

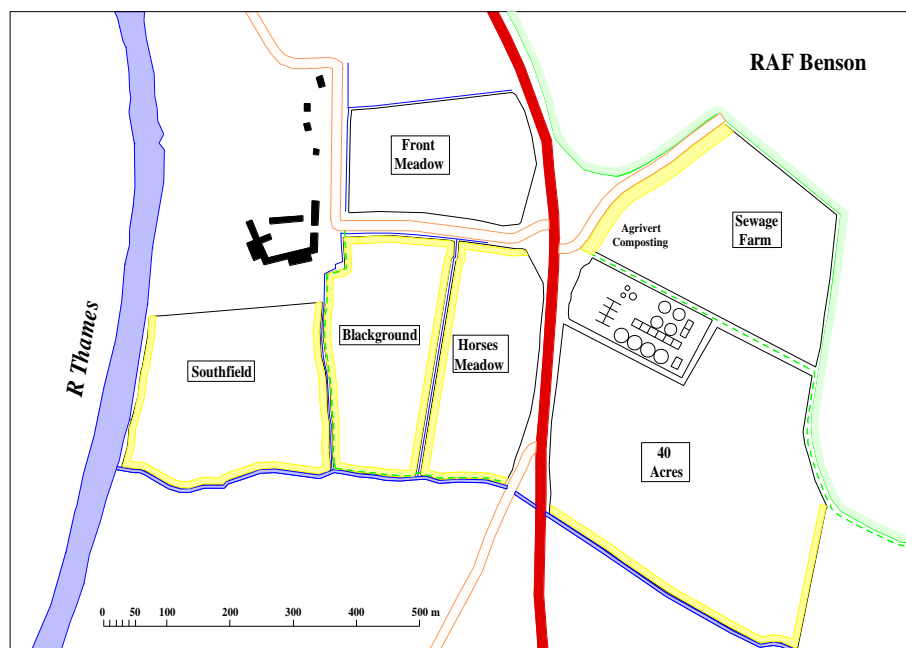
# **Battle Farm, Preston Crowmarsh**

## **Bird (and other wildlife) observations April 2005 – March 2015**



In April 2005 the survey of Battle Farm and Clack's Farm started. This report covers observations at Battle farm between April 2005 and March 2015. Although the survey was directed at the birds in the area I have included observations of Butterflies and noteworthy sightings of mammals, insects and flowers.

The survey area encompassed six fields as shown on the map below.



During the survey, Front Meadow was a grass pasture with cattle grazing during some of the period and all other fields were autumn planted grain. The field edges shown in yellow in the above plan were environmental strips approximately 10m wide and cut once during the year, in August.

The individual fields had the following dimensions:

Field Name	Area (m <sup>2</sup> )	Perimeter (m)
Front Meadow	41700	778
Southfield	56194	1124
Blackground	46534	958
Horse Meadow	43373	895
Sewage Farm	63577	1031
40 Acres	131208	1735

The surveys were carried out by walking the field boundary, each month, noting species and numbers of birds seen or heard. The field boundary was divided into obvious “breaks” and detailed information is held for each of these divisions together with birds associated with the centre of the field. This data is available for further analysis but this report is confined to a summary of the information, mainly on a month by month basis but with some reference to the value of different fields.

The following table gives an annual summary of the total number of birds identified, the number of species and the total number of individual birds seen on the red and amber data lists.

Period	TOTAL	Species	Red data	Amber data
2005/6	3256	61	227	611
2006/7	3618	64	732	691
2007/8	3112	61	372	521
2008/9	3168	60	109	426
2009/10	2679	57	205	326
2010/11	3385	65	191	468
2011/12	3232	64	184	582
2012/13	3527	62	120	707
2013/14	3599	58	406	557
2014/15	3746	59	174	476

To explain these data lists, seven quantitative criteria were used by leading governmental and non-governmental conservation organisations in the UK to assess the population status of each species and

place it onto the red, amber or green list. Although the lists have been updated during the ten years of the survey the 2016 lists have been used here.

The Red Species List comprises birds of high conservation concern and the Amber Species List, those of medium conservation concern. Species that fulfil none of the criteria are green-listed.

Of the birds recorded during the ten years of the survey, covered in this note, 15 species are on the Red Data list:

Grey Partridge	Lapwing	Herring Gull
Skylark	Yellow Wagtail	Fieldfare
Song Thrush	Redwing	Spotted Flycatcher
Marsh Tit	Starling	House Sparrow
Linnet	Yellowhammer	Corn Bunting

and 28 are on the Amber Data List:-

Little Grebe	Mallard	Tufted Duck
Shoveller	Red Kite	Kestrel
Snipe	Curlew	Black-headed Gull
Lesser Black-backed Gull	Common Tern	Stock Dove
Swift	Kingfisher	Green Woodpecker
Sand Martin	Swallow	House Martin
Meadow Pipit	Grey Wagtail	Dunnock
Whinchat	Black Redstart	Mistle Thrush
Whitethroat	Willow Warbler	Bullfinch
Reed Bunting		

By far the commonest species recorded during the period was Woodpigeon which accounted for 27% of all records. Only 1 other species (Rook) exceeded 5% of the total.

