

**Findings of a breeding bird survey on land at 52, New Street, Ash near
Sandwich, Kent, April – July, 2023
by Martin Sutherland on behalf of KB Ecology
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1. Introduction

This report presents the findings of surveys of the birds on an area of land between Sandwich Road and New Street, Ash near Sandwich, Kent. The survey consisted of four visits which were conducted between April 20th and July 9th, 2023.

The survey included the general breeding bird community of the site itself and the turtle dove population within the entire kilometre square in which the site lies (TR 2958).

The aims of the survey were:

- to determine the species composition and size of each species population within and adjacent to the site,
- to determine the status of Turtle Dove at the site and in the wider area

Turtle Dove is a RSPB priority species due to its significant population decline: 98% between 1967 and 2018. It is the UK's fastest declining species and threatened with global as well as national extinction.

'Turtle Dove Friendly Zones' (TDFZs) have been established in areas which still support breeding populations of the species. Of the 29 zones in England, 12 are in Kent.

The site lies within the Ash TDFZ. In 2021, the site formed part of at least one Turtle Dove breeding territory.

2. Description of the survey area

The entire site, including buildings, is approximately two hectares in area. Of this, 0.2 ha is buildings and hard standing which lies in the south of the site. The remainder is open vegetated ground with much herbage and bramble and about 40 scattered young trees (oak, holm oak, birch, ash and sycamore).

Around the perimeter of the site are lengths of hedgerow, mostly tall and fairly broad and totalling about 330m in length. These are mostly of hawthorn and blackthorn.

The most significant occur around a cottage that lies adjacent to the north-western corner of the site (H1), adjacent to the Sandwich Road at the northern end of the site (H2), running south from the eastern end of H2 along the north-east boundary (H3), along the south-eastern facing boundary adjacent to new housing (H4) and along the eastern side of the site buildings (H5). The latter includes walnut, birch and hazel with a group of a taller cypress species at the northern end. H1 also includes apple and a dogwood species.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of these habitats at the site.

