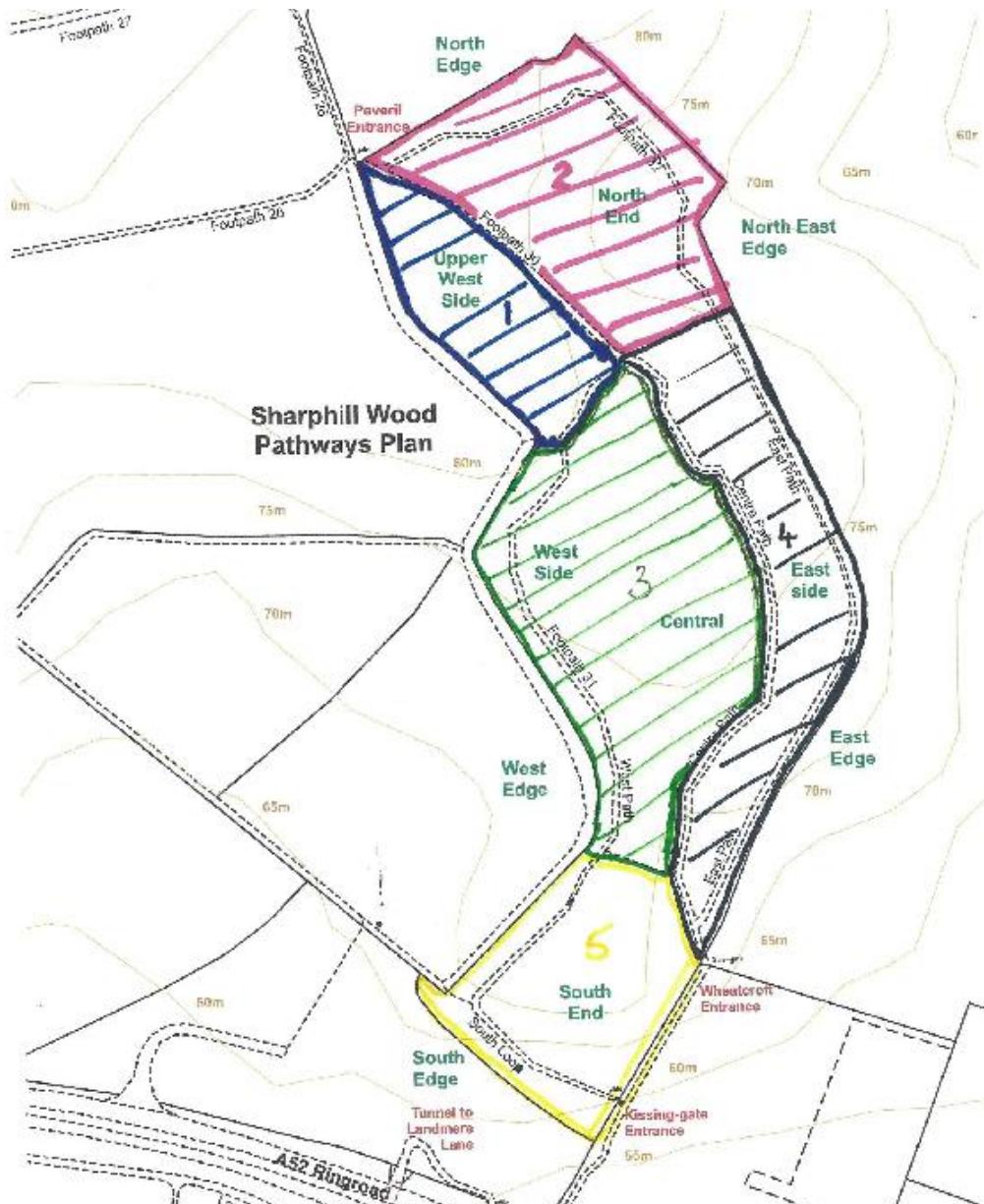
## Methodology

Data is based on 6 visits to the Wood from late March to early June 2024 (30th March, 11th April, 29th April, 16th May, 27th May and 8th June). Each visit started at approximately 08.30 and lasted about 2.5 hours. I was assisted on one visit by Tim, on another visit by Hilary, and on the remaining visits by Jenni (along with Dave on one occasion). Having extra pairs of eyes and ears and somebody to act as scribe on those occasions was very useful. The same transect was taken on each visit:

