.ALNWICK WILDLIFE GROUP

NORTHUMBERLAND ESTATES BIRD SURVEY

REPORT FOR APRIL 2019 – FEBRUARY 2020

This survey is carried out by members of the Alnwick Wildlife Group.

Introduction

Aims of the Survey

The basic aim is to attempt to measure the effects of Northumberland Estates' management on the wild bird population in the area of the survey, also to record any other points of interest which the survey may reveal about the local wildlife.

Areas of the Survey

The survey is taking place on four areas, where Northumberland Estates are attempting to increase the population of Red Grouse to a point where some sustainable shooting is possible. One other area is leased for private shooting and is under different management. These areas are: -

Post Office Pylon.
Black Lough.
Alnwick Moor.
Hulne Moor.
Kimmer Lough. (Private shooting)

All these areas are on the Fell Sandstone ridge, which runs roughly in a semi-circle round the base of the Cheviots. All except the Kimmer Lough rise to about 250 metres and have a typical upland vegetation of heather on shallow peat but there are some areas of Blanket Bog with a depth of peat at over 40cm. where heather burning should no longer be carried out. There is also a wide variety of other habitats. The average size of each area is approximately 120 hectares. The Estates management is mainly heather burning to improve its feeding value for Red Grouse and suitability for breeding cover. More intensive control of some predators is carried out, improved water availability for dry periods and provision of limestone grit etc. Hulne and Alnwick Moors form the area of highest Grouse population at present, followed by the Post Office Pylon, which is approx. one mile away, and the Black Lough at two miles. Here there are only one or two pairs of breeding Red Grouse but it is hoped that the numbers will increase. Kimmer Lough is more distant and at a lower level. The shooting here is let and the management of the moor is less intensive. Few Red Grouse have been recorded.

Methodology of the Survey.

The five sites are visited five times annually, three during the breeding season and twice in the winter. All birds are recorded but a small number have been selected as the "target species" which are those more commonly found in these areas and most likely to be affected by the Estate management. In an attempt to produce comparable results specific routes are used at each visit and approximately the same time spent there. Visits are made when weather is reasonable since recording is impossible in extreme weather.

Analysis of Data

The counts of the target species from each area are totalled and graphs produced from these results. To achieve the aims of the survey a comparison with population counts over a larger area must be made. An attempt is made to compare our figures with UK national averages produced by BTO from their annual Breeding Bird Surveys. National figures can often be misleading when used as a direct comparison in any one local area and these facts have to be taken into consideration when reviewing the results. The "Bird Atlas" published by the British Trust for Ornithology, also gives very useful information when comparing local trends in population over the ten-year period prior to 2011 when the previous Atlas was produced but is becoming less relevant as time passes. The more recently published "Northumbria Bird Atlas" from the Northumbria and Tyneside Bird Club, also provides much useful and more local information. Last produced in 2015, it is also becoming out dated.

The numbers of some species can vary so much during the ten-year periods between National surveys that the results can be very misleading. A more accurate picture can be obtained from annual surveys such as this, being made on a more regular basis.

There are many factors affecting bird populations. Weather is easily shown to be the most important. Periods of severe winter conditions leading to starvation, especially in those species more dependent on insects for food. Very dry periods also affect insect development and can create a shortage for the species which are completely dependent on them. (eg. Wrens.) The effects of the winter periods on some species between 2010/11, when there were two month-long periods with complete snow cover, as well as low temperatures, can be clearly seen on the graphs. Late and wet breeding seasons also have had a depressing effect on some species. It is interesting to see how populations may change with improving weather conditions.

Botanical List.

The vegetation lists of the five areas included in the NEBS surveys is now presented as a separate item and can be found along with the results of other surveys in the "archives" pages of the "Alnwick Wildlife Group" web site.

Breeding Period Results for Target Species

Falling populations of many British birds in recent years have resulted in the grouping of species into three bands: -

Black. For those not endangered.
Amber. Those for which there is some concern.
Red. For those at greatest risk.

BTO National figures give: -

(A) A long-term trend as a % rise or fall over the period 1995-2017
(B) A Breeding Bird Survey trend as an estimated average % rise or fall over the period 2017-2018

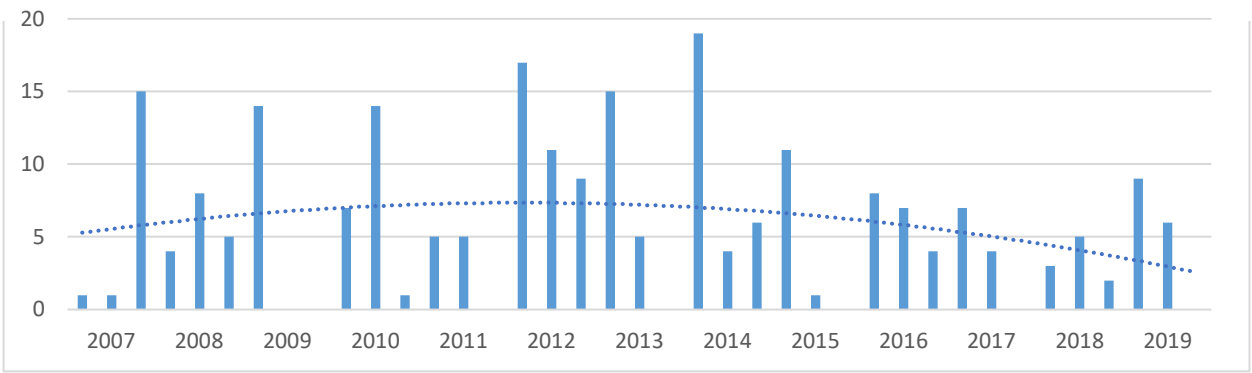
Please note that these are the latest figures published by BTO. And are approx. two years behind our own counts.

Information taken from the BTO National Bird Atlas is shown as "**(BA)**" and from the Northumbria Bird Atlas as "**(NBA)**".

These figures and the colour classifications are given along with the graph for each of the target species.

The graphs that follow show the breeding period records for each of the target species.

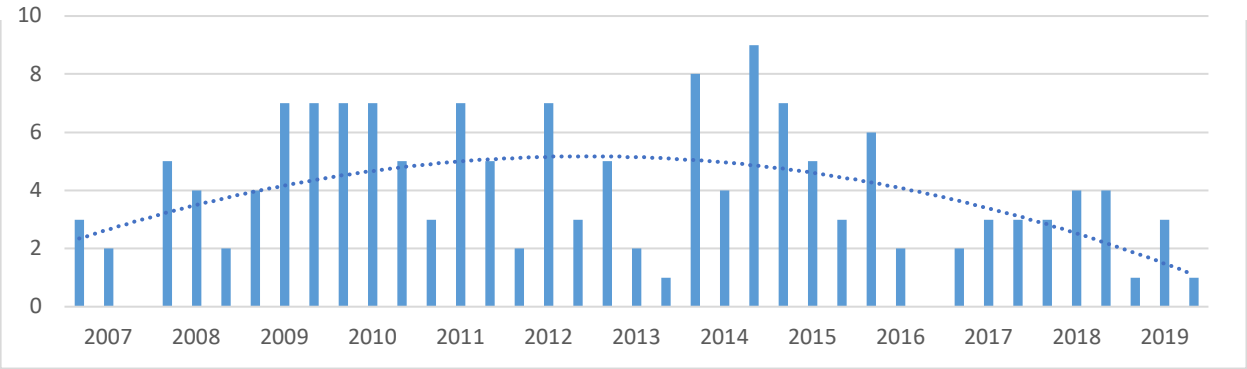
Mallard



Mallard have been recorded in very irregular numbers, which may include young birds at some counts and therefore may not give a true picture of their breeding status but it would now seem that there has been a gradual decrease in counts, especially in the last four years of the survey. Both the (BA) and (NBA) indicate a very gradual increase in numbers over a long period, but a sharp decrease over the last four years, which would appear to agree with our survey results. The total count of birds may be affected by shooting. None at all were recorded at the June survey.