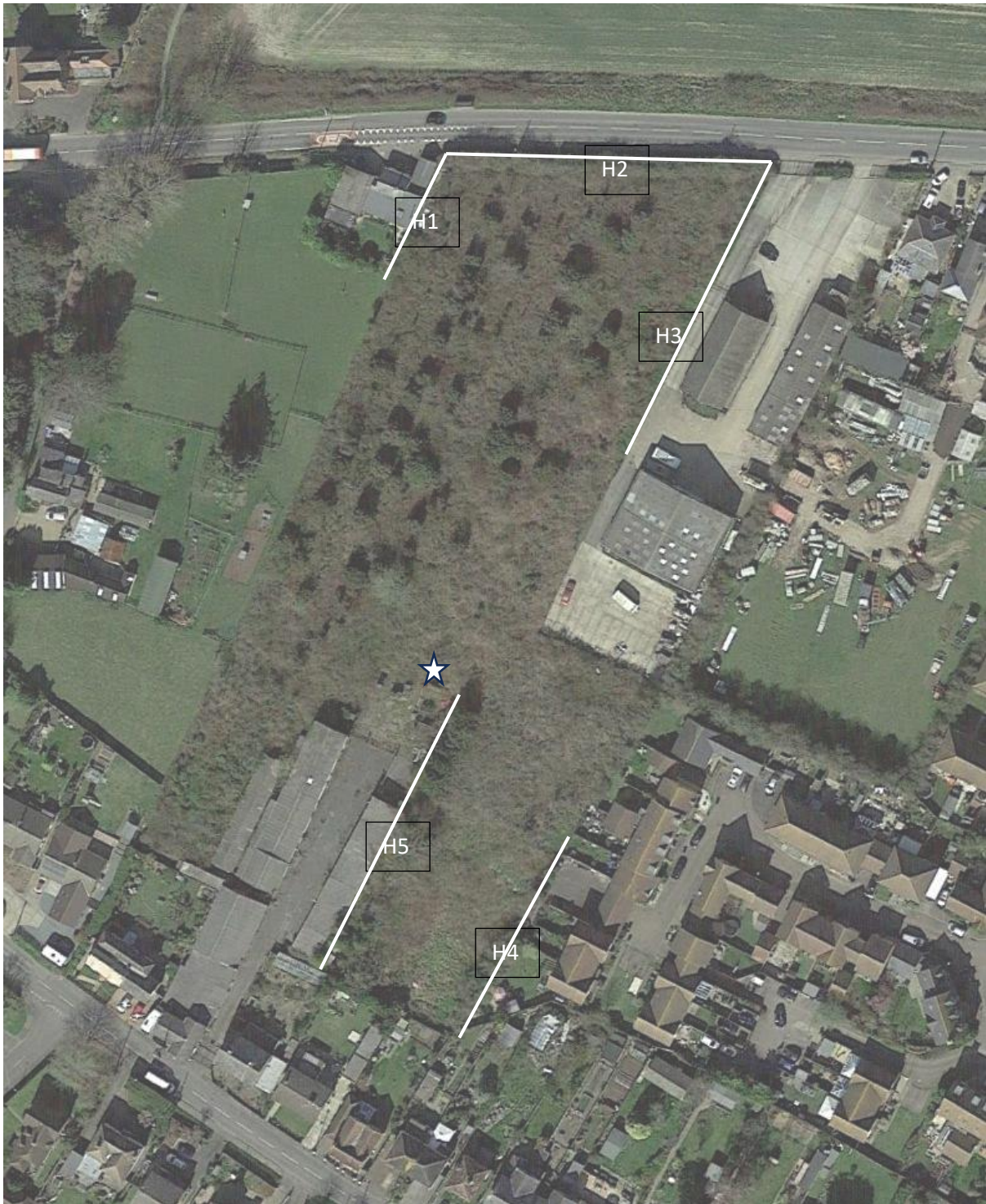


Figure 1. Map of the survey area showing the distribution of buildings and open habitats at the site and the main sections of hedgerow within and around the site perimeter. The white star indicates the location of the passive audio recorder used for nocturnal monitoring.

3. Methodology

3.1 General breeding bird survey

The survey involved four visits as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Dates and start times of diurnal visits, and the weather conditions on each, during the survey.

Date	Start time	Weather
April 20 th , 2023	0550	NE 3, 5/8 cloud. 7C at 0600 incr 10C by 0900.
May 12 th , 2023	0500	N 2, 8/8 cloud. 11C at 0600-0900. Dry.
June 6 th , 2023	0450	NE 3-4, 8/8 cloud. 11C at 0500 incr 14C by 0800. Dry.
July 9 th , 2023	0530	SW 1, 3/8 thin high cloud. 18C at 0600 incr 20C by 0800.

All visits were conducted in early morning when bird activity is generally high and disturbance and noise from roads and other sources is usually relatively low.

The field survey methodology is based on the Common Birds Census (CBC) developed by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) (Gilbert *et al*, 1998).

On each visit the whole area is slowly walked and the location, activity and behaviour of each bird seen or heard marked on a large scale map of the site. A separate map was used for each visit. The mapping of species registrations on each visit enables individual species maps to be created and the extent of individual species territories to be defined with reasonable accuracy.

All buildings were examined for evidence of barn owl activity and any other signs of potential use by nesting birds.

Standard CBC requires 8-10 visits spread through the season. This number of visits allows a high accuracy and a level of detail that can be compared year to year, thus allowing effective monitoring.

The main difference between standard CBC and the adapted CBC methods used in this survey is that the number of visits has been reduced.

When reducing the number of visits, the size of the area to be surveyed, the complexity of the area's habitats and the suite of species that are thought to potentially occur should all be considered so that the number of visits is adequate for the purpose.

It is also important to consider that breeding activity varies between species and it is often important that an early season visit is made. Many resident species establish territories as early as March while some migrant species do not even arrive in this country until May.

Thus, the consequences of reducing the number of visits include:

- fewer species registrations which may result in reduced accuracy when assessing the numbers and extents of breeding territories.
- An increased possibility of missing species, particularly those which are secretive, wide-ranging or occur at low densities.

These consequences increase as the number of visits is reduced. However, to compensate for this, effort is targeted at species of local or regional importance for which suitable habitat exists and are therefore considered potentially to occur. There is usually no need for such targeting in standard CBC.

It is particularly important that surveys occur in optimum weather conditions and are spaced appropriately through the breeding season.

In this instance, the total of four visits and the degree of targeted effort is considered to have produced an accurate and fair illustration of the species composition of the breeding community and the size and distribution of the species populations. This is because the survey area contains a rather small amount of suitable habitat for nesting birds and is relatively easy to work. However, it is possible that some low density and wide-ranging species might have gone unrecorded.

