

## Fairfield Winter Bird Survey 2019-2020

As with previous winter bird surveys, a monthly visit was carried out between November and February inclusive. Each visit took place in the morning and lasted for approximately three hours.

In a change to previous surveys the wetter, rushier fields were not walked systematically to flush out Snipe, because the Fairfield Association regularly undertake their own snipe species flush counts. However, when encountered, Snipe and Jack Snipe were registered on the field maps and subsequently entered in the count data.

The cessation of this survey component *may* have resulted in 'missing' a few skulking Wrens and Meadow Pipits but both these species were scanned and listened for and I think it is a fair trade-off for reducing the invasive disturbance of these habitats.

The arable field *was* walked thoroughly (approx 10-metre widths) in order to fully assess if and how this was utilised by songbirds. As in previous winters it also revealed that this relatively dry habitat was also used by low numbers of Snipe and Jack Snipe!

As a result of this fieldwork method the relatively hard to 'dislodge' Skylark was found on two out of four visits. The counts (1 and 2 respectively) were unimpressive but hopefully flocks will find the habitat in future winter periods.

Amber-listed Meadow Pipits, which have a limited (but perhaps increasing) wintering presence in our part of Lancashire were more numerous with a maximum day count of 13 in the grassy stubble.

Other species feeding in this habitat included Greenfinch, Wren, Jackdaw and Mistle Thrush. However, site management appears to have had the clearest positive impact on Linnet. Numbers of this red-listed finch were very impressive on a local level, with a maximum count of 75 in the late December visit. The species was feeding both in the border strips and in the more open stubble zones, while also seeking refuge up in the trees in Pony Wood when disturbed.

In terms of other farmland species, Stock Doves were present throughout the period, and indeed are a welcome (and slowly increasing) year-round presence on site. Reed Buntings, which in summer are more often encountered in the wetter northern meadows of the site was seen in single-figure groups in the arable southern half of the site. Again, this winter distribution is likely due to the managed habitat here namely stubble and set-aside.

Grey Partridge was absent-- unfortunate for a species which until recently has been 'hanging on' at Fairfield, but perhaps not surprising for a bird in such steep local and national decline. Two recorded on the former tip at Salt Ayre in April 2020 perhaps gives a little hope that with continued management Fairfield will see the species return.

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