Amber listed (A) +12% (B) -6%

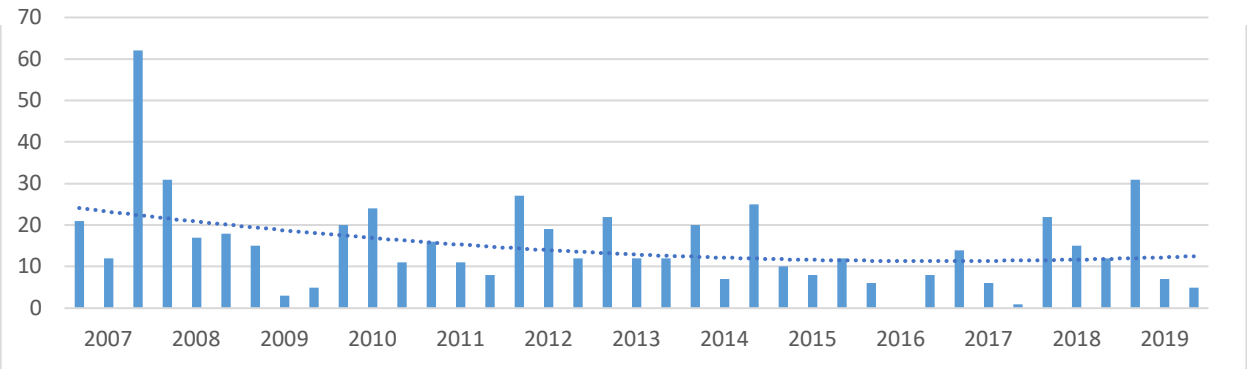
Buzzard



The vast spread of Common Buzzard into the eastern counties in the last 25 years is reflected in the long-term trend figures shown below. A reduction in local counts during 2011/13 was attributed to poor breeding results and a levelling off due to pressure on available breeding territories. Our records for 2016 show a reduction in numbers which may be due to the very late breeding season in the North East and follows the national figures which show a small drop in numbers. This has been followed by an increase in 2018 and another fall in 2019, which again follows the national figures.

Black listed (A) +96% (B) -3%

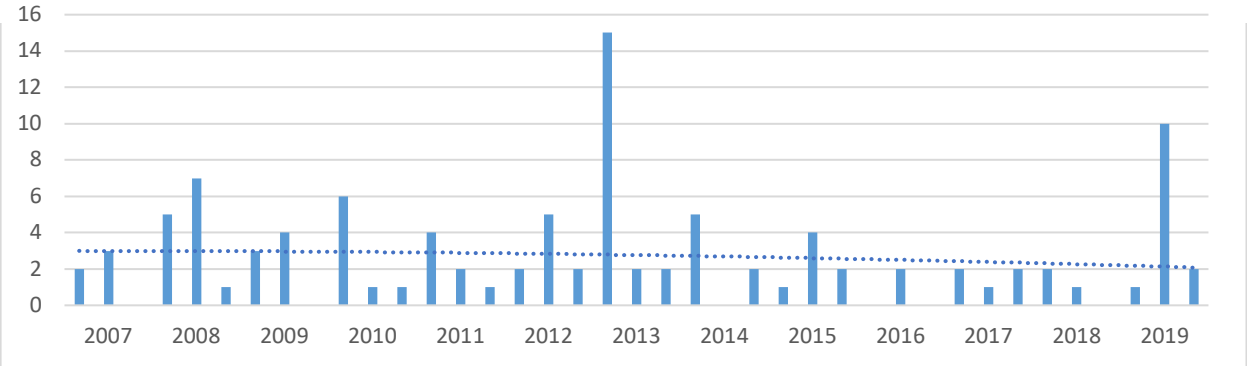
Red Grouse



The population of Red Grouse appears to have reduced gradually over the last few years, to 2017. The low level of shooting during that period will probably have been sufficient to control any increase in numbers. None were shot in the 2016 to 2018 seasons, and very limited shooting in 2019 when approximately twenty birds were shot. These counts may be very misleading and numbers recorded during the winter are usually much higher (see the winter chart) when birds are less secretive. One or two pairs have bred successfully in recent years at the Black Lough but it is thought that they may have moved to areas of higher population once on the wing.
(NBA) shows major gains in the area of the Cheviots. (BA) indicates little change in the national population during the last twenty years but a healthy increase in numbers in the last twelve months. This chart indicates a small increase in the last twelve months.

Amber listed (A) +3% (B) +26%

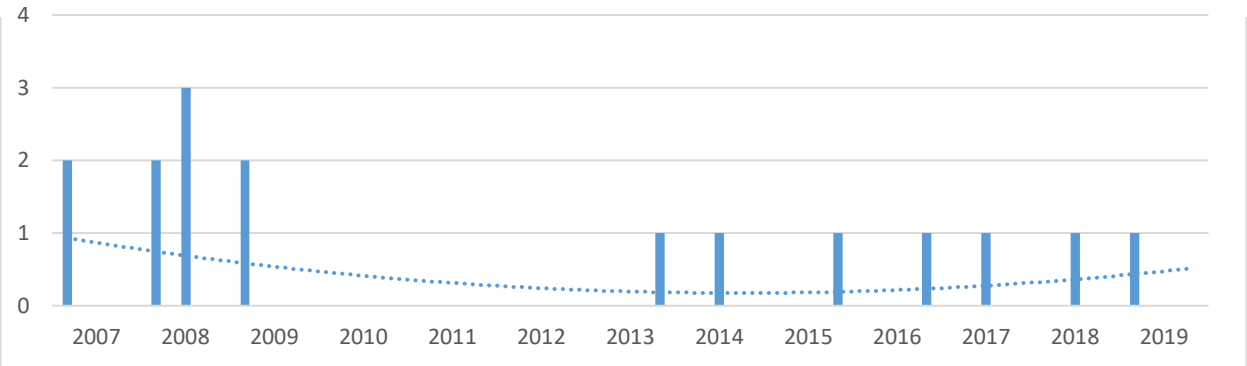
Red Legged Partridge



Red Legged Partridge in the survey areas are probably the remnants of birds released here in previous years or from releases on neighbouring estates. Hand-reared birds released for shooting do not make good breeding stock in the wild. The survey area is not the natural habitat for Red Legged Partridge, although many are now released on heather moorland for shooting in other areas. A continued decline in numbers is most likely here.

Black listed (A) +10% (B) -12%

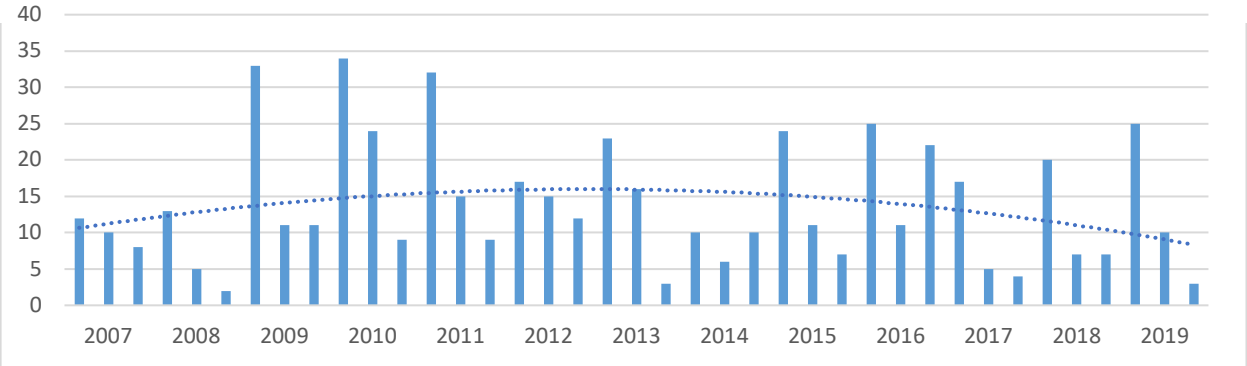
Grey Partridge



The areas covered by the survey are not natural habitat for Grey Partridge, it is therefore not surprising that the population has more or less disappeared. But (NBA) Records a healthy increase in Grey Partridge counts in the area to the west of Alnwick, which will no doubt be due to the Partridge scheme in progress there. It would not be surprising to see some movement of Greys into the NEBS survey areas on Alnwick Moor.