As a guide to difference between the various fields the following table has been prepared. The average number of species identified seemed a better guide than the total number of birds as, if the latter was used, the results could be significantly affected by the location of a mobile large flock of, for example, Woodpigeons. In order to compensate for the different field sizes a separate column gives the number of species per km of the boundary

The results, averaged over the ten years of the survey were:

Field	Average number of species	Species per km of boundary
<b>SOUTHFIELD</b>	12.8	11.4
<b>BLACKGROUND</b>	9.8	10.2
<b>HORSE MEADOW</b>	6.7	7.5
<b>FRONT MEADOW</b>	11.6	14.9
<b>SEWAGE FARM</b>	14.0	13.6
<b>40 ACRES</b>	13.0	7.5

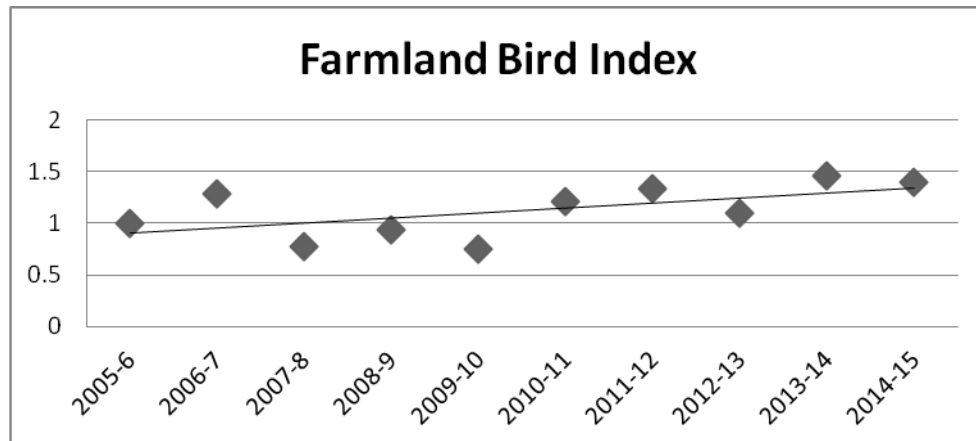
After ten years the top three fields, Front Meadow, Sewage Farm and Southfield all offered something that the others didn't. Front Meadow has a wet ditch, a substantial hedge and is adjacent to houses, the owners of some who provide food for the birds. Sewage Farm has the attraction of having a boundary alongside the sewage works with all the associated insects and warmth during the winter and Southfield has one boundary along the River Thames and another along the outfall stream from the Sewage Works. It might be expected that the mature trees along the southern boundary of Southfield, Blackground, Horse Meadow and 40 Acres would have a significant effect both on numbers of individuals and numbers of species but this proved not to be the case. It is possible that the fact that all surveys were carried out before noon, when these boundaries are in shade, might have affected results.

## The Farmland Bird Index

In 1999 the Government set a target of reversing the decline in farmland birds by 2020. This is measured by the collective population trend of the 19 bird species that are most dependent on farmland in the UK.

Species that contribute to the FBI are the Corn Bunting, Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Grey Partridge, Jackdaw, Kestrel, Lapwing, Linnet, Reed Bunting, Rook, Skylark, Starling, Stock Dove, Tree Sparrow, Turtle Dove, Yellowhammer, Yellow Wagtail, Common Whitethroat and Woodpigeon.

Although the Farmland Bird Index (FBI) was not designed for individual farms an attempt has been made to calculate the index for Battle Farm.



Although a little too soon to draw firm conclusions, the results indicate that key farmland bird species have increased marginally over the 10 years of the survey.

## **Systematic list with status of all birds seen at Battle Farm**

This section lists all of the birds seen by me during the ten years of the survey. The total number of species at the end of the ten year period stands at 89.

Where sufficient sightings have been recorded some attempt has been made to analyse trends. A cut-off level of 1 sighting per month on average has been chosen. I am well aware of other species, not on the list, that have been seen, some by me, but have only included those seen by me between April 2005 and March 2015 during the monthly surveys.

The small table accompanying each species gives the total number observed and the total number of months on which it was seen. The border round the picture indicates their official conservation status. (Red - high conservation concern; Amber - medium conservation concern and Green currently not of conservation concern).

**Mute swan** *Cygnus olor*



Just occasional sightings over the ten years of the survey. Seen either on the Thames or flying over the farm land.

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Total number seen	12
Total months seen	5

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**Greylag Goose** *Anser anser*



Greylag geese seen around here are unlikely to be truly wild but part of the feral populations established during the 20<sup>th</sup> century which have now colonised much of England.

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Total number seen	1
Total months seen	1

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**Canada Goose** *Branta canadensis*



This large goose is present in this country as a result of introduction from its native North America. Seen in 9 of the 10 years usually as small groups flying over the farmland following the Thames.

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Total number seen	97
Total months seen	16

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**Egyptian Goose** *Alopochen aegyptiacus*



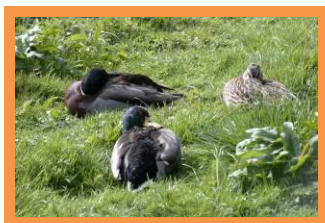
This colourful goose was introduced into this country as an ornamental wildfowl species and has escaped into the wild and is now successfully breeding.

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Total number seen	4
Total months seen	2

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**Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos*



*Trend – increasing by 8.6 per year.*

A very common resident duck of the area seen in small numbers each year, mainly on or alongside the river but occasionally in wet ditches and on the farm pond.

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Total number seen	461
Total months seen	76

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**Shoveller** *Anas clypeata*



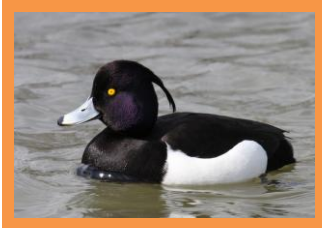
A very unusual farmland bird but a pair of these ducks was seen, in February 2014, on the River Thames which forms the border of one of the fields.

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Total number seen	2
Total months seen	1

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**Tufted Duck** *Aythya fuligula*



Another bonus of having the Thames as one of the field boundaries. Small numbers are occasionally seen on the river especially during cold periods. This record represents a party of 6 seen in December 2010.