- hedgerow approaching northern (Peveril) 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 during the spring 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%2CJPFV4R%2CE3H05%2C1](https://www.bto.org/our-science/publications/birds-conservation-concern?dm_i=IG4%2C3WSRE%2CJPFV4R%2CE3H05%2C1)) are marked as such.

Note that fly-pasts of species clearly not associated with the woodland and its immediate surroundings (e.g., gulls) are not included in the species accounts.

### Pheasants, Partridges and Quails (*Phasianidae*)

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

### Swifts (*Apodidae*)

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

### 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 zone 1. 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 attempt was made to map their locations and numbers were not estimated.

### 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 seldom encountered. However, this year there was a sighting in zone 4 on 29<sup>th</sup> April, and one was heard in zone 3 by the eastern path on 8<sup>th</sup> June.



**Sparrowhawk in zone 4, April 2024**

**Red Kite (*Milvus milvus*).** Although increasingly seen in the general area, it was not observed during survey visits.

**Common Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*).** Seen over the Wood on three visits, including 3 birds together over the eastern buffer zone on 30<sup>th</sup> March.

### 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 5 visits. In fact drumming was heard as late as the final visit (8<sup>th</sup> June). Observations were in the central part of the wood, either side of the main path (zones 3 and 4), and near the north corner of zone 2 (where on one occasion a bird was identified as a juvenile). There could be one or two pairs.

**Green Woodpecker (*Picus viridis*).** This species is usually quite vocal, and although heard calling on three visits (generally from the northern end of zone 4 / south-eastern corner of zone 2, but once from the southern end of zone 3), it was not heard as frequently as in some previous years. Probably just a single pair, and probably mobile between the various pockets of woodland in the area and any grassland suitable for ground-feeding.

### Falcons (*Falconidae*)

**Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) – AMBER LIST.** Seen on one visit over the field between the wood and the business park and on another visit above zone 3/zone 5 boundary.



## Crows (*Corvidae*)

**Eurasian Jay (*Garrulus glandarius*).** Sightings on 3 visits in the central area (2 birds on one occasion).

**Magpie (*Pica pica*).** Seen or heard in or near the Wood on all visits and known to be plentiful in the general area. No attempt has been made to estimate numbers.

**Jackdaw (*Coloeus monedula*).** Seen or heard in various parts of the Wood on all visits. No attempt has been made to estimate numbers.

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

**Carriion Crow (*Corvus corone*).** Heard and seen regularly in various places throughout the Wood and surrounding areas, in particular on the fields to the north and west. No attempt has been made to estimate numbers.

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

## Tits (*Paridae*)

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

**Blue Tit (*Cyanistes caeruleus*).** Widespread, and easily overlooked, particularly when well away from paths. Observations during survey visits suggested they were present throughout the Wood, perhaps at least a dozen pairs.

In addition, nest box monitoring found 15 boxes used by this species, with varying degrees of success. Since there must also have been natural nest sites (and also some older nest boxes that we are unable to monitor), it is likely there were significantly more pairs on site than was apparent from the survey visits.

**Great Tit (*Parus major*).** Observed throughout the Wood on all visits, with relatively few observations in the northern half of the wood. This species is easily overlooked when not singing or when well away from paths, and therefore may be under-recorded. Observations suggest fewer than 10 pairs and probably fewer than in previous years.

Nest box monitoring found only 3 boxes used by this species, all in the southern half of the wood. This again is lower than in most recent years.