Red listed (A) -63% (B) -6%

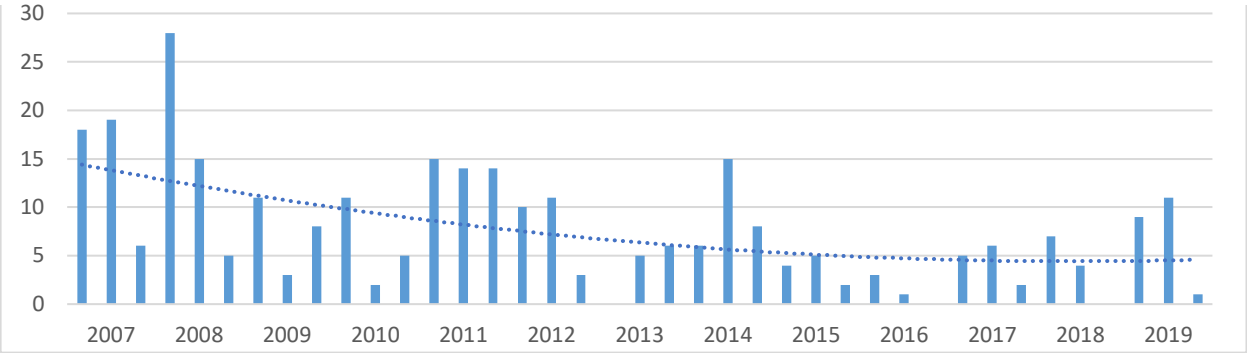
Pheasant



Counts of Pheasant will always vary where they have been released for shooting. There is one release pen affecting the survey which is on the border of Hulne Moor. At the Kimmer Lough some birds have been released and the area is shot over on a very regular basis throughout the season. (NBA) & (BA) both show little change in either local or national figures on a long term average, but it is noted that the short term estimates over each of the last twelve months vary widely.

Black listed (A) +34% (B) 0%

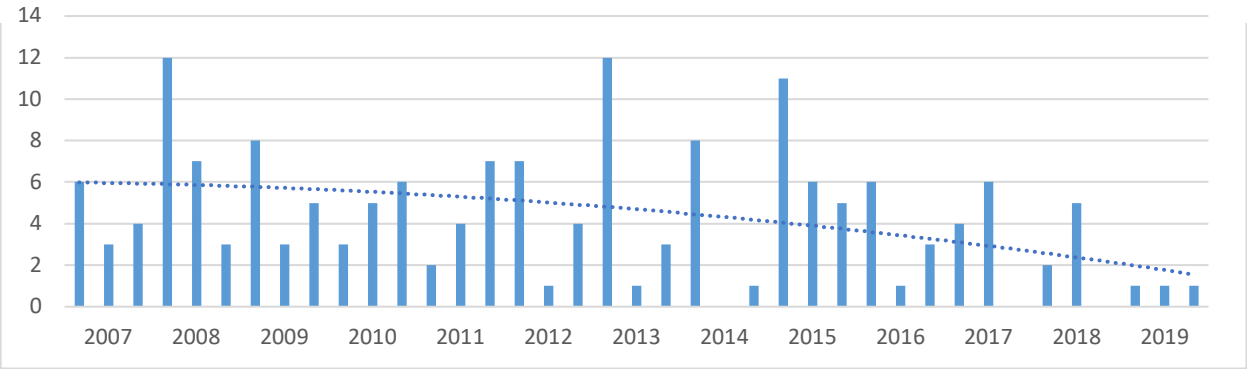
Lapwing



The apparent slow decline shown in this graph would seem to be following the general trend both nationally and locally but here there are slightly increased numbers in the April and May counts during the last three years, which is encouraging. Lapwing are early breeders and will start to flock and move before the last visit in June. (BA) shows the highest losses are from the western side of the country. (NBA) indicates a rise in population in our area which is more likely to be on marginal grassland more suited to their requirements or on over-wintered stubble. An excellent example of this is at Ratcheugh where some stubble fields have been left and Lapwing numbers have increased. This is dependent on crop rotation which will always vary.

Red listed (A) -42% (B) -5%

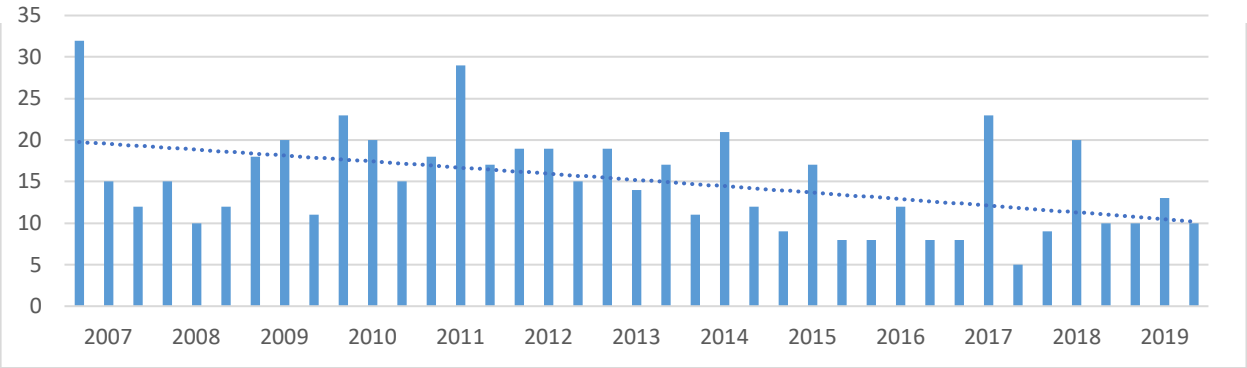
Snipe



The higher counts of Snipe made in late April of most years will include birds which were still on passage. Counts made later in the season would indicate a small but regular population of breeding birds. (BA) results indicate that there has been a reduction in their lowland breeding habitats. (NBA) results show a more stable population. National figures indicate a very stable population but this graph shows a downward trend.

Amber listed (A) +32% (B) 0%

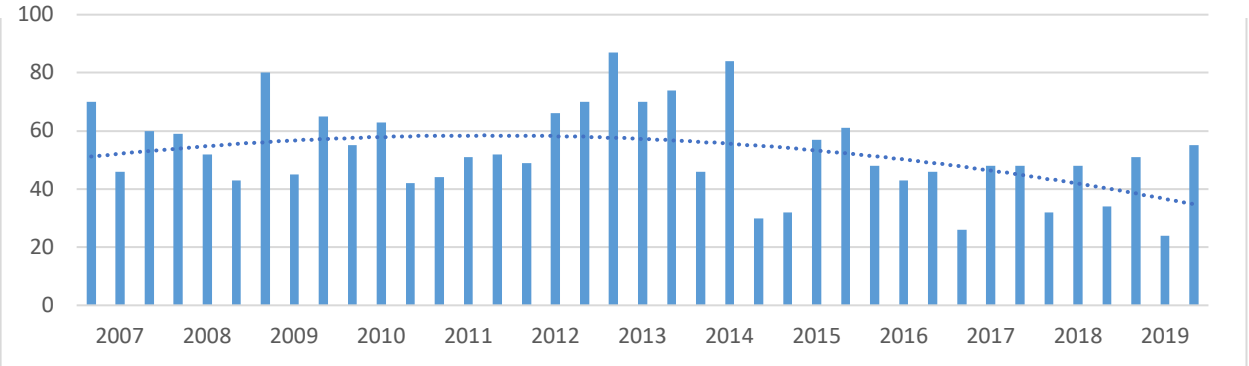
Curlew



Curlew are showing a slow decline in the survey area which is disappointing since (NBA) records a stable population in the North East. National figures show a steady decline overall. The highest counts appear to be in the late May visits when there are likely to be young hatched and much more activity amongst the adults.

