

## Townfoot and Fieldhouse Bird Survey .

### Winter Period Records. 2019/2020.

This survey is carried out by members of Alnwick Wildlife Group and covers the tenth year.

Unfortunately, due to the present Coronavirus restrictions no bird surveys have been carried out here during this breeding season. The winter surveys were completed and the results may be of some value or interest to Northumberland Estates.

The Aims of the scheme and Methodology remain the same as detailed in previous reports.

#### **Graphs.**

Graphs can easily mislead when based on few visits each winter taking into account all the vagaries of winter weather conditions which can affect counts. Some of the Target species are not seen regularly at this time and no graphs have been prepared for the following species.

Kestrel. Few sightings.

Sparrow Hawk. Few sightings.

Skylark. Mainly move away from the area in winter.

Meadow Pipit. As the Skylark.

Mistle Thrush. Small numbers.

Lapwing. Only three records of groups, usually when there is more severe weather affecting their wintering areas nearer the coast.

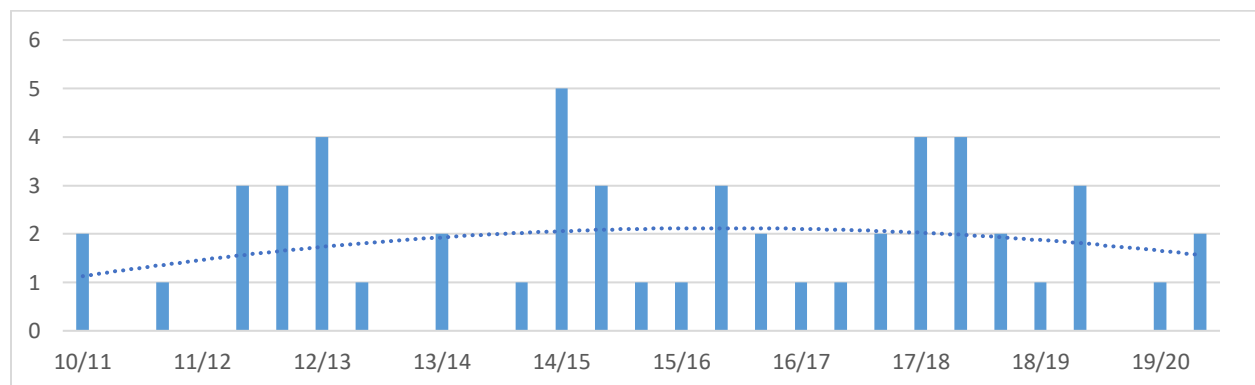
All Bird species are classified into three groups, which are indicated with each graph as follows.

Black listed, for those which are not endangered.

Amber listed, for those where there is some concern.

Red listed, for those at the greatest risk.

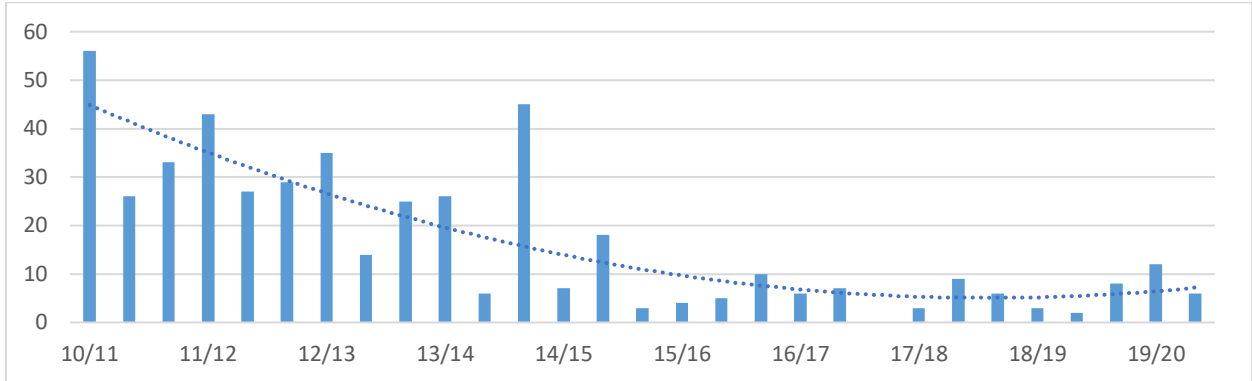
#### Buzzard



Buzzard are resident throughout the year and the population seems to have stabilized to a sustainable level. Road kill probably proving to be a major part of the food supply.