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Total number seen	6
Total months seen	1

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**Red-legged Partridge** *Alectoris rufa*



This, the larger of the two partridges and with a distinctive black and white face is fairly common in the fields around Battle Farm though not always seen during my regular visits. This species, introduced from the continent, is more common than the rapidly declining Grey Partridge and numbers are augmented by releases by shooting organisations locally.

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Total number seen	90
Total months seen	26

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**Grey Partridge** *Perdix perdix*



*Trend – decreasing by 1.4 per year but results very scattered.*

Nationally the decline in numbers of Grey Partridge is causing great concern and this is mirrored by observations here. During the first year of the survey 50 individuals were counted but numbers rapidly declined to single sightings in 2008/9 and 2009/10 though there has now been an increase to around 20 sightings each year latterly.

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Total number seen	227
Total months seen	44

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**Pheasant** *Phasianus colchicus*



*Trend – increasing by 1.9 per year.*

This very distinctive game bird was introduced to this country more than 900 years ago and is commonly reared for game shooting. Although favouring woods and copses it is fairly common in the area and observed on around half of the survey visits but only in small numbers.

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Total number seen	175
Total months seen	56

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**Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo*



Sightings of this fish eating coastal bird are too low to draw conclusions about trends but it is reassuring to know that there are enough fish in the river to sustain a winter population. All records relate to birds either on the River or flying over.

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Total number seen	27
Total months seen	18

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**Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea*



Another species apparently doing reasonably well with a sighting, on average, nearly every other month. Most, if not all, records were from east of the main road but likely to be seen in any of the wet ditches and even in open fields where they have been seen feeding on field voles.

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Total number seen	61
Total months seen	48

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**Little Grebe** *Tachybaptus ruficollis*



Six sightings of this delightful small bird, also called Dabchick. All in Southfield where the stream enters the Thames. Just a single sighting of two together.

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Total number seen	6
Total months seen	5

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**Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus*



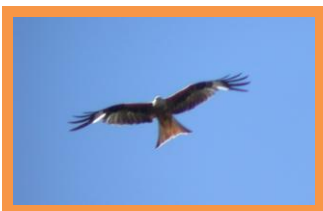
Five sightings over the ten years of the survey, all on the River Thames and all of single birds.

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Total number seen	5
Total months seen	5

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**Red Kite** *Milvus milvus*



*Trend – increasing by 2.3 per year.*

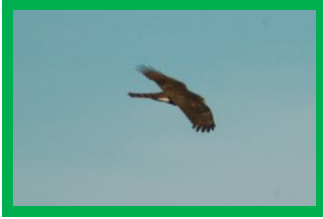
Twenty years ago it would have been unthinkable to see this species featured in a list of local birds but since the re-introduction programme by the RSPB, English Nature and Joint Nature Conservation Committee this magnificent raptor is frequently seen soaring over fields of Battle Farm and surrounding area.

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Total number seen	339
Total months seen	115

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**Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter nisus*

Numbers of Sparrowhawks have increased dramatically since the banning of DDT and they are now almost as numerous as Kestrels, though not so visible, views often being restricted to a rapid low level hunting pass which is easily missed. Sightings varied considerably over the years but the species was seen on about one fifth of visits.

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Total number seen	26
Total months seen	24

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**Common Buzzard** *Buteo buteo*

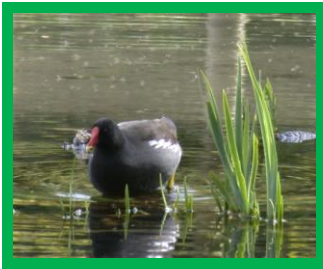
*Trend – increasing by 1.0 per year.*

If that large bird soaring high over the area hasn't a forked tail it is probably one of these. Numbers of Buzzards have increased as Red Kites have become established but whether there is a connection is unclear though probable. The frequency of sightings fluctuates widely from year to year, probably dependant on the location of the nearest nest site.

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Total number seen	144
Total months seen	82

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**Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus*

This common bird of ponds, rivers and almost anywhere wet can be seen along the river or in wet ditches though sightings have been rather sporadic. This dark brown and black bird with a red bill and forehead is usually seen walking along waterside banks with jerking, chicken-like movements of the head.

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Total number seen	23
Total months seen	18

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**Coot** *Fulica atra*

This is a common bird of lakes and rivers but only occasionally seen. All sightings were on the river.

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Total number seen	15
Total months seen	10

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**Lapwing** *Vanellus vanellus*

*Trend – increasing by 2.2 per year*

Sightings of this attractive, but rapidly declining, wading bird of farmland have been fairly irregular having only been encountered on about one in six visits. They have certainly attempted to breed but unfortunately I have been unable to confirm success and suspect predation by corvids or fox.

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Total number seen	229
Total months seen	23

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### Curlew *Numenius arquata*



This large wading bird with a long downward curving bill is more normally associated with muddy coasts and estuaries but, up until 2007, we were lucky to have them breeding close by. Between about February and July they could be heard over the area as they commuted between the airfield and surrounding damp meadows. There is an interesting record of a Curlew on the airfield sighted on 4 April 1999 wearing plastic coloured rings. This was reported to BTO and the bird was identified as one that was ringed as part of a PhD study at Scoughall, just east of North Berwick on the Firth of Forth on 15th April 1985. It was ringed as a male in its second year making it 15 years old in 1999. I was never able to determine whether this bird was breeding locally or resting on its journey north.

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Total number seen	13
Total months seen	5

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### Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*



This long billed wading bird can sometimes be seen in flooded ditches during the winter months. Only two records, one of two birds in 2005/6 and a single bird flying over in 2007/8.

