

Notes on BTO Report

Early last year, the Friends suggested to Portfolio Holder, Cllr. Will Roberts, that the British Trust for Ornithology be commissioned to carry out surveys on the ground-nesting birds and we were very pleased that Cllr. Roberts took this on board. The BTO were then given the following brief by WDC.

"In 2025, the British Trust for Ornithology was commissioned to undertake standardised breeding birds survey at St Mary's Lands, Warwick, between 26th April and 1st August, specifically to assess site use by ground nesting birds and to set a baseline against which future change in bird populations and site management change can be measured".

"The main focus was to evaluate the use made by ground nesting birds of compartments with temporary fencing, which provides protected areas for nesting, at this open predominantly grassland site, with high use by the public".

It's a complicated and comprehensive report. It is an excellent survey, exactly what a survey should look like. Well done BTO. What a difference to the report commissioned by Plinke.

Whether or not the fencing goes ahead our TWO PRIMARY CONCERNS expressed to officers and Councillors were

1) THE SURVEYS

This is an excellent example of what a survey should be, in contrast to previous reports. We expressed dismay at the reports submitted by ASW. We stated the number of visits were inadequate and lacked 'scientific rigor', poor methodology.

The BTO report suggests that re skylark (4.2.1) "***the greater number of territories detected may also be due to the more intensive survey methods and visits..***"

Exactly the point we made.

2) SKYLARK ACTIVITY not noted in July and August probably due to height of the sward.

4.2.1 "*tall vegetation beyond a certain height and density becomes unsuitable*".

This has also been noted in the BTO report that Skylark raised 2/3 broods Meadow Pipit 1/2 viz.

4.2.2

"However, the lack of observations of juveniles and families on earlier visits may suggest, like Skylark, that breeding ended prematurely and just a single brood".

We were delighted to see reed buntings included.

All they can go by re bird numbers is the information they were given from previous years. There are hints that these may not be accurate due to poor recording and inadequate visits. Therefore, without this accurate baseline, there is no way to reliably predict if numbers have increased. Yet.

Skylark and Meadow Pipit have traditionally nested here.

Only next year, using their own measurements from 2025 will they be able to answer that question.

Other relevant factors they flag up

- Skylark numbers in the West Midlands and across the country have increased anyway
- An atypically hot dry summer

There are other areas where skylark nest outside the fencing. But it is doubtful that any nest outside the racetrack; most of the activity is within that circle except for the field across the brook, they have been seen and heard evidence aplenty.

It's what we've been pushing for since 2021 when it was argued that their report was 'lacking in scientific rigor'.

The FoSML Report was NOT a bird survey. It was a consultation exercise on the public reaction to the fencing, in lieu of WDC, who promised consultation and have never delivered. We mentioned the lack of skylark sightings in July and August and suggested (after talking to the RSPB) that it might be the height of the sward causing this effect. This has been picked up by the BTO and they have tabled it.

It is 4 years since we flagged up those two main points and nothing has been done in the intervening years until the BTO carried out the surveys.

The BTO were under the impression that SML was located **within** the Racecourse.

It was amazing and heartening to note how many species of birds inhabited the area.

2.2.1 *"By using the standardised CBC method to collect the data, this provides a comparable baseline dataset, which can be used to identify changes in breeding bird territories over time".*

4.1 *"In order to be able to provide a measurable comparison between recent survey and the current 2025 survey, it is important that standardised methods are used throughout all surveys"*

It is therefore not possible to state whether the fencing has led to an increase in the bird population simply because an area has been fenced off to contain them. The optimum habitat (including structure, tussocks, vegetation and foraging) is in the contained areas (is the fencing really necessary then?). Should the duration of the fencing be shortened?

"High levels of territorial display and breeding activity were noted for both Skylark and Meadow Pipit between the 26th April and 13th June survey visits, diminishing substantially by 14th July, indicating that the breeding season may have ended early, likely due to seasonal grass growth reducing suitability for later breeding attempts".

5.1 *"it must also be considered that these temporary fenced compartments contain the optimal nesting habitat-structure for both Skylark and Meadow Pipit, meaning the reduced disturbance may only account in part for the higher breeding territory densities in these compartments".*

"The near central position of the temporary fenced compartments is also in the optimum location to maximise suitability for both Skylark and Meadow Pipit, i.e. a large expanse of open habitat away from tall structures, as well as having a good tussocky sward structure".

"The duration of the temporary fencing also has potential for revision. As the breeding activity and presences of families had substantially diminished by late July (Table 7 & 8), it may be possible to remove the temporary fencing earlier during the summer".

"the results of the planned 2026 breeding bird survey are needed to inform any proposal to change the habitat management regime".

"as the 2025 temporary fenced compartments contain the best quality/structured habitat in the optimal centre of the sites, there are very limited options for using temporary fencing on other part of the site as available areas are small and the vegetation structure/composition is suboptimal".

"any change to the temporary fence compartments, or their removal, may result in a reduction of breeding territories of both Skylark and Meadow Pipit".

The whole of the Lammas Field does not, therefore, need to be contained (fenced-off) as proposed by WDC.

"The planned repeat 2026 breeding bird survey will provide further confirmation of the numbers of ground nesting bird species present and their use of the habitats, as well as the influence of protective fencing. The combined results and findings from the 2025 and 2026 breeding bird surveys will inform future site management and breeding bird protection plans".