

Spring Birds at Sharphill Wood 2025

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 settling down to breed and 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 2025. Similar reports have been produced annually since 2018, although the 2020 report was limited because of Covid-19 restrictions.



Nuthatch at Sharphill Wood

Highlights

Whilst there were no particular highlights this year, it was great to confirm that the usual birds are still present and, in many cases, in good numbers.

Methodology

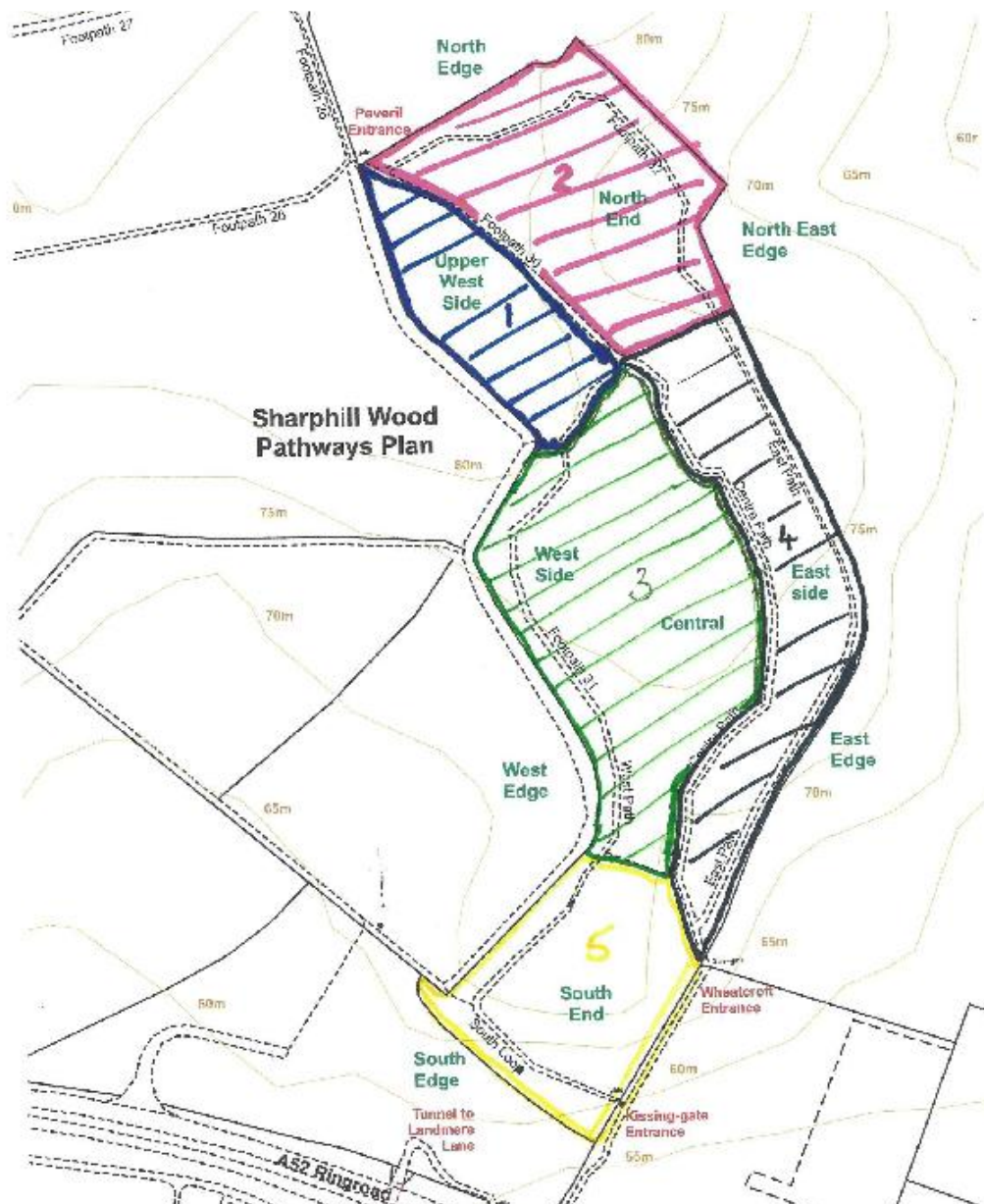
Data is based on 6 visits to the Wood from late March to early June 2024 (27th March, 10th April, 28th April, 15th May, 28th May and 12th June). Each visit started at approximately 08.30 and lasted about 2.5 hours. I received valuable assistance on five of the visits from Janet Crowe, Tim Carney, Chris Ritzmann, Hilary Mansfield and Andrew Edwards. 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;
- return via buffer zone outside north edge of the Wood.