Red listed (A) -48% (B) -3%

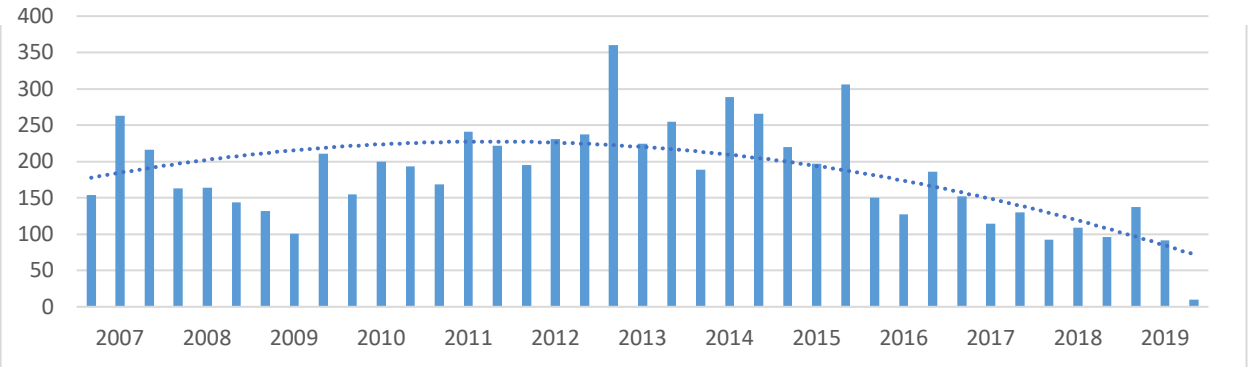
Skylark



Skylarks in our area appear to have been holding their own, a better result than the national average. As one of the commoner species in the survey area, they are more likely to show the results of local management. The biggest losses have been in Ireland (BA). Losses in England are mainly associated with more intensification in arable farming areas with the change from spring-sown to winter-sown crops. Population in the North East appears to be stable (NBA).

Red listed (A) -18% (B) +3%

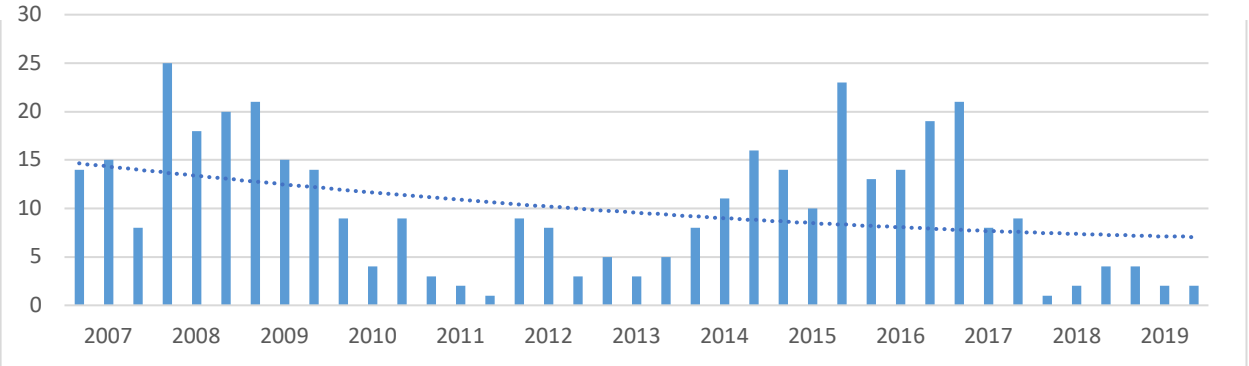
Meadow Pipit



Meadow Pipits are the commonest species in the survey area and are therefore most likely to indicate any change in population trends. In this area they would appear to have followed the national trend with a fall in the early years of the survey but a better than average rise until 2015 since when counts have fallen. In the British Isles there has been a loss of numbers mainly in Ireland and the west coast of the UK (BA).

Amber listed (A) -18% (B) -10%

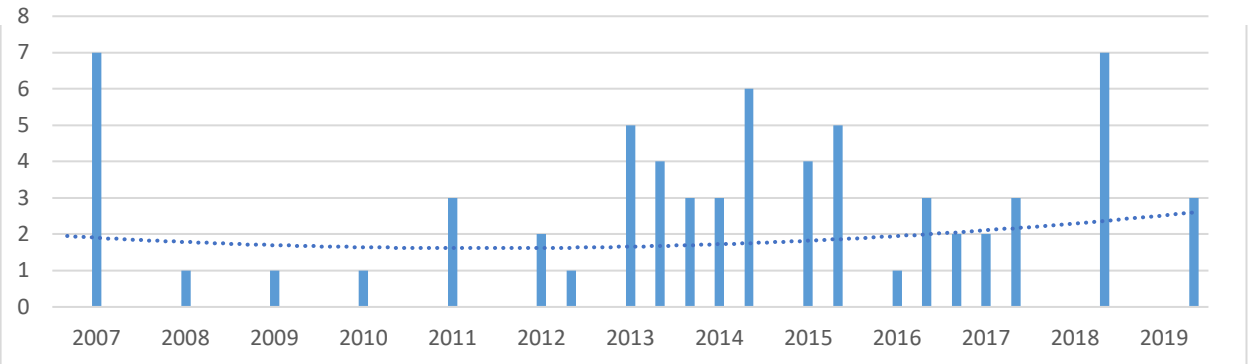
Wren



After the catastrophic fall in Wren numbers due to weather conditions in 2010 to 2012, counts then showed a dramatic improvement only to be hammered again in the 2017/18 winter, when a short period of snow cover and low temperatures was followed by a late, cold and dry spring. It is hoped that better conditions will now allow them to bounce back. This would be typical of their ability to produce large numbers of young when conditions allow. Repopulation of the higher heather moorland, where in the past numbers have been healthy, in these surveys has been very slow, compared to more favourable areas of more sheltered woodland or coastal habitats.

Black listed (A) +34% (B) -21%

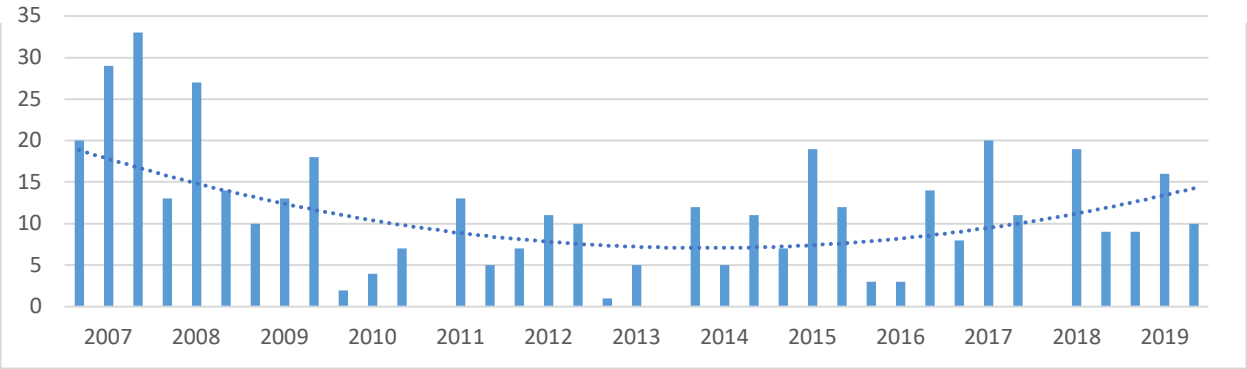
Whinchat



Whinchats have had several better years, with sightings of successful family groups on several occasions. National losses have been general throughout the British Isles over a long period, losing breeding habitat in England more than in Scotland or Wales. (BA) This trend appears to have been reversed in the survey areas. As a migrant species, Whinchats are not affected by our winter weather but will be subject to conditions in their winter quarters where drought has been a problem in the Sahel.

Red listed (A) -56% (B) -12%

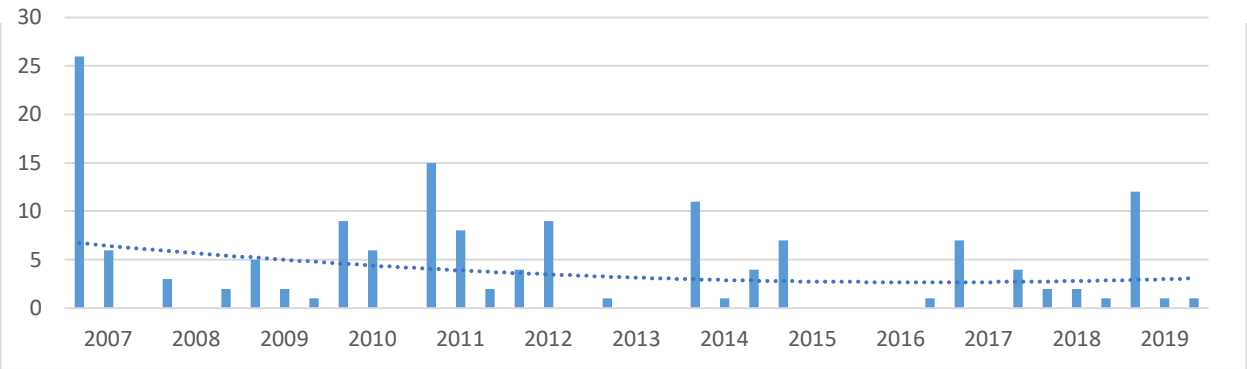
Stonechat



Stonechats in the survey area show slow signs of recovery in the last four years, after the bad winters of 2010/11 which the graph would indicate, has affected them severely. In the twenty years up to 2008 there had been a steady increase in numbers moving into the North East of England and eastern Scotland from the west. (BA) National figures show a steady increase.