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Total number seen	3
Total months seen	2

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### Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*



Small numbers of these fish eating “swallows of the sea” nest on water bodies adjacent to the river and can occasionally be seen hunting up and down the Thames. This record represents an observation of 2 together in July 2011.

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Total number seen	2
Total months seen	1

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### Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*



*Trend – decreasing by 1.6 per year*

One of the commonest gulls in the area is the Black-headed Gull and these are widespread, in the winter months. They can frequently be seen flying overhead travelling between local pig fields and various water bodies. They can occasionally be seen in the summer, but at this time of the year they are mainly confined to flying along the river. These summer birds are probably from the local breeding population from either Radley or Farmoor. This gull's name can be somewhat confusing as the adults in breeding finery have chocolate brown heads rather than black and young birds or adults during the first part of the winter have only a dark “smudge” behind the eye.

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Total number seen	800
Total months seen	54

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**Lesser Black-backed Gull** *Larus fuscus*

*Trend – increasing by 6.2 per year*

Larger than Black-headed Gulls and easily told apart by their dark upper wings. Commonly seen flying overhead in the winter and this species tends to occur more frequently than their smaller cousin in the summer. These summer birds are normally young birds not yet mature enough to breed.

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Total number seen	361
Total months seen	61

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**Herring Gull** *Larus argentatus*

This large gull is probably overlooked as, in flight and at height they are rather difficult to identify unless other gulls are around for comparison. Just a single sighting of 3 birds in January 2011.

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Total number seen	3
Total months seen	1

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**Feral Pigeon** *Columba livia*

This species, better known in city centres, can occasionally be seen in the area. They have been seen on hanger roofs at RAF Benson and probably breed or have bred there in the past. This name tends to be used for any pigeon/dove that is not one of the other recognised species and covers racing pigeons and various hybrids.

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Total number seen	92
Total months seen	19

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**Stock Dove** *Columba oenas*

*Trend – increasing by 3.2 per year*

This small relation of the Woodpigeon is best distinguished by the lack of white on the neck and wing and it's generally blue/grey appearance. Stock Doves nest in holes in trees and are closely associated with farmland where they feed on seeds and grain. With the changes in farming practices this species is in serious decline but can still be seen, in small numbers, over the area.

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Total number seen	163
Total months seen	58

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**Wood Pigeon** *Columba palumbus*

*Trend – reducing by 26.7 per year*

The white neck flash and broad white wing bar across the open wings easily identifies this, the largest of the pigeons. It is a common species throughout the area and can occur in very large numbers causing considerable damage to some crops.

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Total number seen	8899
Total months seen	120

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**Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto*



The Collared Dove represents an amazing success story. They first arrived in this country back in the 1950's and bred for the first time in 1958 in Norfolk. Since then they have rapidly spread throughout the country and seem to have taken to gardens like the proverbial duck to water. Not quite so common outside gardens and there is some evidence to suggest a slight decline in numbers recently.

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Total number seen	15
Total months seen	10

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**Little Owl** *Athene noctua*



This, our smallest owl, was introduced to the UK in the 19th century. It can sometimes be seen in daylight, usually perching on a tree branch, telegraph pole or fence post. It has a very fierce expression and will bob its head up and down when alarmed. In flight it has long, rounded wings and rapid wingbeats. Just a single sighting in August 2011.

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Total number seen	1
Total months seen	1

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**Common Swift** *Apus apus*



*Trend – reducing by 3.3 per year*

Although Swifts resemble members of the Swallow family they are not related but are more closely linked to the Nightjar. They are summer visitors which nest in the roof space of some of the older houses in the area. They do, however, require a location where they can fly straight in, and drop vertically out in order to gain flying speed. These remarkable birds virtually live on the wing, feeding, drinking, collecting nest material, mating and sleeping whilst flying. It has been estimated that each parent flies some 500 miles (800 kilometers) a day collecting food and cold wet weather may force them to forage far from the nest for long periods. The eggs are resistant to chilling and the young can withstand several days of starvation when they become torpid at night, their temperatures falling from the normal 38°C to as low as 21°C. Seen regularly between mid May and early August though numbers are significantly affected by local feeding conditions.

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Total number seen	219
Total months seen	23

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**Kingfisher** *Alcedo atthis*



Probably the most exotic and certainly the most colourful of the birds to be seen in at Battle Farm. Unfortunately views tend to be restricted to a streak of bright blue as the Kingfisher flashes past low over the river or over a flooded ditch.

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Total number seen	10
Total months seen	10

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### Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*



The Green is our largest woodpecker, well known for its loud cackle from which it gets its country name of "yaffle". It is associated with woodland and large trees but its fondness for feeding on ants brings it down to lawns and open fields.

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Total number seen	103
Total months seen	70

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### Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*



The Great Spotted Woodpecker is mainly a woodland bird but seen occasionally in gardens and elsewhere. Some people can be confused between this species and the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker but the difference in size is very obvious. The Great is about the size of a Blackbird whereas the lesser is only the size of a Sparrow.

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Total number seen	56
Total months seen	41

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### Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*



A common raptor in the area, often seen hovering over the site searching for voles, which constitute a large part of their diet. Most birds of prey have a large hunting territory so sightings can be rather sporadic though here they have been relatively constant.

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Total number seen	76
Total months seen	56

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### Hobby *Falco subbuteo*



The hobby is about the size of a kestrel and has long pointed wings, rather like a large swift. It can catch dragonflies, swallows and martins on the wing and these form its main prey. These are caught in its talons and transferred to its beak in flight. They can accelerate rapidly and are capable of high-speed aerial manoeuvres. Somewhat surprisingly just a single record in August 2014.