Note that this last section is a slight departure from previous years, enabling the possibility of recording birds in the developing scrub.

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 or in dense understorey, 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.

Advances in Artificial Intelligence (AI) in recent years have led to phone software that is able to analyse bird calls and songs and suggest the species responsible. One such application is Merlin, and this was used to some extent during visits. Merlin suggestions were never taken at face value, but occasionally they were useful for backing up what the observer thought was calling. Where Merlin detected a species that the observer was unable to confirm, even if the species could reasonably be expected on site, this was not taken as confirmed presence of a species.

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 this spring (during survey visits or on other occasions), as well as species recorded during previous springs but absent this year. 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%2CJPVF4R%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 5. Probably several breeding pairs, but difficult to estimate. The species seemed to be particularly vocal in late March.

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. The species was not recorded this spring.

Red Kite (*Milvus milvus*). Although increasingly seen in the general area, it was not recorded this spring.

Common Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*). Although this is now a fairly common bird in the area, it was not recorded in or over the wood this spring.

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*). Although this was not seen this spring, it was heard calling on several visits and drumming on one of the visits, in all cases near the centre of the wood. Unlike some recent years, there was no evidence of breeding, although it is quite possible they have bred. There was nothing to suggest the presence of more than 1 pair.

Green Woodpecker (*Picus viridis*). This species is usually quite vocal, and it was indeed heard calling on all visits, generally in the northern and central parts of the wood. Birds are believed to commute between Sharphill wood and other nearby woodlands (e.g., Wilford Hill wood), and there has never been any evidence of breeding at Sharphill.

Falcons (*Falconidae*)

Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) – AMBER LIST. Seen on one visit south of the southern entrance.

Crows (*Corvidae*)

Eurasian Jay (*Garrulus glandarius*). Seen on the first visit and heard on the second visit, in the northern half of the wood on each 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, particularly towards the south of zone 4, near the Wheatcroft gate. No attempt has been made to estimate numbers.

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

Carrion 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 (where around 30 individuals were seen on one occasion). No attempt has been made to estimate numbers.

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

Tits (*Paridae*)

Coal Tit (*Periparus ater*). Merlin software detected the species on three occasions in May (one survey visit, and two casual visits) in a similar place along the path between zones 3 and 4, but observers were unable to confirm. Although the species has been recorded some previous springs, it has generally been early in the season (March or early April), perhaps before birds move to coniferous habitat for breeding.

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 12 boxes used by this species, in all cases leading to successful fledging. 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. In particular, all but one of the used nest boxes were in the northern half of the wood, yet observations during survey visits suggested a fairly even distribution of the species throughout the wood. Therefore it is likely that there were well over 12 pairs.

Great Tit (*Parus major*). Observed throughout the Wood on all visits. This species is easily overlooked when not singing or when well away from paths, and therefore may be under-recorded. Observations suggest about 10 pairs.

Nest box monitoring found only 1 box used by this species (in zone 1), which is lower than in recent years. However, from the numbers suggested by survey visits, natural nest sites (or old boxes that we cannot inspect) are being used.

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 (2 on one occasion).

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 only on one visit, flying into zone 5 from the south. There was no clear indication of 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. There were probably 12 or more singing males.

Reed Warblers (*Acrocephalidae*)

Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*). Not recorded. Note that this is not a bird to be expected away from reed-fringed water, but singing was heard on a visit in 2024.

Sylviid Warblers (*Sylviidae*)

Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*). Heard singing (and occasionally seen) in most parts of the wood on all survey visits except the first, which would have been too early for these summer visitors. Consistency in the locations of singing males on the various visits was somewhat lacking, making it difficult to estimate the number present, but there may have been as many as 10, representing a slight improvement on 2024.

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

Lesser Whitethroat (*Curruca curruca*). Not recorded this year.

Whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*) – **AMBER LIST**. This migrant species, which tends to arrive in late April, was observed on each visit from 29th April onwards. On 3 occasions it was seen and heard singing in the scrub outside the southern entrance, and on 28th May one of the birds appeared to be a juvenile. Also on 3 occasions the species was seen and heard singing in the buffer zone outside the northern edge of the wood, and/or in the hedgerow leading down the hill. This species now seems to be a regular in the suitable habitat at the two ends of the wood (probably one pair at each location).