Black listed (A) +87% (B) -39%

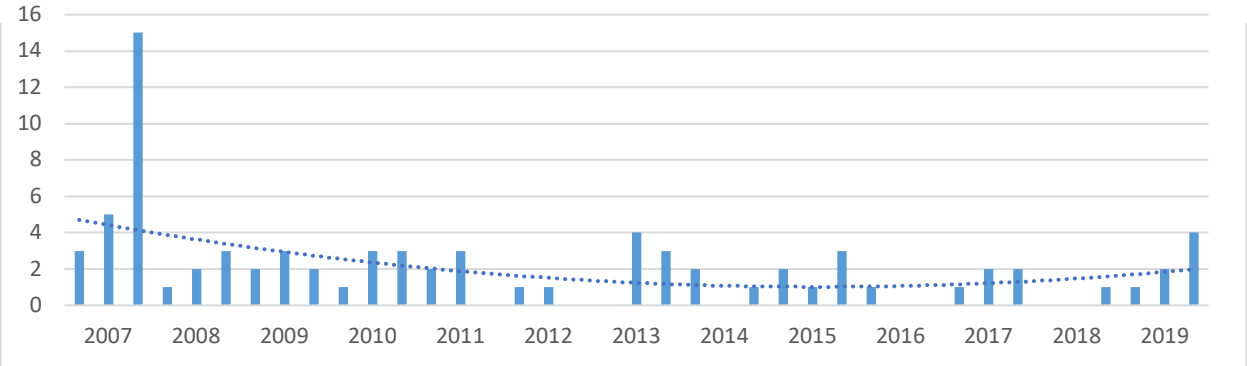
Wheatear



There would appear to be only a very small population of Wheatears breeding in the survey area, most records being of birds in passage, early in the season. It is estimated that there are only 700 pairs nesting in the county (NBA). Nationally there has been a very gradual reduction in numbers over a long period (BA). This is another migrant species.

Black listed (A) -34% (B) -3%

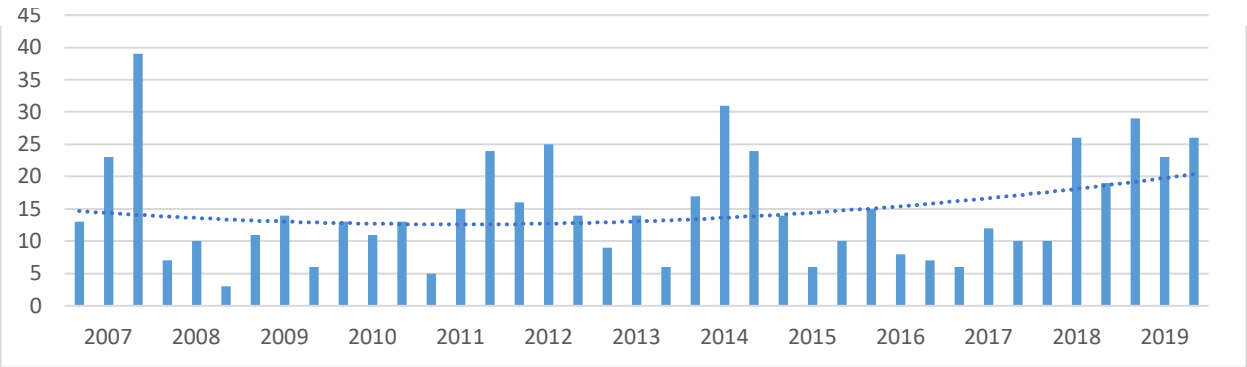
Song Thrush



Song Thrush continue to be seen in very small numbers. Most records are made at the edges of the survey areas where forestry plantations form the boundary. More of these trees have now been removed, which will obviously have an effect on numbers recorded and make this graph inaccurate. Nationally there is a small increase in numbers, after a long period of decline. (BA) The use of molluscicides has been blamed in part for their decline. It is good to see that nationally there has been a small increase recorded over the last three years.

Red listed (A) +29% (B) -18%

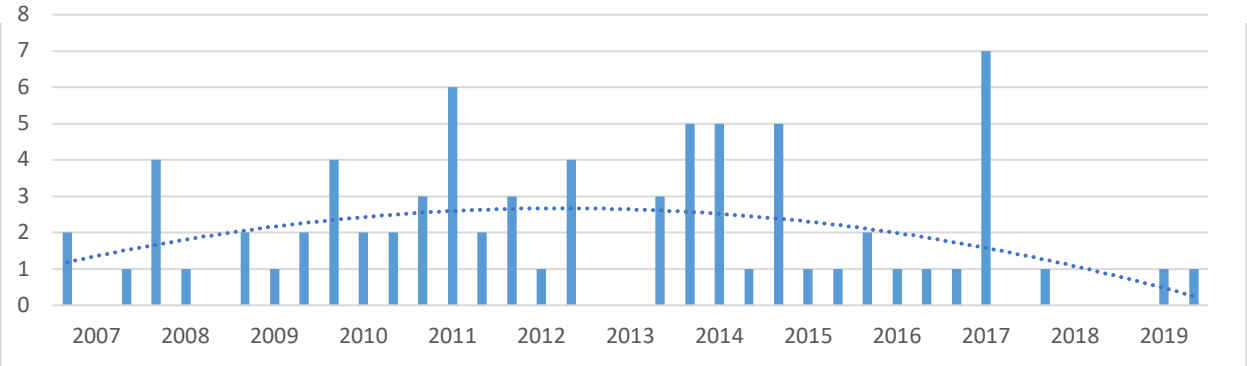
Carrion Crow



Despite gamekeeper control, numbers remain steady as vacant territories are recolonized from outside the area and higher numbers have been seen in the last two years. The national and local population remains constant (BA). It is interesting to note that during the two world war periods Carrion Crows increased dramatically since there was practically no gamekeeping and they also were able to Increase their breeding range.

Black listed (A) +18% (B) 0%

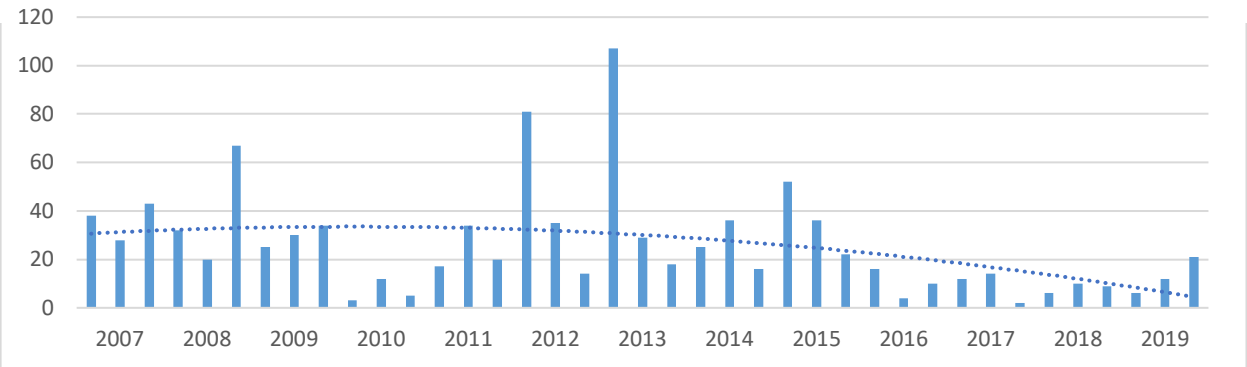
Yellowhammer



In the survey areas Yellowhammers are only recorded in small numbers during the breeding season as, except for a few areas of Gorse, there is little suitable habitat for them. Over the British Isles, continued losses seem to have happened on the edges of its recognized breeding areas and also on higher land mainly in the north west and in Ireland. (BA) Locally the population is fairly steady (NBA). In the survey areas there has been a decline during the last two years. Historically their decline started in the 1950/60's, possibly due to the use of organochlorine as a seed dressing.