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Total number seen	1
Total months seen	1

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### Peregrine *Falco peregrinus*



A very rare visitor to the skies above Preston Crowmarsh being seen on only a single occasion in December 2008.

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Total number seen	1
Total months seen	1

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**Magpie *Pica pica***

*Trend – increasing by 3.2 per year*

The Magpie is a widespread and common resident whose numbers, nationally, steadily increased from 1960 to 1990. The population is now stable. Like the Jay it will feed on a wide variety of foods. It has been blamed for the decline of many of the farmland and song birds but, although it may be a factor, it has been shown to be insignificant compared with other factors.

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Total number seen	441
Total months seen	115

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**Jay *Garrulus glandarius***

A colourful woodland member of the crow family, but rather secretive. It is mainly sedentary and feeds on a wide variety of food such as small vertebrates, including small birds and their eggs and chicks and in winter on beechmast and acorns.

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Total number seen	27
Total months seen	17

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**Jackdaw *Corvus monedula***

*Trend – increasing by 9.5 per year*

Jackdaws nest in holes in trees and will readily take over a chimney if the fire is no longer in use. They are widespread and common and tend to be associated with some of the buildings in Howbery Park which is alongside the farm fields.

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Total number seen	691
Total months seen	98

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**Rook *Corvus frugilegus***

*Trend – increasing by 54.5 per year*

The Rook is a common resident in the area and, with the large Rookery just down the road in Preston Crowmarsh and small offshoots adjacent to front Meadow and near the sewage farm they are a common sight in the area.

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Total number seen	3432
Total months seen	109

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**Carrion Crow *Corvus corone***

*Trend – decreasing by 1.7 per year*

Nationally the number of Carrion Crows has been steadily increasing in recent years. They nest locally and are scavengers, eating a wide variety of foods. Despite the belief that large black birds in flocks must be Rooks and ones or twos must be Crows this is not always a reliable method of identification. Crows will gather into flocks of a hundred or more birds. The best way to separate them is by looking at the bill; long, pointed and greyish white on Rooks, shorter, stumper and black on Crows.

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Total number seen	695
Total months seen	119

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**Goldcrest *Regulus regulus***

This, the smallest of our birds, was fairly common considering their preference for conifer trees and the very limited number of these trees in the survey area. The recording rate is very weather dependent as most records were in the winter when these birds are wider ranging, often associating with mixed foraging flocks of tit species.

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Total number seen	53
Total months seen	29

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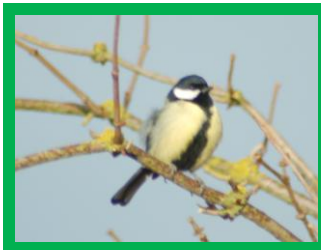
**Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus****Trend – increasing by 1.1 per year*

A very common resident showing a rather worrying low average count in 2008/9 possibly due to poor nesting success in the very wet summer of 2008. However, as is typical of small birds which lay large number of eggs, they rapidly recovered to treble their numbers two years later.

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Total number seen	1009
Total months seen	118

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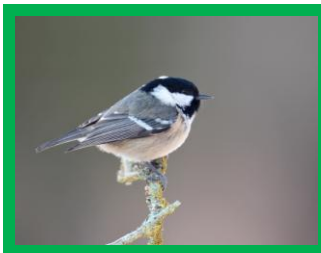
**Great Tit *Parus major****Trend – reducing by 0.3 per year*

As its name would suggest this is the largest member of the tit family. They can be easily recognised by the shiny black cap and bib joined by bold black lines enclosing white cheeks and a black stripe down yellow bib and belly. The Great Tit is a common resident with similar habits to the Blue Tit though they tend to feed on the ground more often. They have a wide variety of calls and song and, "that strange bird call you hear in the woods" is more often than not a Great Tit.

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Total number seen	717
Total months seen	115

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**Coal Tit *Periparus ater***

Not as colourful as some of its relatives, the coal tit has a distinctive grey back, black cap, and white patch at the back of its neck. Its smaller, more slender bill than blue or great tits means it can feed more successfully in conifers. A regular visitor to most peanut feeders, they will take and store food for eating later. In winter they join with other tits to form flocks which roam through woodlands and gardens in search of food.

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Total number seen	8
Total months seen	3

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**Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris***

This is a small, mainly brown bird, with a shiny black cap, dark 'bib' and pale belly. In the UK its identification is made tricky by the very similar appearance of our race of willow tit. They're so hard to identify that ornithologists didn't realise there were two species until 1897!

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Total number seen	6
Total months seen	3

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**Skylark** *Alauda arvensis*

This rapidly declining ground dwelling bird occurs quite widely in the fields around Battle Farm and on the airfield. It is more often heard than seen when in its characteristic towering song flight. They sing from a considerable height, often making it difficult to see the bird. It is thought that the reduction in numbers is, in part, due to a lack of suitable winter stubble for feeding and also because of the lack of insects during the summer for feeding young. They mainly breed, locally, on the airfield but many nesting attempts are thwarted by silage cutting and broadleaf weed spraying.

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Total number seen	141
Total months seen	49

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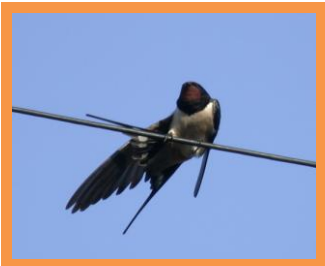
**Sand Martin** *Riparia riparia*

This close relative of the familiar House Martin is a passage migrant as they require sandy banks in which to excavate their nest tunnels. In the past they have nested locally at Grundon's gravel pit above Ewelme and at gravel pits at Dorchester. There is only a single record but they must pass through the area each year.