3.2 Audio monitoring

In addition to the diurnal walkover surveys, a single automatic audio recorder (Audiomoth) was used to monitor nocturnal activity. This was particularly aimed at determining whether species such as Barn Owl might be using buildings on the site. This device was programmed to record for eight hours from 2100 to 0500 GMT for three nights and early mornings in early May.

The location of the device is shown in Figure 1.

The dates of the nocturnal acoustic monitoring and the nightly weather conditions are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Dates, times and weather conditions during each night of nocturnal acoustic monitoring.

Date	Recording period (GMT) <i>Civil dusk and civil dawn</i>	Weather
May 4 th -5 th	2100-0500 2100/0443	SW 1-2, mostly cloudy and dry. Min 10C.
May 6 th -7 th	2100-0500 2103/0439	S veering W 1-2, 6/8 cloud, dry. Min 12C.
May 8 th -9 th	2100-0500 2107/0435	SW 1-2, overcast with rain. Min 12C.

3.3 Turtle Dove survey

The Turtle Dove monitoring survey of the wider area followed the methodology described in the 2021 national survey of the species. This requires two survey visits, the first between 11th May and 20th June, and the second between 21st June and 31st July allowing four weeks between each of the two visits.

Surveys should be undertaken between dawn and 0900 as Turtle Dove activity reduces considerably after this time as birds move from breeding territories to forage in the wider countryside.

As with the General BBS, each bird and its behaviour is mapped on each visit, a separate map being used on each.

The two survey visits were undertaken on May 12th and July 9th, 2023 when the whole of the TR 2958 kilometre square (which contains the proposed development site) was walked.

4. Survey findings

4.1 General breeding bird survey

The survey recorded a total of 26 bird species using habitats within, or closely adjacent to, the proposed development site. These are shown in Table 3 which details the number of registrations of each species on each survey visit and the minimum numbers of breeding territories considered to be present.

Figure 3 in the Assessment shows the distribution of these registrations.

Table 3. Numbers of registrations of all species recorded on each survey visit.

Species	A April 20	B May 12	C June 06	D July 07	Number of territories
Pheasant	0	1	0	0	0
Swift	0	0	1	2	0
Stock Dove	1	0	1	0	1 ex*
Woodpigeon	5	3	5	8	6
Collared Dove	5	4	5	3	4
Sparrowhawk	0	2	0	1	1 ex
Green Woodpecker	0	0	0	3	1 ex
Kestrel	0	1	0	0	0
Jay	0	1	1	0	0
Magpie	1	2	2	0	1
Jackdaw	1	1	1	0	1
Carrion Crow	1	1	2	1	1 ex
Blue Tit	3	0	0	1	1
Great Tit	4	1	0	1	1
House Martin	0	0	1	1	0
Whitethroat	0	2	1	4	2
Wren	7	6	5	5	6
Starling	3	3	0	2	3
Song Thrush	1	1	0	1	1
Blackbird	1	6	6	2	3
Robin	4	5	3	2	4
House Sparrow	4	3	6	4	7
Dunnock	7	2	4	3	5
Chaffinch	0	1	1	1	1
Linnet	2	1	2	1	1
Goldfinch	4	2	2	2	1

ex = extensive. This indicates that the nest was considered to lie outside the site although the site was an important part of a breeding territory for feeding.

An additional three species were noted flying over the site. These were Herring Gull, ring-necked parakeet, and skylark. However, none of these was considered to be associated with the site or its habitats.

The nocturnal survey recorded another six species but, again, none was considered to be associated with the site or its habitats.

These additional species and brief details of their occurrence are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Additional species recorded during the survey but which were not considered to have any association with the site.

Species	Details
Mallard	Recorded flying nearby at night on May 9 th .
Moorhen	Recorded flying over on each of the three nights monitored.
Coot	Recorded flying over at night on May 5 th .
Little Grebe	Recorded flying over at night on May 5 th .
Herring Gull	Apparently nesting on housing to the east and south-east of the site and occasionally flying over.
Grey Heron	Recorded flying over at night on May 5 th .
Tawny Owl	Recorded calling at some distance from the site on two nights.
Ring-necked Parakeet	One flew over on July 7 th landing in trees west of the site.
Skylark	One flew east over the site on June 6 th .
Yellowhammer	One singing north of Sandwich Road on May 12 th .