Red listed (A) -21% (B) -3%

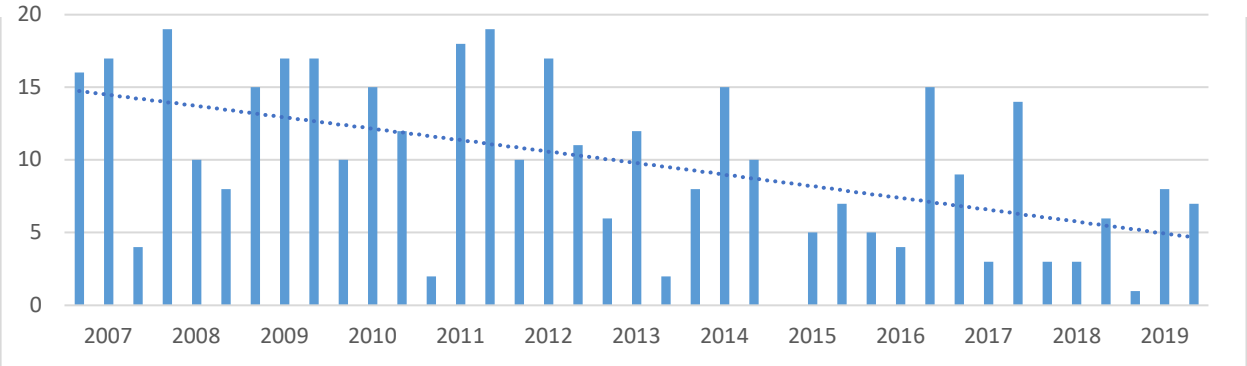
Linnet



The higher counts made in the early or late breeding period when Linnets are either still in flocks prior to breeding or are already beginning to gather together after fledging, should be discounted. The breeding population obviously suffered in the bad conditions of 2010, then increased in numbers until the last three years when they have again fallen. Nationally, Linnets have suffered losses in their northern breeding areas (BA), but appear to have a stable population here in the North East (NBA). This is not indicated in our survey results.

Red listed (A) -17% (B) -4%

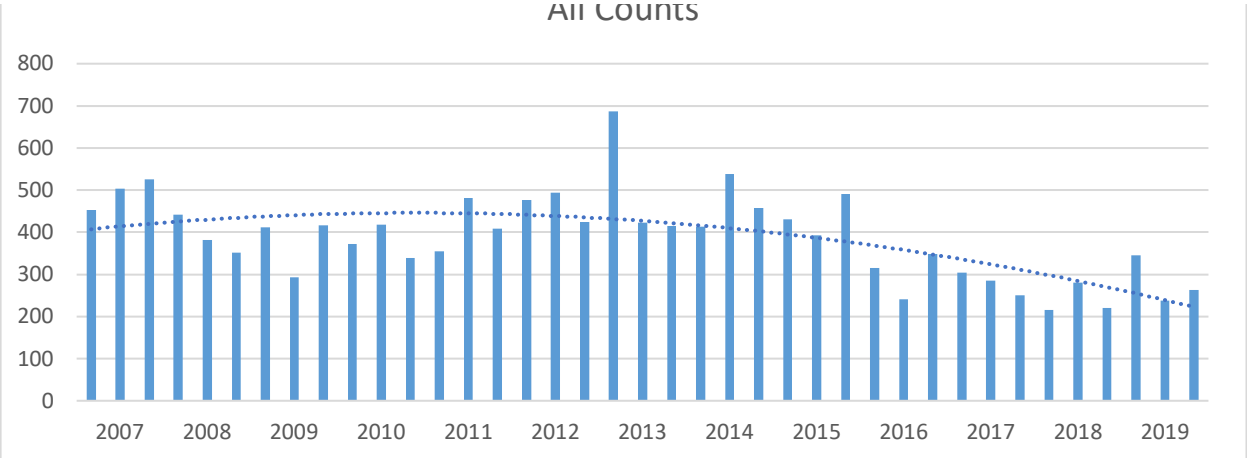
Reed Bunting



Reed Bunting numbers have slowly fallen in the survey areas. Only a relatively small part of the area is suitable breeding habitat. Nationally the population is stable. (BA) but still shows a fall of -13% in 2017-18.

Amber listed (A) +37% (B) -13%

Total of All Breeding Period Counts (Target Species)



2017 to 2019 have shown to be the lowest average total number of birds of the Target Species recorded in the survey to date. This graph shows a gradual overall decrease in the number of birds recorded during the time of the survey.

Others of the Target Species in the Breeding Season

The following list of birds, which were originally included with the target species, have not been recorded in sufficient numbers to enable any useful graphs to be produced for them. They have therefore been excluded from the list, although any sightings are still recorded. They are: -

Merlin
Recorded occasionally in four areas, except Kimmer Lough, and mainly seen in April but there has been no evidence of breeding. The total number of breeding Merlin in Northumberland has been estimated at fifteen pairs.

Golden Plover
Alnwick Moor seems to be the favourite area for these, with flocks numbering from 19 to 400 recorded in the April surveys on six occasions. They would at that time be on their way to their breeding territories in the north. A further group of 70 birds were recorded in April of 2019 at the Post Office Pylon site.

Jack Snipe
Very occasional records of single birds, mainly in the autumn passage. Smaller than Common Snipe with shorter bill and legs, their flight is usually more direct and shorter.

Woodcock
Often seen as winter visitors, arriving in late autumn. Originally seen as a game bird but now A protected species.

Nightjar
A record from Alnwick Moor of a pair during May 2009 and another from the adjoining area of Hulne Moor, which may have been a breeding pair. The area in which they were recorded would seem to be very suitable for breeding. The number of breeding birds in north Northumberland is very gradually increasing.

Raven
There have been a good number of records from most of the survey areas of Ravens. They are increasing their range to the east and are recorded in increasing numbers. A pair were recorded in late February in the Hulne Moor area and another pair were seen on three occasions at the Black Lough, both of which may have been breeding pairs. Ravens are very early breeders and could possibly have completed their nesting before the start of our breeding period of surveys had commenced.

Conclusions

Despite the relatively small amount of data gathered by the survey, an attempt to compare these with National averages appears to be the only way to achieve the aims of the survey.

Taking into account the thirteen years of the survey, the following table is a comparison which should be viewed critically.

In view of the fact that there is a reduction in numbers of many species it might be taken as a satisfactory result if the local population of any species is being maintained at a constant level.

Species with higher counts during breeding period than National averages.

Skylark. (Red listed)
Whinchat (based on very small counts). (Amber listed)
Carrion Crow (Black listed)
Grey Partridge. (Red listed)

Species with lower counts than the National average.

Yellowhammer (Red listed)
Red Legged Partridge. (Black listed)
Linnet. (Red listed)
Reed Bunting. (Amber listed}
Snipe (Amber listed)

Species with little variation from the National averages.

Red Grouse. (Black listed)
Pheasant (affected by birds released for shooting). (Black listed)
Stonechat (Black listed)
Song Thrush (Red Listed)
Wren (weather related). (Black listed)
Lapwing. (Red listed)
Mallard. (Amber listed)
Buzzard. (Black listed)
Curlew. (Red listed)
Meadow Pipit. (Amber listed)
Wheatear (based on small numbers). (Amber listed)

Summary of the five areas.

Kimmer Lough. Breeding Season 2019.

All three breeding season surveys were completed in favourable conditions. The spring and early summer were quite dry and often comparatively mild and even the June visit happened before the weather took a significant turn for the worse during the middle of the month. Whether the breeding success of the first broods of the moorland nesting birds will have been adversely affected cannot be known from these surveys.

Two new species were added to the breeding season list for the Kimmer site. A Cormorant was seen by the lough on the April visit and, far more interestingly, a quail was heard on the May visit in the tussocky grassland to the north west of the lough.