Buzzard are Black listed

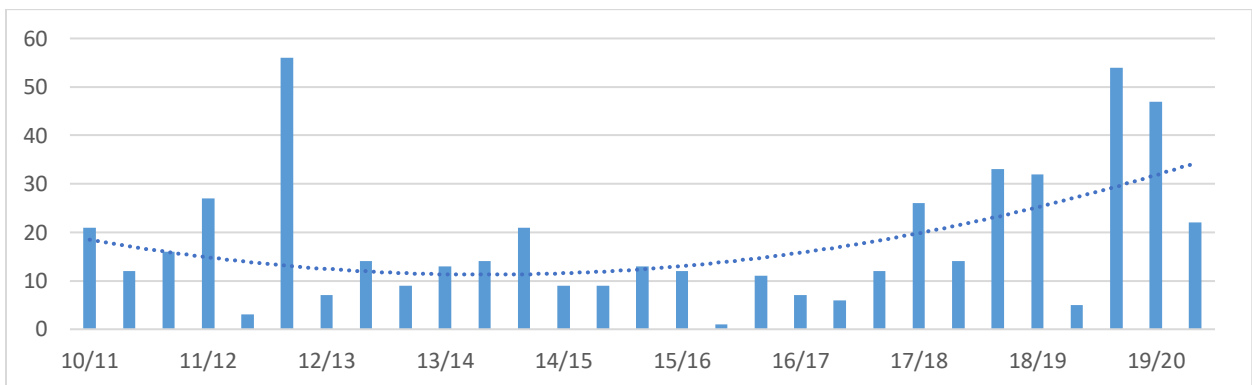
## Grey Partridge



Grey Partridge numbers in winter have declined. This may be due to the level of shooting in the past years which could have put the breeding population at risk. Ratcheugh is now considered to be the breeding centre from where birds could spread to neighbouring areas.

Grey Partridge are Red listed.

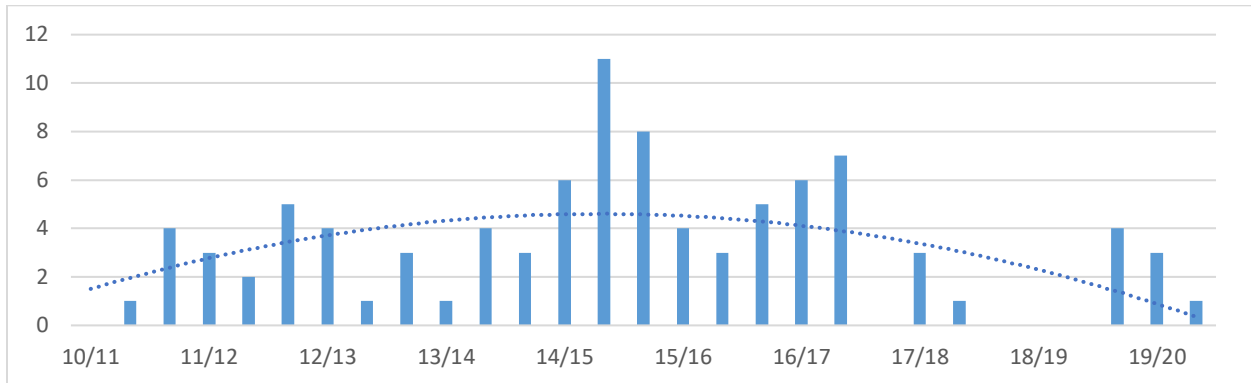
## Pheasant



Pheasant numbers at T & F have risen considerably in the last three years and it is presumed that there have been releases of reared birds in that period.