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Total number seen	18
Total months seen	3

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**Swallow** *Hirundo rustica*

The Swallow is a regular summer migrant, arriving in late March and April and most have gone by mid October. They breed in barns, sheds, garages and other outbuildings with open access, so that they can fly straight in to the nest, which is usually built on top of a beam or ledge. They are often seen in fast acrobatic flight in search of flying insects over the fields. They are gregarious during migration, gathering in large numbers over suitable feeding areas.

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Total number seen	618
Total months seen	57

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**House Martin** *Delichon urbica*

The House Martin is a regular summer visitor, most of which arrive during the second half of April and depart to Africa between mid August and mid October. They build a nest of mud, shaped like a cup, which is stuck to the underside of eaves on a house, especially where the roof rafters project outside. They nest locally but, unfortunately, their numbers, nationally, have declined markedly in recent years and, somewhat surprisingly were not recorded in 2009/10.

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Total number seen	170
Total months seen	19

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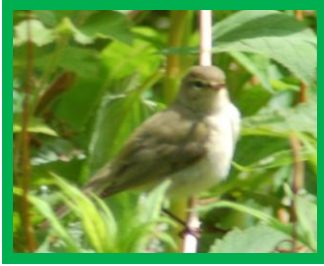
**Long-tailed Tit** *Aegithalos caudatus*

The Long-tailed is not a true Tit and differs from all the other tits in that it is the only one not to nest in holes. They favour thick, tall hedges of Hawthorn or Blackthorn where they build a domed nest decorated with Lichen and lined with as many as 2000 feathers. The records show a healthy increase in observations during the first four years covered but a decline in the last year.

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Total number seen	634
Total months seen	71

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**Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus collybita*

You are usually alerted to the presence of Chiffchaffs by the song which is a monotonously repeated “chiff chaff”. They look very similar to the Willow Warbler but I am yet to see one of these here. They differ in only having the barest hint of yellow on the breast and the legs are blackish brown. They are associated with thick, often tall, hedges, arriving mid March and departing mid September. Like the Blackcap some over winter though they are more easily overlooked. They probably breed in some of the hedges.

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Total number seen	161
Total months seen	62

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**Willow Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochilus*

Just a single record of 2 of these in August 2013. Very similar in appearance to Chiffchaff and either a good view or the song required to tell them apart. Unlike the Chiffchaff Willow Warblers do not overwinter in the UK.

---

Total number seen	2
Total months seen	1

---

**Blackcap** *Sylvia atricapilla*

With good views the Blackcap is easily recognised but they have an annoying habit of sitting in hedges well above head height when the black cap of the male or brown of the female can be very difficult to see. They breed in thick hedges. Our local breeding birds migrate to Mediterranean Countries but Blackcaps are not uncommon during the winter, these birds having migrated here from Europe. Blackcaps breed in suitable hedges on the farm.

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Total number seen	85
Total months seen	35

---

**Garden Warbler** *Sylvia borin*

A bird remarkable for having no distinguishing markings, Noticeable for its drab dull brown plumage. They favour open woodland and scrubland so the area is not ideal habitat for them. Unlike most of the warblers which have very distinctive songs, that of the Garden Warbler is very similar to the Blackcap. As birds are recorded by song as well as sight it is quite possible to confuse the species – especially early in the season before I get my ear in. Just a single record in July 2006.

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Total number seen	5
Total months seen	4

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**Lesser Whitethroat** *Sylvia curruca*

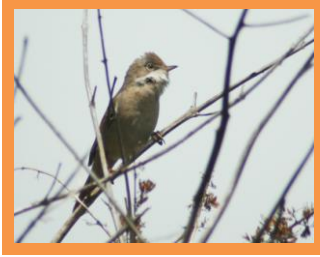
Can be identified from Common Whitethroat as they are slightly smaller but more importantly, greyer plumage, a darker head and darker legs. It is not as common as the Whitethroat and is much more likely to go unnoticed as it is more skulking and is quite happy to sing from the middle of a bush. Prefers old hedgerows with thick undergrowth and adjacent rough grassland. Just two records, one each in 2006/7 and 2008/9.

---

Total number seen	2
Total months seen	2

---

**Common Whitethroat** *Sylvia communis*



As the name implies it has a white throat and has warm brown shoulder feathers and brown legs. This species probably breeds in the hedgerows on battle Farm. It prefers hedgerows which have good undergrowth and they tend to be quite conspicuous, choosing to sing from taller shrubs. Recent studies show that the number of these birds depends, not only on their breeding success, but on the conditions in their winter quarters in Africa. Common Whitethroats arrive in April and depart in September.

---

Total number seen	79
Total months seen	30

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**Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*



An unusual species to be found on farmland but the river frontage provides suitable habitat and they breed in reeds along the Thames though probably not along the farm river boundary as there are no suitable areas of reed. Only a single record from 2005/6 and this could have been during migration.

---

Total number seen	2
Total months seen	1

---

**Nuthatch** *Sitta europaea*



The Nuthatch has a long pointed bill and short tail and, unlike woodpeckers and the Treecreeper, it climbs up, down and around the tree trunk and branches using its powerful toes. The song, which is a loud, rapid series of piping notes normally, alerts you to its presence.

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Total number seen	7
Total months seen	6

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**Treecreeper** *Certhia familiaris*



The streaked brown back of the Treecreeper are excellent camouflage against bark as it climbs up trees mouse-like. They usually start at the bottom and work upwards in a spiral around the trunk. The brown downward-curved beak is used to probe crevices for insects and its stiff tail is used as a prop.

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Total number seen	3
Total months seen	2

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**Wren** *Troglodytes troglodytes*



A very common resident. Sometimes overlooked because of its habit of skulking in deep undergrowth but rather spoils the secretive behaviour by singing very loudly, especially for such a small bird. Only missed on two of the 60 surveys and probably overlooked because they were not singing.