## Larks (*Alaudidae*)

**Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*) – RED LIST.** There was a singing male over the fields just to the north and west of the Wood on most survey visits, although not on the last visit after the transport of topsoil from the community park area had commenced.

## 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*).** Seen on most visits, sometimes several birds together, in various parts of the wood and near the southern entrance. No clear indication of whether they might be breeding on site.

### 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) on all survey visits, throughout the Wood with the exception of zone 1. There were probably about 12 singing males.

### Reed Warblers (*Acrocephalidae*)

**Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*)**. This is not a bird to be expected away from reed-fringed water, but singing was heard from the eastern boundary, towards the southern end of zone 4, on 16<sup>th</sup> May.

### Sylviid Warblers (*Sylviidae*)

**Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*)**. During each visit, singing males were heard, and occasionally seen, throughout the Wood, with a slight concentration towards the southern end of zones 3 and 4. This species was recorded a little less frequently than in recent years, and it is doubtful there were more than about 6 singing males in total.

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

**Lesser Whitethroat (*Curruca curruca*)**. Although doubtless a visitor to the site in the past, this species had not previously been recorded during these surveys. Singing was heard on 29<sup>th</sup> April in the hedgerow leading down from the northern entrance and also by the northern edge of the wood. There may have been two separate males.

**Whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*)** – AMBER LIST. This species tends not to arrive until late April, and this year it was not observed until the first visit in May. From then on it was consistently heard and seen during survey visits (and also some casual visits) in the hedge leading down from the northern entrance and in the buffer zone along the northern edge of the wood. There appeared to be 2 singing males on a couple of occasions. At the usual location in the scrub below the southern entrance, the bird was heard on only one visit.

### Goldcrests (*Regulidae*)

**Goldcrest (*Regulus regulus*)**. Observations of this species during survey visits in previous years have tended to be early in the season (late March / early April), which would be consistent with the birds moving to conifer habitat during the breeding season. However, this year, on a couple of casual visits in early June, singing was heard from the central path near the centre of the wood.

### Wrens (*Troglodytidae*)

**Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*)** – AMBER LIST. Abundant and widespread throughout the Wood. Probably about 20 pairs evenly distributed, and therefore probably the most numerous species on site.

### Nuthatches (*Sittidae*)

**Nuthatch (*Sitta europaea*)**. Heard on the 2<sup>nd</sup> survey visit (4<sup>th</sup> April), coming from the vicinity of the zone 2 / zone 4 boundary. It was also seen in zone 1 from the central path during the dawn chorus walk on 27<sup>th</sup> April. Probably only a single pair.

### Treecreepers (*Certhiidae*)

**Treecreeper (*Certhia familiaris*)**. There were 3 sightings during the first survey visit on 30<sup>th</sup> March, two in zone 2 and one in the south of zone 1. Also there were casual sightings (not during formal

survey visits) on 27th April (dawn chorus walk), 2<sup>nd</sup> June and during late winter. This rather quiet species was most likely around throughout the season, either a single pair or possibly two pairs.

### Starlings (*Sturnidae*)

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

### Thrushes (*Turdidae*)

**Blackbird (*Turdus merula*).** Heard singing and seen throughout the Wood. Observations were surprisingly few for such a conspicuous bird, although more were found during the May visits. Probably about 5 to 7 pairs.

**Song Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*) – AMBER LIST.** Heard singing and/or seen on most visits in various parts of zones 2, 3 and 4. The song carries a long way, which means it is not easily missed but often difficult to pinpoint the source. Perhaps 2 pairs.

**Mistle Thrush (*Turdus viscivorus*) – RED LIST.** Unusually, this was not recorded during the early survey visits or on casual visits during late winter. However, on the survey visit on 27<sup>th</sup> May, 2 (or possibly 3) birds were seen on the field opposite the southern entrance. Unlikely to have nested in the wood.

### Chats, old world Flycatchers (*Muscicapidae*)

**Spotted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*) – RED LIST.** Not recorded in previous years, a bird (or possibly 2) was heard calling in the northern part of zone 3 on 27<sup>th</sup> May. A visit a couple of days later failed to find the bird(s), and therefore it was likely to have been a stop-over during migration further north.

**Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*).** Frequent sightings and singing throughout the Wood. Probably about 15 pairs distributed across all zones.

### Sparrows (*Passeridae*)

**House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) – RED LIST.** Although present in the nearby residential area and sometimes found in the hedge leading down from the northern entrance, it was not recorded during survey visits this year.

### Accentors (*Prunellidae*)

**Duncock (*Prunella modularis*) – AMBER LIST.** This was seen or heard singing on each visit, on most occasions at the southern end of zone 4, but once or twice further north in zone 4 or zone 2 and once in the buffer zone outside the northern entrance. As the song does not carry as far as that of some species, it is possible some were missed away from paths. Nevertheless, there were probably only a few pairs present.

### Finches (*Fringillidae*)

**Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*).** This species, normally common throughout the region and fairly common at Sharp Hill in recent years, was seen or heard during only 3 visits. In each case it was just a single bird by the north-eastern boundary in zone 2, which seems to suggest only 1 or 2 pairs on site, although some could have been missed. This contrasts with estimates in the region of 10 pairs in previous years since this survey began. Whilst Chaffinch numbers generally are known to have dropped in recent years, partly due to Trichomonosis, it seems unlikely that this would fully account for what would appear to be a very substantial reduction in the population on site. It will be interesting to see how this species fares in the next year or two.

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

**Greenfinch (*Chloris chloris*) – RED LIST.** This was heard singing on two visits in its usual location: the southern end of zone 4. Probably a single pair.

**Linnet (*Linaria cannabina*) – RED LIST.** Present in scrub below the southern entrance on all visits except the last, sometimes as many as 4 or 5 birds. Casual observations suggest they had indeed vacated the site by early June.

**Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*).** Observed only on 4<sup>th</sup> April in the field opposite the southern entrance.

### Buntings (*Emberizidae*)

**Yellowhammer (*Emberiza citrinella*) – RED LIST.** Not recorded during survey visits since 2019, and almost certainly lost from the hedgerow below the south-eastern entrance now that housing is so close. However, there have been casual sightings occasionally, including north of the wood last winter and south of the wood last summer (after the 2023 spring bird survey had completed).

## Conclusions

This was the seventh 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, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Robin and Blackbird. There were also small numbers of Stock Dove, Song Thrush and Dunnock. No attempt was made to count Magpies, Carrion Crows, Jackdaws 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), Goldcrest, Nuthatch, Treecreeper, Chaffinch (seemingly in much lower numbers than previous years), Greenfinch and Linnet (just outside the Wood). Other birds seen or heard in, around or over the Wood but probably not breeding there included Sparrowhawk, Common Buzzard, Kestrel, Reed Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Mistle Thrush, Spotted Flycatcher and Goldfinch.

Birds were spread fairly evenly over the 5 zones, although zone 1 perhaps had a lower density 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 the number of species was marginally higher. Although several species recorded in the past were not recorded this year, every species recorded annually since 2018 was recorded again this year.

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

Species	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Pheasant			√				
Common Swift	√	√			√		
Common Cuckoo				√*			



Stock Dove	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Woodpigeon	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Red Kite					√		
Sparrowhawk							√
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			√				
Reed Warbler							√
Chiffchaff	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Blackcap	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Garden Warbler							
Lesser Whitethroat							√
Whitethroat	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Goldcrest					√		√*
Wren	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Nuthatch		√	√	√	√	√	√
Treecreeper	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Blackbird	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Song Thrush	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Mistle Thrush		√	√		√	√	√
Spotted Flycatcher							√
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>	<b>31</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>33</b>

\* Heard, but not during a survey visit.

Thanks to Dave, Hilary, Jenni and Tim for helping with some of the visits. I plan to run a similar survey in 2025, beginning at the end of March.

John Elwell, on behalf of Friends of Sharphill Wood, June 2024