4.2 Turtle Dove survey

No turtle dove was noted within or very close to the site. However, the two surveys of the kilometre square indicated the presence of two pairs while another sighting in the north-east corner of the square probably related to birds from north of the square.

Figure 2 shows the locations of turtle doves noted on kilometre square walks Visits 1 and 2. These involve a singing male in scrub on the south side of Moat Lane east of the bowling club on Visit 1 and it or another seen perched close by on Visit 2 which flew a short distance south-west into nearby hedgerows. Also on Visit 2 one was singing in trees on the north side of Moat Lane at the same time as a second bird sang in scrub south of New Street less than 200 metres southwest of the survey site. Another was seen flying south in the north-east of

the square which was thought likely to be from a territory in the Cooper Street area.

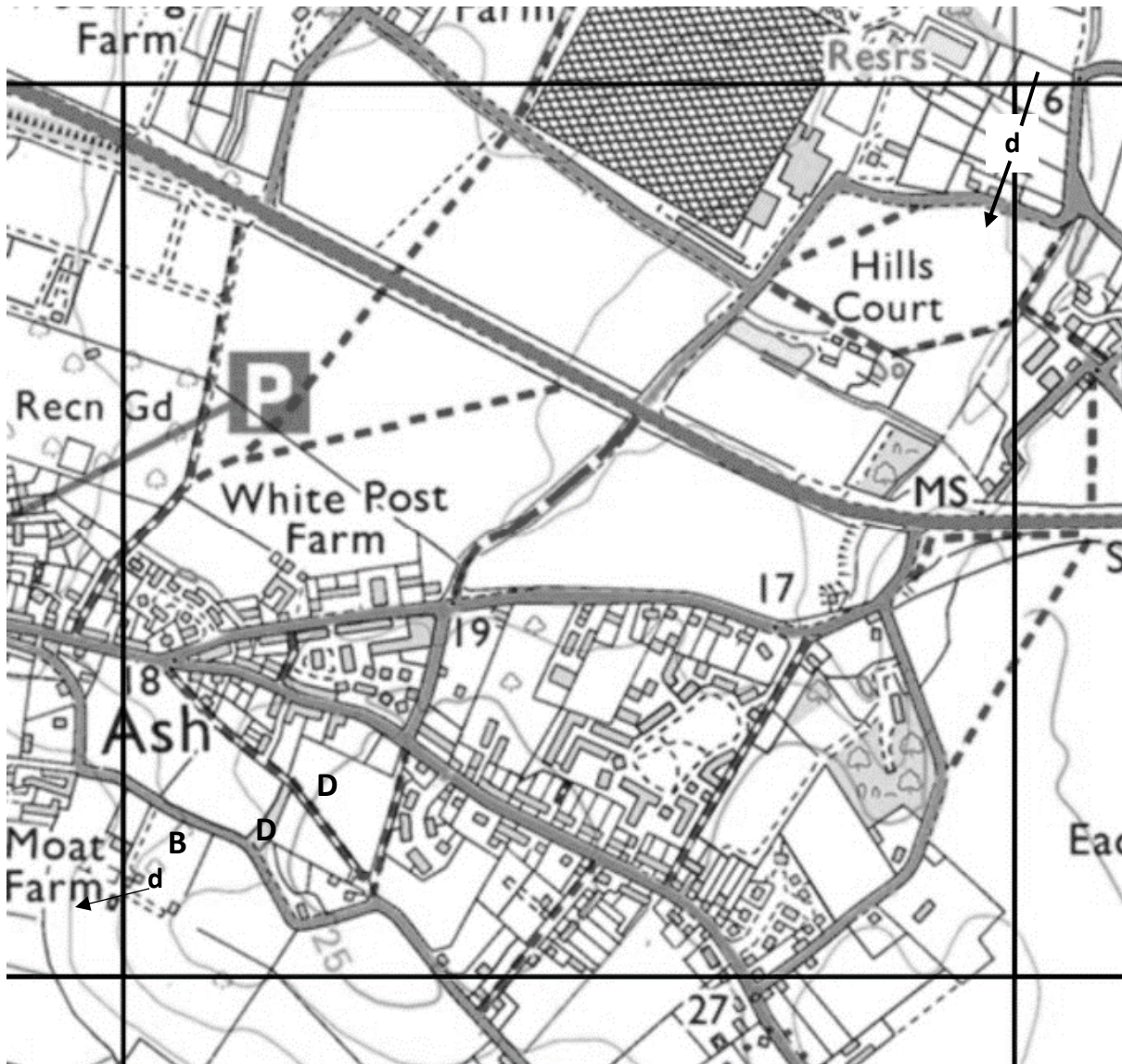


Figure 2. TR 2958: Locations of Turtle Doves recorded during the two turtle dove survey visits. Upper case = singing bird, lower case = bird seen but not singing.