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Total number seen	453
Total months seen	115

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**Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris*



A widespread and common resident, but whose numbers are declining. They nest in any hole that is large enough, often in roof spaces if there is access. After the breeding season Starlings gather into flocks of several hundred. These flocks can become very large when immigrants arrive from Eastern Europe but nothing to compare with the 1950's when there were sometimes flocks in excess of a million birds.

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Total number seen	465
Total months seen	39

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**Blackbird** *Turdus merula*



A very common resident.

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Total number seen	1431
Total months seen	120

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**Fieldfare** *Turdus pilaris*



Harsh chuckling calls from passing Fieldfares are a characteristic sound of farmland in winter. They arrive from Northern Europe, in late October and return over a protracted period from February to April. It is a very dark looking thrush, about the size or slightly larger than a Blackbird. It can be easily recognised as it flies away, as it has a very dark tail with a whitish grey rump. Small flocks can sometimes be seen feeding on invertebrates or, if the ground is frozen, fruit or berries. Not recorded in 2009/10 possibly the very cold and protracted winter pushed these birds further south

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Total number seen	595
Total months seen	26

---

**Song Thrush** *Turdus philomelos*



Widespread but in serious decline, especially since 1975 though from personal observation I think there could be a bit of a recovery in recent years. Although it is hard to imagine now, the Song Thrush was more common than the Blackbird before 1945.

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Total number seen	160
Total months seen	68

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**Redwing** *Turdus iliacus*



The Redwing is a common winter visitor from northern Europe (mostly Finland and Russia), arriving in October and departing between March and April. It is our smallest thrush, even smaller than the Song Thrush. Apart from its reddish underwing, it can be recognised easily by its very distinctive eye-stripe and heavily streaked underparts. Like the Fieldfare, small flocks can sometimes be seen feeding on invertebrates, fallen apples or Hawthorn and other berries.

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Total number seen	719
Total months seen	38

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**Mistle Thrush** *Turdus viscivorus*



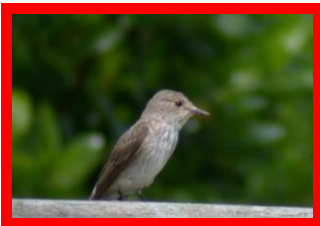
Our largest resident thrush with grey brown plumage on the back and round spots on the breast (they are streaked on the Song Thrush). The Mistle Thrush is widespread but not common. They tend to be associated with larger trees and open fields. Seen, on average, once every six visits.

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Total number seen	24
Total months seen	15

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**Spotted Flycatcher** *Muscicapa striata*



Perhaps surprising that there has only been a single sighting of this declining species as they are known to regularly breed in Howbery Park with which Battle Farm shares a boundary.

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Total number seen	4
Total months seen	2

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**Robin** *Erithacus rubecula*



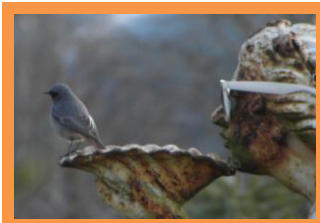
A very common resident. A remarkable increase in numbers during the fifth year of the survey that is difficult to explain.

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Total number seen	1114
Total months seen	119

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**Black Redstart** *Phoenicurus ochruros*



A single sighting of this member of the chat family in March 2013. The black redstart is a small robin-sized bird that has adapted to live at the heart of industrial and urban centres.

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Total number seen	1
Total months seen	1

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**Whinchat** *Saxicola rubetra*



Just a single record of two individuals, in September 2006, on the airfield boundary fence.

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Total number seen	5
Total months seen	4

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**Stonechat** *Saxicola torquata*



A very occasional winter visitor generally early or late winter and all sightings refer to the airfield boundary fence.

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Total number seen	4
Total months seen	3

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**Dunnock** *Prunella modularis*



Another very common resident only missed once in 60 surveys.

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Total number seen	607
Total months seen	118

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**House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus*



A bird strongly linked to mans activity. Although widespread and common it has been in steady decline since 1979 both on farms and in gardens. Hence this not a numerous species around Battle Farm. They nest in holes but will occasionally make a very untidy domed nest in ivy or trees. They will also sometimes take over a House Martins nest.

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Total number seen	178
Total months seen	51

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**Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava*



The yellow wagtail is a small graceful yellow and green bird, with a medium-length tail, and slender black legs. It spends much time walking or running on the ground. It is a summer visitor, migrating to winter in Africa. It appears to have been in decline since at least the 1980s, most likely due to loss of habitat for breeding and feeding. The Yellow Wagtail has only been recorded once, in 2006/7 when a pair probably bred locally.

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Total number seen	8
Total months seen	5

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**Grey Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea*



This is the most graceful of the wagtails with its nimble actions and handsome plumage. The grey head and back, contrasting with bright lime yellow under the tail, eases identification. They prefer fast flowing streams but can often be seen, in the winter months, feeding on insects at the sewage farm.

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Total number seen	78
Total months seen	47

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**Pied Wagtail** *Motacilla alba yarrellii*



The elegant black and white plumage and graceful actions of the Pied Wagtail are a familiar sight around human habitation and frequent the sewage farm, sometimes, in large numbers. The highest count to date has been 71 but counts quite often exceed 50.

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Total number seen	1052
Total months seen	88

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**Meadow Pipit** *Anthus pratensis*



This species is a regular winter visitor being attracted to the sewage farm where they feed on insects. They can occur in quite large numbers the maximum recorded during surveys being 44.

