

New Cut Heritage and Ecology Trail

Annual Report of Bird Group for 2016

This is the inaugural annual report and a little background information is therefore necessary.

Where?

The area surveyed consists of the New Cut Canal tow path and boardwalk stretch between Larkfield Avenue to the west and Spittal Brook to the east and the land to the south between the Cut and the River Mersey including Paddington Meadows. The survey area is divided into 12 roughly equal transects as follows:



When?

The bird survey takes place once each month; normally on a morning of the second weekend of the month, subject to favourable weather conditions.

Who?

Involvement in the survey is open to all New Cut Heritage and Ecology Trail members. The distance of the survey route is approximately 3.25 miles and takes approximately 3 hours. Parts of the survey route are not wheelchair friendly and one stile needs to be negotiated twice.

How?

The survey methodology is based on that recommended by the British Trust for Ornithology for breeding birds (see downloads section on BTO website <http://www.bto.org/> for further information) with the exception that only 50 metres at either side of the transect line is surveyed and surveys are undertaken throughout the year rather than just the breeding period.

There is a facility on the survey record sheets to include any interesting flora and fauna observed (butterflies, mammals, moths, wildflowers, fungi etc).

Monthly totals are reported on the New Cut Heritage and Ecology Trail website and also recorded on RODIS Cheshire and the BTO Birdtrack site.

It should be noted that the survey is only of wildlife that has a direct contact with the survey area, so birds that regularly fly over the site e.g. Cormorants, Gulls, Starling, Canada Geese and Skylarks etc. are not included in the survey record unless they land or are seen to be feeding or hunting over the site.

Why?

In living memory the survey area was once a haven for species such as Grey Partridge, Skylark, Cuckoo, Linnet, Yellowhammer, Meadow Pipit, Grasshopper Warbler, Lapwing, Barn Owl, Hare and Rabbit, but sadly no longer.

Without some form of datum line it will be impossible to identify trends in species diversity and density. It is to this end, with the intention of identifying and improving the habitat for those species currently indigenous and also hopefully attracting a greater variety of wildlife in the future, that these surveys are being undertaken.

What?

The Bird Species List for the Survey Area in 2016 (See Appendix A to this report for more comprehensive information)

- 1 Blackbird B
- 2 Blackcap BC
- 3 Black-headed Gull BH
- 4 Blue Tit BT
- 5 Bullfinch BF
- 6 Buzzard BZ
- 7 Canada Goose CG
- 8 Carrion Crow C

- 9 Chaffinch CH
- 10 Chiffchaff CC
- 11 Coal Tit CT
- 12 Collared Dove CD
- 13 Coot CO
- 14 Cormorant CA
- 15 **Dunnock** D
- 16 **Fieldfare** FF
- 17 **Gadwall** GA
- 18 Goldcrest GC
- 19 Goldfinch GO
- 20 **Grasshopper Warbler** GH
- 21 Great Crested Grebe GG
- 22 Great Spotted Woodpecker GS
- 23 Great Tit GT
- 24 Greenfinch GR
- 25 Grey Heron H
- 26 **Greylag Goose** GJ
- 27 **Grey Partridge** P
- 28 **Grey Wagtail** GL
- 29 **House Martin** HM
- 30 **House Sparrow** HS
- 31 Jay J
- 32 **Kestrel** K
- 33 **Kingfisher** KF
- 34 **Lesser Black-backed Gull** LB
- 35 **Linnet** LI
- 36 Long-tailed Tit LT
- 37 Magpie MG
- 38 **Mallard** MA
- 39 **Meadow Pipit** MP
- 40 Moorhen MH
- 41 **Mute Swan** MS
- 42 Nuthatch NH
- 43 Pheasant PH
- 44 Pied Wagtail PW
- 45 **Redpoll (Lesser)** LR
- 46 **Redwing** RE
- 47 **Reed Bunting** RB
- 48 Reed Warbler RW
- 49 Robin R
- 50 Sand Martin SM
- 51 Sedge Warbler SW
- 52 Siskin SK
- 53 **Snipe** SN
- 54 **Song Thrush** ST
- 55 Sparrowhawk SH
- 56 **Starling** SG