5. Assessment

5.1 Importance of habitats within the site

Figure 3 shows the distribution of all registrations of birds noted using habitats within and closely adjacent to the site during the survey visits.

As well as showing the high proportion of bird species which are now red or amber listed due to population declines, 14 of the 26 species (53.8%), the figure shows distinct clustering of birds in association with the hedgerows within and around the site.

Species associated with the buildings include woodpigeon, collared dove, jackdaw, and starling. Those associated with the hedgerows include woodpigeon, whitethroat, wren, robin, blackbird and dunnock while in the scattered young trees collared dove, goldfinch and linnet occur.

5.2 Population size

No species occurs in particularly high numbers the most abundant being as follows:

House Sparrow	7 pairs
Woodpigeon	6
Wren	6
Dunnock	5
Collared Dove	4
Robin	4

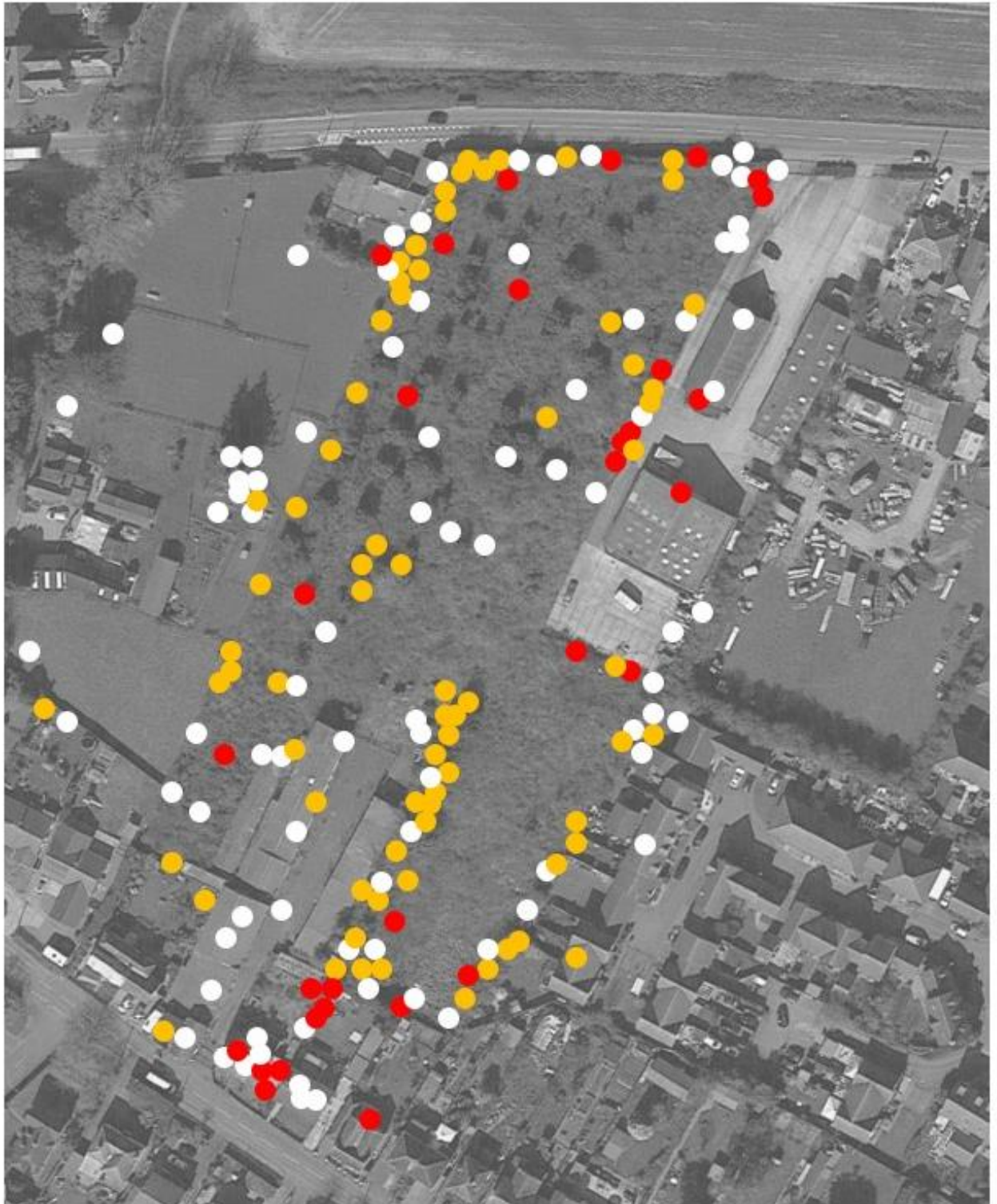


Figure 3. Distribution of all registrations of birds recorded within or adjacent to the site. Red and amber discs indicate birds within those categories of conservation concern. White discs show all other birds. Note that birds flying over the area, including those aerial feeding, are not included.

5.3 Rarity and species of conservation importance

Species considered to be of conservation importance include those included in Schedule One of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (WCA), and the three categories listed below and shown in Table 5.

BoCC Red List = Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern.

BoCC Amber List = Amber List of Birds of Conservation Concern.

S41 = Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act (2006) priority list.

No Schedule 1 species was noted.

Table 5 shows the species recorded which are included in the remaining three categories.

Table 5. Bird species of conservation importance recorded within and closely adjacent to the site during the breeding survey.

Species	BoCC Red List	BoCC Amber List	S41
Swift	●	-	-
Stock Dove	-	●	-
Woodpigeon	-	●	-
Sparrowhawk	-	●	-
Kestrel	-	●	-
House Martin	●	-	-
Whitethroat	-	●	-
Wren	-	●	-
Starling	●	-	●
Song Thrush	-	●	●
House Sparrow	●	-	●
Dunnock	-	●	●
Linnet	●	-	●

Birds of Conservation Concern Red List species

This category includes species which are considered globally threatened by the IUCN and species which have undergone a severe population decline and not recovered. It also includes species showing severe declines (>50%) in the UK