Goldcrests (*Regulidae*)

Goldcrest (*Regulus regulus*). Merlin software detected the species on three occasions in May (one survey visit, and two casual visits) in a similar place along the path between zones 3 and 4, but observers were unable to confirm. Although the species has been recorded some previous springs, it has generally been early in the season (March or early April), perhaps before birds move to coniferous habitat for breeding (although in 2024 it was heard later in the season).

Wrens (*Troglodytidae*)

Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*) – **AMBER LIST**. Abundant and widespread throughout the Wood. Probably about 25 pairs evenly distributed, and therefore probably the most numerous species on site. Although the estimation method is imprecise, there is a hint of a slight increase in population over recent years.

Nuthatches (*Sittidae*)

Nuthatch (*Sitta europaea*). Unusually, this was not heard at all, and it was seen only on a casual visit on 29th April at the northern end of zone 3. Therefore present, but probably only a single pair.

Treecreepers (*Certhiidae*)

Treecreeper (*Certhia familiaris*). Unusually this was seen only once during the season, on the penultimate survey visit on 28th May. Its quiet call and song make it difficult to hear, although it may have been heard on one visit. Present, but probably only 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 in spring, and that was the case this year.

Thrushes (*Turdidae*)

Blackbird (*Turdus merula*). Heard singing and seen throughout the Wood. Probably about 5 to 7 pairs.

Song Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*) – AMBER LIST. Heard singing and/or seen on only the 3rd, 4th and 5th survey visits, which is unusual for this vocal species. Perhaps 3 territories: north central and south.

Mistle Thrush (*Turdus viscivorus*) – RED LIST. Not recorded this year.

Chats, old world Flycatchers (*Muscicapidae*)

Spotted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*) – RED LIST. Not recorded this year, although there was an unconfirmed suggestion of this species on Merlin on 19th May.

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. Present in the nearby residential area and recorded on two survey visits in the hedge leading down from the northern entrance.

Accentors (*Prunellidae*)

Dunnock (*Prunella modularis*) – AMBER LIST. This was seen or heard singing on 4 visits, 3 times in zone 3 and once in the scrub south of the southern 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 Sharphill until recently, was seen or heard during only 3 visits, and only in zone 2. Seemingly the site now supports only 1 or 2 pairs. Whilst this is a similar result to 2024, it is considerably less than the 10 or so estimated in years up to 2023. 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 in 2024 and lack of recovery this year.

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: by the main path at the southern end of zones 3 and 4. Probably a single pair.

Linnet (*Linaria cannabina*) – RED LIST. Present in scrub below the southern entrance on all visits except the penultimate, sometimes as many as 4 or 5 birds.

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

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 occasional casual sightings in the last year or two, in areas to the north and south of the wood.

Conclusions

This was the eight 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 in all zones and the surrounding area.

Some other species were recorded within the wood during some visits and in low numbers, probably indicative of breeding in some cases. These included Great Spotted Woodpecker, Green Woodpecker, Jay, Nuthatch, Treecreeper, Chaffinch (seemingly in much lower numbers than pre-2024) and Greenfinch. Birds were spread fairly evenly over the 5 zones, although zone 1 perhaps had a slightly lower density. Possible callings of Coal Tit, Goldcrest and Spotted Flycatcher were unconfirmed.

Outside the wood, Common Whitethroat, House Sparrow and Linnet were found in scrub / hedgerow to the north and/or south of the Wood. Skylark was singing in the fields to the west and north of the wood. There were single sightings of Long-tailed Tit (flying into the wood) and Kestrel (south of the wood).

The quantity of birds recorded this year was not significantly different from recent years, but the diversity was disappointingly low, with only 27 confirmed species (the lowest total since the first survey in 2018). Species such as Common Buzzard, Mistle Thrush and Goldfinch were not recorded, and there was a lack of any scarcer species. In fact this was the first year that Common Buzzard has not been recorded, although there is probably no significance in this as the species continues to be common in the wider area.

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

Species	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
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			√					
Chiffchaff	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Reed Warbler							√	
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		√						
Total species	27	32	31	30	31	29	33	27

Thanks to Andrew, Chris, Hilary, Janet and Tim for helping with some of the visits. I plan to run a similar survey in 2026, beginning at the end of March.

John Elwell, on behalf of Friends of Sharphill Wood, June 2025