- 57 Stonechat SC
- 58 Swallow SL
- 59 **Swift** SI
- 60 **Teal** T
- 61 Treecreeper TC
- 62 Tufted Duck TU
- 63 Whitethroat WH
- 64 Whitethroat(Lesser) LW
- 65 **Willow Tit** WT
- 66 Willow Warbler WW
- 67 **Woodcock** WK
- 68 Woodpigeon WP
- 69 Wren WR

69 Species in total

12 Birds highlighted in Red are on the current Birds of Conservation Concern **Red List**.

16 Birds highlighted in Amber are on the current Birds of Conservation Concern **Amber List**.

Average number of different species per monthly survey 29.42

Average number of birds seen or heard per monthly survey 269.58

Most recorded Species: 1) Magpie 327
2) Blackbird 297
3) Woodpigeon 292

Species recorded only once: Coal Tit; Grasshopper Warbler; Great Crested Grebe; Grey Wagtail; Lesser Black-backed Gull; Nuthatch; Pied Wagtail; Sedge Warbler; Treecreeper; Willow Warbler.

Species recorded on only one occasion (multiple birds): Greylag Goose; Kingfisher; Lesser Redpoll; Sand Martin; Siskin; Starling; Tufted Duck;

Red List Species (number of recordings in 2016)

Fieldfare 5
Grasshopper Warbler 1
Grey Partridge 6
Grey Wagtail 1
House Sparrow 143
Linnet 16
Lesser Redpoll 10
Redwing 188
Song Thrush 42
Starling 2
Willow Tit 7
Woodcock 2

Amber List Species (number of recordings in 2016)

Black-headed Gull 90
Bullfinch 71
Dunnock 89
Gadwall 3
Graylag Goose 3
House Martin 28
Kestrel 6
Kingfisher 2
Lesser Black-backed Gull 1
Mallard 120
Meadow Pipit 10
Mute Swan 31
Reed Bunting 127
Snipe 3
Swift 68
Teal 2

Overview

From the above data it can be seen that the survey area is a valuable habitat used extensively by House Sparrows, Redwings and Song Thrush from the Red List and Reed Buntings, Bullfinch, Dunnock, Swift, House Martins and Black-headed Gulls from the Amber List.

Raptors

The area is hunted over on a daily basis by three raptors Buzzard, Sparrowhawk and Kestrel.

Warblers

The variety of habitats (Reed Bed, Hedgerow, Wet Woodland and Blackberry bushes) make it a an ideal location for several warbler species in summer; especially Whitethroat, Lesser Whitethroat, Reed Warbler, Blackcap and Chiffchaff. Rare sightings have also been made of Willow Warbler, Sedge Warbler and Grasshopper Warbler.

Tits

The whole of the survey area offers a rich feeding and nesting area for all the common tit species with large numbers of Great Tit, Blue Tit and Long-tailed Tits seen all through the year. Rarer species like the Coal Tit and Willow Tit tend to inhabit the New Cut Canal stretch only.

Finches

The whole of Paddington Meadows is a haven for several finch species throughout the year with Bullfinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch and Chaffinch being seen on a daily basis.

Corvids

Magpies abound especially on Paddington Meadows with a count between 25 to 30 birds normal on any given survey date. Carrion Crows are also seen regularly but sadly no Rook. The occasional Jay can be seen especially when the hazel nuts are out.

Hirundines

The skies above Paddington Meadows offer a rich feeding area for all common species of Hirundines with dozens of Swallows, Swifts and House Martins and a few Sand Martins being seen during mid summer.

Waterfowl, Heron etc.

Little opportunity is available on the survey route to access the river side. When this is available Mute Swans, Mallard, Moorhen dominate. The occasional Gadwall, Tufted Duck, Great Crested Grebe and Canada Goose are noted usually close to the Woolston Tip section of the river.

Woolston New Cut produces regular sightings of Mallard, Moorhen and the occasional Teal and Coot.

Three Greylag Geese touched down in a field in transect 8 in May, but the exercise was not repeated.

The Grey Heron may be seen along the riverside or Cut and occasionally when wet out on the Meadows.

Thrushes

The whole of the survey area is well served by Blackbirds. Song Thrushes turn up in large numbers only sporadically and Winter Thrushes especially Redwings have stripped the Haw berries like a plague of locusts this winter.

No Mistle Thrush have been recorded to date, although in years past the park alongside Larkfield Avenue has been a regular feeding place and will no doubt produce a sighting sometime soon.