over 25 years or longer term in one or more of breeding population, breeding range, non-breeding population or non-breeding range.

Table 5 includes five Red List species - Swift, House Martin, Starling, House Sparrow and Linnet. All are included because of severe population declines.

The presence of Turtle Dove within 200m of the site is important to note as recovery of the habitat could enable the site to be occupied again.

Birds of Conservation Concern Amber List species

This includes species which are of international importance and those showing moderate declines (>25% but <50%) in the UK over 25 years or longer term in one or more of breeding population, breeding range, non-breeding population or non-breeding range. It also includes species on the European Red List (ERLOB). Species were considered of international importance if the UK holds at least 20% of the European population in either the breeding (BI) or the nonbreeding (WI) season.

A total of eight Amber-listed species were recorded at the site. These were Stock Dove, Woodpigeon, Sparrowhawk, Kestrel, Whitethroat, Wren, Song Thrush, and Dunnock.

Sparrowhawk, Kestrel, Whitethroat, Song Thrush, and Dunnock are included due to moderate breeding population declines. Stock Dove, Woodpigeon and Wren are included because of the international importance of their UK breeding populations.

Section 41 (S41) species

Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act (2006) lists habitats and species which are considered of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England.

Five species recorded during the survey are included in S41. These are Starling, Song Thrush, House Sparrow, Dunnock, and Linnet.

5.4 Diversity

The total of 26 species noted using habitats in the site is reasonable, especially considering its recent history.

6. References

BirdLife International (2017) 'European Birds of Conservation Concern: Populations, Trends and national responsibilities' Cambridge, UK: BirdLife International.

Stanbury A *et al* (2021) 'The status of our bird populations: the fifth Birds of Conservation Concern in the United Kingdom, Channel Islands and Isle of Man and second IUCN Red List assessment of extinction risk for Great Britain' *British Birds* 114:723-747

Gilbert G, DW Gibbons and J Evans (1998) 'Bird Monitoring Methods' RSPB.

<https://jncc.gov.uk/our-work/uk-bap-priority-species/>

<https://www.operationturtledove.org/>