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Total number seen	329
Total months seen	45

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**Brambling** *Fringilla montifringilla*



The Brambling, a close relative of the Chaffinch, is a winter visitor to the area. Although fairly common in the Beech woods they rarely come to farmland though sometimes to gardens and orchards where they feed on fallen fruit.

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Total number seen	3
Total months seen	1

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**Chaffinch** *Fringilla coelebs*



The Chaffinch is widespread and a common resident whose population is stable. They breed widely around the farm, building a neat, cup shaped nest in hedgerows. The population levels increase in winter due to immigration from Europe.

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Total number seen	1625
Total months seen	120

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**Bullfinch** *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*



Somewhat surprisingly only two sightings of this brightly coloured finch – both in December, one in 2011 and one the following year.

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Total number seen	2
Total months seen	2

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**Greenfinch** *Carduelis chloris*

The Greenfinch is a widespread and common resident whose population is stable. It is a regular visitor to the farm but in relatively small numbers.

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Total number seen	338
Total months seen	79

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**Linnet** *Carduelis cannabina*

The Linnet is present throughout the year though much more numerous in the winter when they gather into large flocks, augmented by birds from Europe and are to be seen on rough ground and stubble where they feed on weed seeds. They have been in serious decline since 1974 though recently they have benefited from set-aside and have taken a liking to Rape crops. Records have been very sporadic, the actual location of winter flocks making a large difference to the table.

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Total number seen	1064
Total months seen	43

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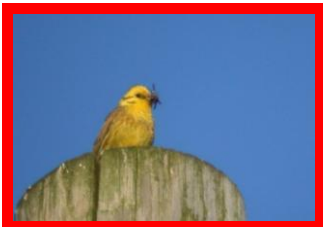
**Goldfinch** *Carduelis carduelis*

A favourite for cage bird enthusiasts early this century, but thankfully no longer - at least in this country. The Goldfinch is a seed eater, which does well on unkempt areas, especially where teasel, burdock or thistles flourish. They were seen on about half of the surveys but there was a slight increase in sightings during the period covered by this note..

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Total number seen	880
Total months seen	82

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**Yellowhammer** *Emberiza citrinella*

The Yellowhammer is probably best known for its song which is often written as "little bit of bread and no cheese". They are widespread and common along hedgerows and rough grassland associated with open farmland. Nationally, numbers have been declining since 1988 which may, in part, be due to the change to autumn sown cereal crops with the resultant lack of winter stubble fields but records from Battle Farm have remained fairly encouraging.

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Total number seen	438
Total months seen	85

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**Reed Bunting** *Emberiza schoeniclus*

The Reed Bunting is sparrow-sized but slim and with a long, deeply notched tail. Male birds have a black head, white collar and a drooping moustache. Females and winter males have a streaked head. This farmland and wetland bird has suffered a serious population decline, possibly in part, for the same reasons given for Yellowhammer.

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Total number seen	28
Total months seen	17

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**Corn Bunting** *Emberiza calandra*



This nondescript lowland farmland bird is the largest of the buntings and is most usually seen perched on a wire or post. It is a stout, dumpy brown bird which flies off with a fluttering flight and with its legs characteristically 'dangling'. Its dramatic population decline in the UK makes it a Red List species.

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Total number seen	17
Total months seen	7

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## Other Wildlife

### Butterflies

Butterfly sightings are for interest only and in no way represent a “scientific survey”. The recommendation for butterfly surveys is to only carry them out in dry conditions, when the wind speed is less than Beaufort scale 5, and the temperature is 13°C or greater if there is at least 60% sunshine, or more than 17°C if overcast. It was not practical to comply with these stringent recommendations during the bird surveys but, nevertheless, considered worthwhile to keep a note of species encountered.



**Comma**



**Small Copper**

During the first five years of the survey, between April 2005 and March 2010, a total of 23 species of butterfly were seen. The following table gives details of the sightings year by year, a 1 indicating that the species was seen in that year.

<b>SPECIES</b>	<b>2005/6</b>	<b>2006/7</b>	<b>2007/8</b>	<b>2008/9</b>	<b>2009/10</b>
Small Skipper	1		1	1	1
Essex Skipper				1	
Large Skipper		1	1	1	1
Brimstone	1		1		
Large White	1	1	1	1	1
Small White	1	1	1	1	1
Green-veined White		1	1	1	1
Orange-tip	1	1	1		1
Small Copper		1			1
Brown Argos					1
Common Blue	1	1		1	1
Holly Blue	1		1		1
Red Admiral	1	1	1	1	1
Painted Lady		1			1
Small Tortoiseshell	1	1	1	1	1
Peacock		1	1	1	1
Comma	1	1	1	1	1
Speckled Wood	1	1	1	1	1
Marbled White	1	1	1	1	1
Gatekeeper	1	1	1	1	1
Meadow Brown	1	1	1	1	1
Ringlet	1	1	1	1	1
Small Heath	1	1	1	1	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>21</b>

The summer of 2008 was particularly poor for butterflies due to prolonged wet and cool weather.

## Dragonflies and Damselflies



Although the list of the above is rather sparse this is perhaps not too surprising as most members of Odonata favour still water for a large proportion of their life. The only species identified were:

Club-tailed Dragonfly (above left)  
Banded Demoiselle (above right)  
Common Darter

## Mammals

These are very much “casual” observations and biased towards the larger, easily seen and those active during daylight hours.

Muntjak Deer  
Roe Deer  
Fox  
Rabbit  
Hare (on airfield)  
Grey Squirrel  
Mole (evidence)

## Flowers

This is a list of “showy” species noticed during the surveys:

Cowslip  
Ragged Robin  
Oxe Eye Daisy  
Meadowsweet  
Pyramidal Orchid