Pipits

Meadow Pipits used to be a daily sighting in the meadow to the east of the main laneway running towards the river from Larkfield Avenue. Sadly this is no longer the case. However the limited sightings of the species made last year were from this location.

Gulls and Cormorant

Although frequently seen overflying the survey area there are very few loggable sightings of gulls or Cormorant. Cormorant roost on a pylon over the river from transect 7 on Number 4 bed of Woolston Eyes, but are rarely seen on the Meadows side of the river. Black-headed Gulls are occasionally seen within the River Mersey close to the tip; a solitary Lesser Black-backed Gull spent several days in November perched on top of a pylon in transect 8.

Pigeons and Doves

The omnipresent Woodpigeon is the second most populous bird on the "patch" after the Magpie and many birds can be seen roosting in the larger trees on either side of the New Cut Canal.

It's cousin the Collared Dove may be seen also along the tow path of the "Cut" usually in pairs.

Gamebirds

A resident pair of Grey Partridge may be seen occasionally within all fields of the Meadows. Unfortunately, there has been no evidence of any fledglings for this Red List bird.

Pheasant are occasionally seen and heard often in the transects bordering the river adjacent to Number 4 bed. The birds are probably outliers from the Eyes.

Miscellaneous Species

The survey area is particularly suited to Robin, Wren and Dunnock. which can be found everywhere.

Other notable birds seen all too rarely are Kingfisher, Goldcrest, Nuthatch and Treecreeper. The Kingfisher towards the Woolston Tip end of the New Cut, the Goldcrest in both transects 2 and 6; the Nuthatch visits bird feeders in transect 2 and the Treecreeper on hawthorns on the river bank in transect 7.

Both Snipe and Woodcock have been flushed from the fields adjacent to Larkfield Avenue during November and December.

Grey and Pied Wagtails have been located along the New Cut Canal late in the year. Hopefully they will become a more regular visitor during the coming months.

The only woodpecker recorded in the survey area is the Great Spotted Woodpecker which makes occasional sorties to feed on the rotting branches of the ancient Hawthorns on the banks of the Mersey on Paddington Meadows.

Willow Tit Survey 2016 Results

Members of the New Cut Heritage and Ecology group took part in a co-ordinated survey undertaken by volunteers throughout Cheshire, Lancashire, Greater Manchester and Merseyside.

The survey's aim was to estimate the current Willow Tit population within the carbon landscape and provide relevant onsite habitat information to allow for future habitat management, to hopefully increase Willow Tit numbers.

The first Willow Tit survey was undertaken along the length of the New Cut Canal on Good Friday and resulted in the successful location and sighting of one bird on the day of the survey, plus information regarding confirmed sightings of at least three additional birds seen on other occasions.

This was a terrific result bearing in mind the rapid decline in Willow Tit numbers of 87% over the last three decades and augers well for the future of this endangered species along the length of the New Cut.



A video and photos of birds seen recently adjacent to the New Cut Canal can be seen on Facebook Group Willow Tits North West along with news of other Willow Tit surveys undertaken in the North West.

The birds nest typically in a rotted tree stump in a hole the birds make themselves each year and areas of the New Cut canal provide an ideal habitat.

Further to the above survey it can be confirmed that at least two pairs of Willow Tits have nested at either end of transect 2 and at least one of these pairs has successfully fledged young.

Other Wildlife

Mammals

Despite the early start time of the surveys little regular sign of mammals are seen other than grey squirrels.

Two sightings of Field Voles, 1 Stoat, 1 Otter and 1 Grey Seal have been recorded.

Although known to frequent the survey area no foxes or badgers have been seen during surveys, probably due to the high dog walking activity.

The successful bat survey undertaken in August resulted in the identification of 4 species: Common Pipistrelle Bat; Soprano Pipistrelle Bat; Whiskered Bat and Daubenton's Bat in the survey area.

Butterflies

Species observed during 2016 were:

Painted Lady
Meadow Brown
Comma
Red Admiral
Small Tortoiseshell
Small Skipper
Common Blue
Gatekeeper
Peacock
Speckled Wood.

