

Fairfield Nature Reserve Breeding Birds 2019

This year I made three early morning visits during the peak breeding season (April, May and June) in good survey conditions. A fourth (perhaps early July) visit wasn't possible for the surveyor but might have proved useful in forming a better impression of breeding productivity.

Diversity of species was a little down on 2018 with 31 (compared with 37) species considered to be breeding on-site, as well as three or four 'possibles' in the somewhat frustrating '0-1 pairs' bracket.

The accompanying spreadsheet lays out all the relevant sightings and counts but please read on for some comment, comparison and conjecture.

Goldfinches, Chaffinches and Greenfinches were well represented this year (up to 7, 5 and 3 pairs respectively were each up on last year's figures). The latter species is in trichomonosis-linked decline so their consolidation on site in recent years is welcome.

After one pair in 2018, the breeding Linnet population seemed to be back to the familiar zero in 2019, although a briefly-singing male on one visit offered some hope for future seasons. Less worrying, given their less conspicuous habits, was Bullfinch-- slipping from last year's one pair to this year's 'possible'-- with a pair seen, but crucially on just one visit.

Blue and Great Tits seemed to have had a good season, with an increase in pairs and some productivity (ie fledged young) noted during the final visit. Regular monitoring of nest boxes would give a more accurate handle on success here.

Other familiar green-listed species like Robin, Blackbird, Wren and Dunnock were all more abundant than in recent breeding seasons.

All bird populations fluctuate naturally so it is hard to say how much if any of these temporary gains are attributable to site management, but it is tempting to think that the recent (though modest) consolidation of Common Whitethroat and Lesser Whitethroat (one pair apiece breeding this year) could be linked to healthy hedgerows and perhaps a local environment of invertebrate abundance. Another (more arboreal) warbler, the Blackcap, was particularly numerous this breeding season and Chiffchaff remained steady at two pairs.

Reed Bunting has had a small but regular breeding (and wintering) presence on site since this surveyor has been visiting the area (c.1996 onwards) so a drawing a blank this spring and summer was a little disappointing, though perhaps not entirely unsurprising given its continued declines nationwide.

A second year of absence for Grey Partridge is more worrying, particularly against a grim backdrop of steep local and national declines. The practice of releasing farmed Red-legged Partridge and Pheasant has been posited as being one of several factors detrimental to wild native Grey Partridges and although the former introduced species was not encountered this year, Pheasant was-- and was seen to be breeding successfully.

Waterfowl and waders had a disappointing season, with Lapwing presence ceasing after a flurry of early spring reports. My April visit saw a male displaying widely over the site,

without a partner or potential mate for an audience, and perhaps predictably both subsequent visits were Lapwing-free. The other most viable wader species, Oystercatcher, showed early promise but also failed to breed.

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September 2019