It is now eight years since Lapwing has been recorded here and once again there were no records in 2019. Similarly the absence of Snipe, which appeared in 2018, was repeated this year.

No Cuckoos were seen or heard this year, but there has been at least one pair on the adjacent Beanley moorland. So the lack of any sightings at Kimmer will probably not be particularly significant.

Untill 2015, despite the good populations of Willow warblers, there were very few Chiffchaffs recorded, but in the last five years sightings, or more often “hearings” have become more regular and this year the numbers were particularly good. Also, after an absence of six years, it was pleasing that a Wheatear was recorded in each of the April and May visits.

The Gull species predominantly present on and around the lough continue to be Herring and Lesser Black-back, but a less usual group of 14 Greater Black-backs was seen on the April visit.

The only comments about other fauna seen were the two Roe Deer and a Longhorn Beetle (species unspecified) at the June visit.

Kimmer Lough, Winter summary, 2019-20.

The weather was good for both winter surveys and consistent with the comparatively mild season we have had so far. The overall impression on both visits was that “things where very quiet” The December count would have been low had it not been for the 50 Wigeon on the Lough. In all, the winter counts totalled 22 species, which is the higher end of the winter totals since 2007.

There were two new species to add to the winter species list for the site. A Moorhen was put up from the Kimmer outflow burn and a pair of Grey Partridge got up from the same area. The shepherd at Titlington Mount, immediately to the west of the site, says he occasionally sees Grey Partridge but in recent years Partridge sightings have all been Redlegs at Kimmer, including the 12 birds seen here in December 2019.

The four Snipe that got up from the tussocky grassland to the west of the Lough were the first, except for occasional singles, since December 2013 visit when nine were counted. Similarely the single Woodcock disturbed at the foot of the higher ground was an uncommon sighting here and only the fourth bird seen in thirteen years of the winter counts.

It was a little sad that no Wrens were recorded on either winter visit. The recent winters have not been particularly hard, so one might have expected to have come across some of this species.

Richard Poppleton, 11/2/20

Black Lough.

Twenty nine species of birds were found on Black Lough during the 2019 breeding season over the three visits. Again, May seems to be the peak month for numbers as first brood fledge and are active across the site. Graylag goose and Mallard were seen on Black Lough in the early part of the period but there was no evidence of breeding. Red Grouse remain elusive, but breeding was confirmed in May when a pair were seen to distract a Fox from a clutch of chicks Only one species of bird of pray was seen (Kestrel) in June. One Lapwing turned up in June. There was thought to be at least two pairs of Curlew on site in May, which possibly resulted in one successful nest. One of the pairs in May was quite aggressive suggesting that the observer was close to the nest. No Snipe were recorded but this maybe as a result of the extended dry period through 2018 and into 2019.

Cuckoo remains a regular bird at Black Lough despite worrying declines in other parts of England. Large numbers of big caterpillars would suggest that this species would remain ever present in May for the near-future. Skylark numbers seem down on previous years. Meadow Pipit numbers again peaked in May – it would be interesting to know where these birds disperse to once they have stopped breeding. Wheatears appeared at the early visit, but this year did not linger. There are still good populations of both Stonechats and Whinchat – bracken and small areas of scrub are conducive to good breeding habitats for both species. The large Thrushes (Song Thrush, Blackbird and Mistle Thrush) all appeared in the last visit suggesting post-breeding dispersal. Small numbers of Whitethroat, Willow Warblers and Chiffchaffs continue to be recorded. It could be that these species increase as the new woodland at the northern end of the site becomes established. This has changed the site since the Estate has taken 17 hectares of the hill back for planting on the steep slope next to the road. Carrion Crow continues to be one of the commonest species recorded during the summer surveys. Small numbers of Reed Bunting are found in the areas of soft rush especially at the southern and western sides of the site.

Natural England are getting tougher on burning on blanket bog and wet heath, I suspect that they will ban burning on blanket bog in the near future. Some of the burns on Black Lough and Post Office Pylon have been a bit hot and this has been to the detriment of the recovering vegetation.

George Dodds.

Alnwick and Hulne Moors.

Red Grouse did a repeat of last year with low counts during the breeding season, again keeping their heads down, but much healthier numbers In the shooting season. There was little shooting this year with, I understand, one drive on Alnwick Moor and likewise on the Post Office Pylon, the total bag being 20 brace.

It's not known if Curlew bred on Alnwick Moor this year but they did as usual on Alnwick Moor with probably two pairs. No Lapwing bred on Hulne Moor, preferring to concentrate on the one area of Alnwick Moor where they are usually found, with nine recorded in April eleven in May, but none in June, By then any young they might have produced would be on the wing and away.

The only raptors recorded were Kestrels in May and December seen on both sites and probably the same birds and one Barn Owl hunting in the daytime in May.

More Wheatears were sighted than in past years with five in April, probably still on passage and two in later months which could have been breeding. We are desperately short of breeding Wheatears over the whole of our area.

A family of eight Stonechats were seen in May. Numbers do seem to be on the up.

Breeding counts of Meadow Pipits are lower on both these moors than in late years. There was again a small number of birds over wintering here.

Freemans Gap pool and the wet land on the over flow below it, leading from Hulne Moor to the Alnwick Moor area is always interesting, providing a very different habitat to the open moorland. More cover is provided by willow, gorse and unfortunately, Rododendrom. Warblers are seen here frequently, Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff, Blackcap and Whitethroat all having been recorded.

Only one record of a Cuckoo this year in June and also one of a Redstart.

On the pool through the breeding season have been one pair of Tufted Duck, Mallard and one Teal. In the winter there were seventy Teal and seven Greylag Geese.

Wrens are still in very short supply on the open heather moorland with only one being recorded between the two areas during the entire year.

Jim Clark.

Post Office Pylon.

This site continues to maintain a certain population of Red Grouse with reasonable numbers recorded during both the summer and winter periods. Curlew are also very regular breeders here with probably three pairs breeding, more than at any of the other moorland sites. A group of ten were recorded in April, presumably pairing before dispersing to their usual breeding

sites. Traditionally Curlew will have laid a full clutch of eggs, usually four, by the end of the first week in May, but with the effects of global warming and the earlier springs that we have been experiencing it is probably now earlier.

Other visitors seen in passage to their breeding grounds in the north, were seventy Golden Plover, also seen in April. Not the first flock to be seen on these moors at this time of year.

There is very little suitable habitat for Willow Warblers but there are two small patches of Goat Willow near the east corner where they have always been recorded. This year three were recorded in April but unfortunately none during the rest of the breeding season. Stonechat seem to have done well this year on most of the sites. Seven were seen in April and three in June. In the winter there were four in November and an odd one in February, these may have been from further north. Meadow Pipits where present in good numbers during the breeding period and odd pairs during the winter, again possibly from further north.

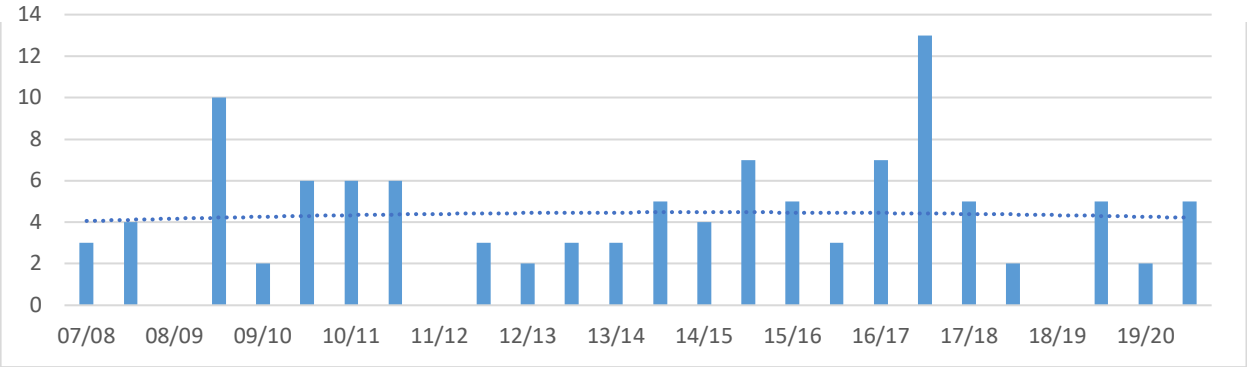
Jim Clark.