APPENDIX "A" BIRD SURVEY RESULTS 2016

<i>Total species</i>		<i>Jan-16</i>	<i>Feb-16</i>	<i>Mar-16</i>	<i>Apr-16</i>	<i>May-16</i>	<i>Jun-16</i>	<i>Jul-16</i>	<i>Aug-16</i>	<i>Sep-16</i>	<i>Oct-16</i>	<i>Nov-16</i>	<i>Dec-16</i>	<i>Total 2016</i>
1	Blackbird B	6	14	6	14	18	18	21	13	17	47	99	24	297
2	Blackcap BC				5	4		9	3	4				25
3	Black-headed Gull BH	23	2	3			1	1				25	35	90
4	Blue Tit BT	12	10	10	11	8	5	5	4	12	7	16	17	117
5	Bullfinch BF	11	11	5	5	1	9		1	2	7	10	9	71
6	Buzzard BZ	2	1	3	2				1	1		1		11
7	Canada Goose CG	10									2			12
8	Carrion Crow C	6	7	17	1	5	3	2	5	9	10	10	11	86
9	Chaffinch CH	15	8	9	8	12	3	1	1	1	10	3	2	73
10	Chiffchaff CC				8	4	5	8	3	3				31
11	Coal Tit CT										1			1
12	Collared Dove CD	4	5		2	2		1	1	1				16
13	Coot CO			2	1	1								4
14	Cormorant CA			1	1									2
15	Dunnock D	5	5	19	17	6	6	3	1	5	11	9	2	89
16	Fieldfare FF										2	3		5
17	Gadwall GA			2		1								3
18	Goldcrest GC	1											1	2
19	Goldfinch GO	14	12	14	15	6	15	30	9	43		49	15	222
20	Grasshopper Warbler GH					1								1
21	Great Crested Grebe GG	1												1
22	Great Spotted Woodpecker GS		1			1	1	1		1				5
23	Great Tit GT	6	9	5	6	1	3		1	6	5	6	6	54
24	Greenfinch GR	5	21	20	8	13	10	19	3	4	11	10	8	132
25	Grey Heron H	2				1			2	2		3	1	11
26	Greylag Goose GJ					3								3
27	Grey Partridge P			2			2				2			6

28	Grey Wagtail GL											1	1
29	House Martin HM				10			1	1	16			28
30	House Sparrow HS	6	5	12	6	7	8	35	5	4	10	21	143
31	Jay J			1						2			3
32	Kestrel K	1	1							1		2	6
33	Kingfisher KF								2				2
34	Lesser Black-backed Gull LB											1	1
35	Linnet LI					1	8	4	3				16
36	Long-tailed Tit LT	2	1	11	8	13	9			8	12		64
37	Magpie MG	14	27	23	24	14	17	24	25	34	55	30	327
38	Mallard MA	2	2	5	5			8	6	23	24	26	120
39	Meadow Pipit MP		5									5	10
40	Moorhen MH	2	2	3	4	4	3	4	2			10	34
41	Mute Swan MS		2		1	7	5	12	2	2			31
42	Nuthatch NH										1		1
43	Pheasant PH			1				1					2
44	Pied Wagtail PW											1	1
45	Redpoll (Lesser) LR											10	10
46	Redwing RE	1		90							32	65	188
47	Reed Bunting RB	7	2	8	9	10	19	18	3	7	24	13	127
48	Reed Warbler RW					6	5	4					15
49	Robin R	11	8	12	13	11	7	2	1	8	18	20	126
50	Sand Martin SM				2								2
51	Sedge Warbler SW						1						1
52	Siskin SK			2									2
53	Snipe SN											2	3
54	Song Thrush ST	1	7		3	3	11	6	1			10	42
55	Sparrowhawk SH	1			1			1	1	1	1		6
56	Starling SG					2							2
57	Stonechat SC			1								1	2
58	Swallow SL					1	4	6	2	1			14

59	Swift SI					16	25	17	10					68
60	Teal T		2											2
61	Treecreeper TC	1												1
62	Tufted Duck TU				4									4
63	Whitethroat WH					13	16	17	10					56
64	Whitethroat(Lesser) LW				1		1							2
65	Willow Tit WT					1	4	1				1		7
66	Willow Warbler WW						1							1
67	Woodcock WK											1	1	2
68	Woodpigeon WP	35	27	25	28	25	20	22	21	44	7	14	24	292
69	Wren WR	1	4	8	10	12	11	7	7	5	15	11	9	100
	TOTAL SEEN/HEARD PER MONTH	208	201	320	233	234	256	291	150	265	316	472	289	3235
	SPECIES COUNT PER MONTH	30	27	29	31	35	32	31	31	28	24	29	26	

Average species/month 29.42
 Average count/month 269.58