

TROOPERS HILL

BREEDING BIRD SURVEY

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this survey was to record and assess the populations of breeding birds in and around the Troopers Hill Local Nature Reserve (LNR), Bristol. The site is owned by Bristol City Council and is managed by the council with assistance from a Friends Group, for its nature conservation, amenity and historical value. Its importance for vegetation and invertebrates has been recognised for over twenty years but there is little specific information on its birds.

SURVEY METHODS

The survey was carried out using Common Bird Census (CBC) methods during late April and May 2007. It was visited on four occasions within one hour of sunrise. All visits were made during suitable weather conditions, without heavy rain or strong wind. Each bird seen or heard was recorded using a code that differentiates between different forms of activity (i.e. birds singing, calling, carrying food etc), generating four maps from the four visits. A single summary map, showing the centre of breeding territories, was compiled by analysis of the field maps and is attached to this report.

SURVEY RESULTS

The following breeding birds, with the codes used on the attached maps, were recorded on the site:

Blackbird (B)	15 pairs
Blackcap (BC)	8 pairs
Blue tit (BT)	1 pair
Bullfinch (BU)	1 pair
Chaffinch (CH)	7 pairs
Chiffchaff (CC)	1 pair
Dunnock (D)	4 pairs
Goldfinch (GO)	1 pair
Great tit (GT)	2 pairs
Greenfinch (GR)	5 pairs
Lesser whitethroat (LW)	1 pair
Long-tailed tit (LT)	2 pairs
Robin (R)	13 pairs
Song thrush (ST)	1 pair
Wood pigeon (WP)	9 pairs
Wren (WR)	14 pairs

Several other bird species were recorded on the site but were not breeding and are therefore not shown on the map, as follows:

Collared dove: breeding in adjacent gardens;
Goldcrest: breeding in adjacent garden;
House sparrow: breeding in nearby houses;
Magpie: breeding in adjacent gardens and in Crew's Hole;
Starling: breeding in nearby houses.

Swift and house martin were recorded feeding over the site. Herring and lesser black-backed gulls, sparrowhawk and grey heron were seen flying over the site. Great spotted woodpecker, jay and whitethroat could be heard in Crew's Hole, but were not seen on Troopers Hill.

ASSESSMENT

Scrub and trees around the periphery of the site support moderately large populations of breeding birds. Most of these are common species, which are widespread in gardens, parks and other habitats throughout Bristol. Some are less common: chiffchaff is restricted to wooded areas, including large gardens; and lesser whitethroat is restricted to sites with good quantities of scrub, including neglected allotments. Single pairs of each were found at Troopers Hill: chiffchaff on the wooded western side of the hill; and lesser whitethroat in scrub, also on the western side of the hill.

Two of the species recorded have been included in lists of birds of conservation concern because their populations have declined substantially, although they remain fairly common and widespread. These are bullfinch and song thrush. Single pairs of each were recorded: bullfinch on the edge of Crew's Hole on the northern edge of the hill; and song thrush in scrub in the southern corner of the hill.

The habitats that are of value for birds at Troopers Hill are the scrub, including areas of bramble, and developing woodland. There are substantial areas of both habitats on the periphery of the hill. There are no species associated with either heathland or open grassland, since the areas of these habitats are relatively small and they are subject to high levels of disturbance.

The bird populations of Troopers Hill are of nature conservation value in a local context. Their value does not approach the value of the hill's vegetation or invertebrates. The site's vegetation is unique in Bristol and is an example of a habitat type that is rare throughout the former County of Avon and adjoining areas. The site's invertebrate fauna includes species that are rare in a national context. Whilst Troopers Hill's bird populations are of value, there are several sites in Bristol that are comparable or better for birds, in terms of both numbers and species diversity. In the very local context these include Crew's Hole, which

has large quantities of woodland and scrub habitat. Elsewhere in this part of Bristol Arnos Vale Cemetery, St Anne's Valley and Eastwood Farm have more significant bird populations. It is feasible to create and manage habitat for the bird species found at Trooper's Hill at a range of sites throughout Bristol, whereas many of the plants and invertebrates found here cannot be conserved at any other site within Bristol.

MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

In view of the comments made above it is clear that management for the hill's vegetation and invertebrate populations should take precedence over management for birds and this has been the case with recent management. This has included removal of relatively small areas of scrub and this may have led to some small reduction in bird breeding habitat, although the areas removed are much smaller than those that remain, and substantially smaller than those that are present at Crew's Hole. It is likely that some further removal will be carried out. This should continue to concentrate on locations where scrub has recently encroached over or is threatening valuable grassland or heathland habitats, or where there is a realistic chance that such habitats might be restored.

Older and more mature areas of scrub should be retained as habitats for birds, invertebrates and other species such as badgers. Management of these habitats should take lower priority than management of grassland and heathland, but if resources allow measures to encourage a range of structure within the scrub should be carried out. These should aim to create dense beds of young bramble with retained trees, in particular less usual species such as oak, silver birch and willow. Broom is of relatively little value for birds but should be favoured for its invertebrate interest. Nest boxes attached to retained trees would be useful in increasing numbers of species such as blue tit that are at present relatively scarce on the site.

Active birds' nests of all species are protected by law and scrub and scrub clearance should therefore not be carried out between 1st March and 31st July.

The best opportunities for mitigating any minor adverse impacts on birds caused by habitat management at Trooper's Hill are provided at Crew's Hole, where larger areas of suitable habitat are present and other interests are less important. Management here could include measures to restore areas of bramble and other scrub, by selective tree felling within areas of immature woodland, retaining selected trees and areas of mature woodland.