Winter 2019/20.

Similar to the winter of 2018/19 this winter has so far been mild with little in the way of frost and snow. December was mild but with some heavy rain at times, January was much wetter with some local flooding, more rain in early February was followed by a period of high winds. The area of the surveys was not affected by flooding as so many other parts of the country. I think that the North East has been very fortunate.

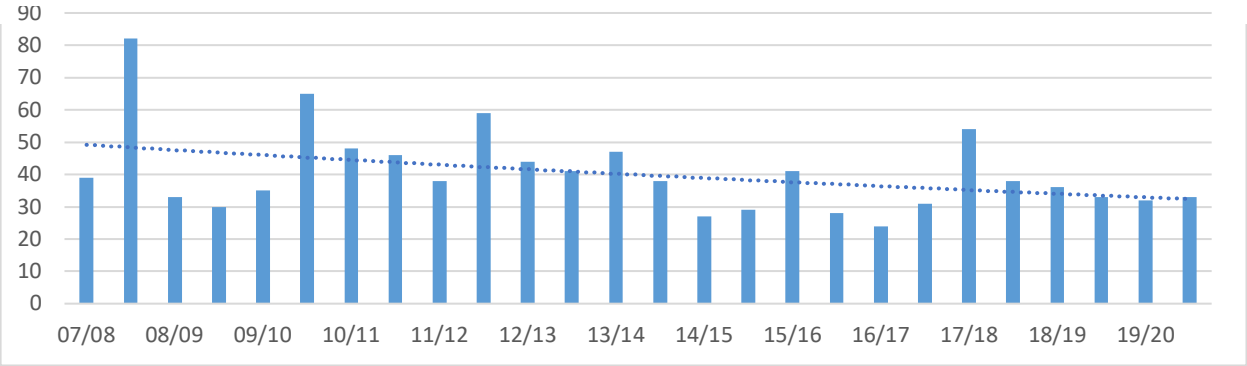
All species are recorded through the winter period, but sightings can be very irregular and numbers are usually quite low. Most species which breed on our moorlands are semi migratory, often not leaving this country but moving to coastal areas or to places where food and shelter are more readily available. The areas of moorland covered by the survey are usually quiet in the winter and total counts can be very small. Nothing would therefore be achieved by creating graphs for most of the target species, but the following three species are of interest although there are no national figures which can be used as a comparison with our records.

Buzzard



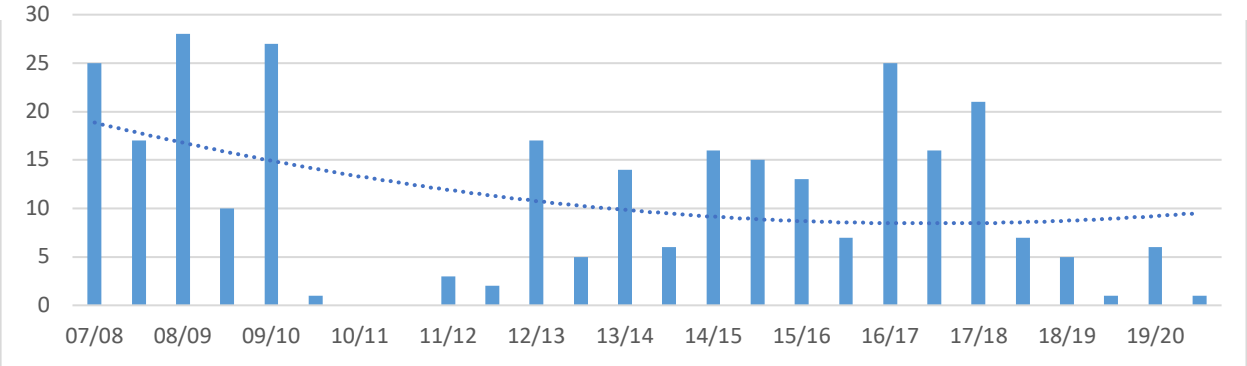
Although there were no sightings of Buzzards in late 2018 the average throughout the survey period remains level in the winter period.

Red Grouse



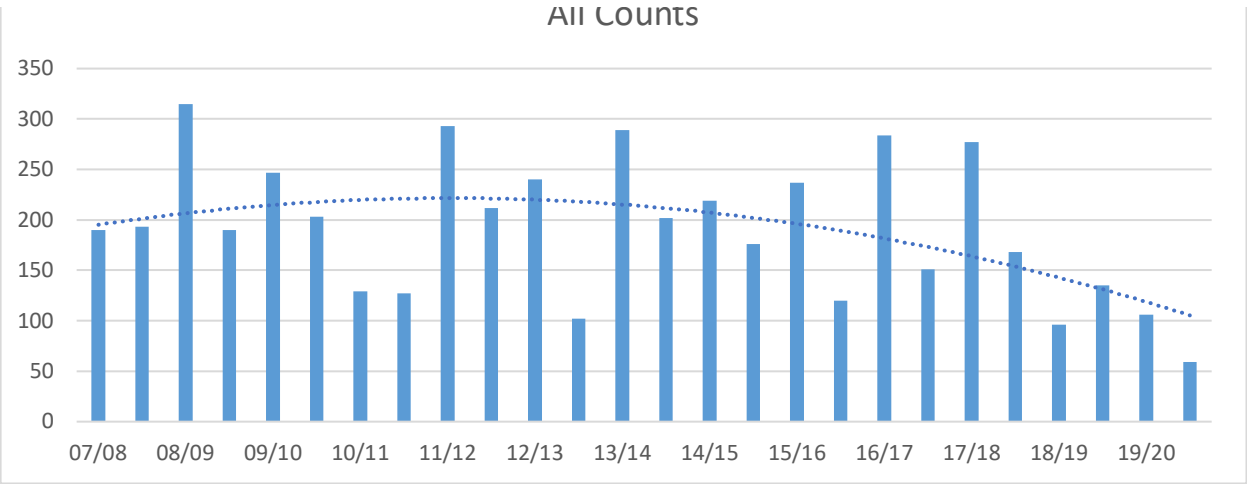
Counts of Red Grouse in the winter have always been higher than in the breeding season when they appear to be much more secretive. After several years without any shooting the proportion of birds that are now mature enough to breed will form a sound basis for a healthy increase in the population. Hopefully there will be better prospects of an increase in numbers from the main breeding area of Hulne and Alnwick Moors to the other nearby survey areas. This will be made a little more difficult since these are not actually adjoining and are also of comparatively small area. There has been a very little shooting in the 2019/20 season.

Wren



Counts of Wrens in both the summer period and the 2016/17 and 17/18 winters reached a similar level to that of pre-2010, but numbers have subsequently fallen dramatically since then and now appear to be at a very low point.

Total of all Winter Counts (Target Species)



Average winter counts in the winter of 2018/19 and 2019/20 have been smaller than usual with no obvious explanation.

Others of the Target Species in Winter

Meadow Pipit
Mainly move south and west, some into France, Spain, Portugal and Ireland. The few winter records in the survey may well be visitors from northern UK or the continent.

Skylark
Few remain in the survey area but move south and east, often being seen in large flocks on the east coastal dunes, with some crossing the channel to winter.

Lapwing
Flock together and move to coastal areas or to inland lakes and rivers to feed. Occasionally seen in large numbers during surveys nearer the coast or at Branton Ponds for example. Bad weather conditions on the coast will encourage them to move inland temporarily.

Curlew
Similar to Lapwing, feeding on the coast, and nearby areas of arable and grassland. Sizable flocks are often recorded at Fieldhouse and Townfoot, where Natural England were initially interested in our records, resulting in extra areas being put down to grass.

Whinchat and Wheatear
Summer migrants, spending the winter in Africa, where conditions have not been the best for them in recent years, with droughts in the Sahel. Wheatear in particular have fallen in numbers in resent years.

Stonechat
Some remain in the area, others move into southern UK or France, Spain and Ireland.

Reed Bunting
Mainly sedentary but leaves the upland in winter, often forming flocks with other finches, Chaffinch, Yellowhammer and Tree Sparrows etc to feed on stubble and game plots in this area.

Jim Clark. (5/3/2020)