Pheasants are Black listed.

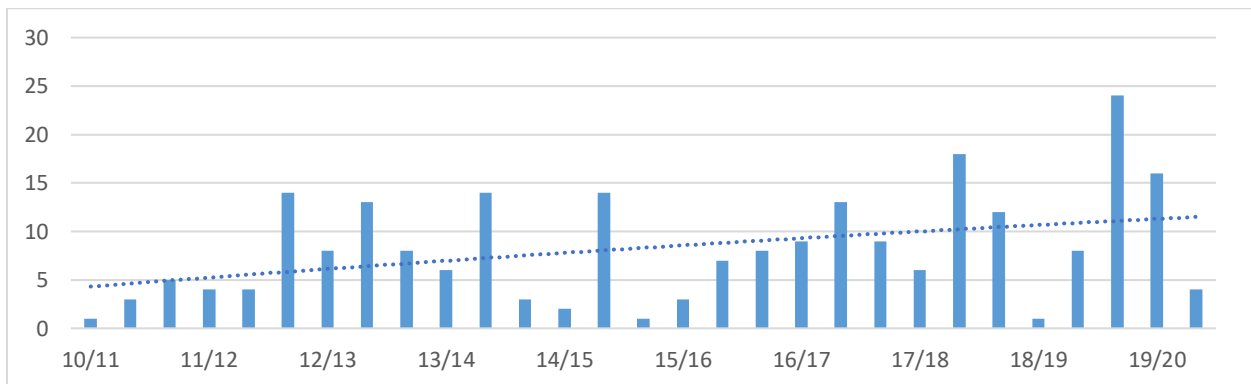
## Wren



We have shown that Wrens have a constant battle to survive. Cold winter periods reduce numbers considerably and even short intervals with complete snow cover reduce their numbers even more. Dry periods at nesting time can also be disastrous, when insects for fledglings is in short supply. 2019/20 was a very mild winter and it would seem that insects should have been plentiful but the long dry period this spring may again have affected breeding results.

Wrens are Black listed

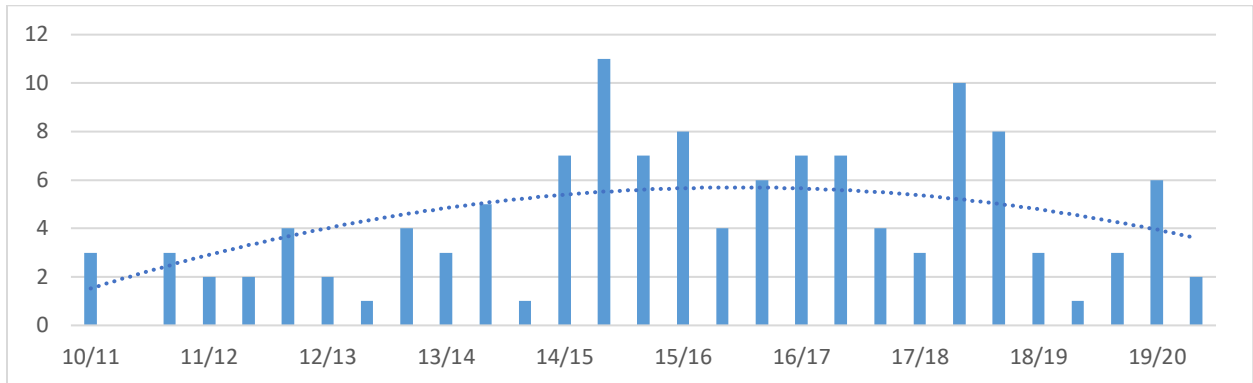
## Duncock



Last winter would appear to have been good for Dunnocks and the graph shows an increase in their numbers during the ten years of the surveys.

Duncock are Amber listed.

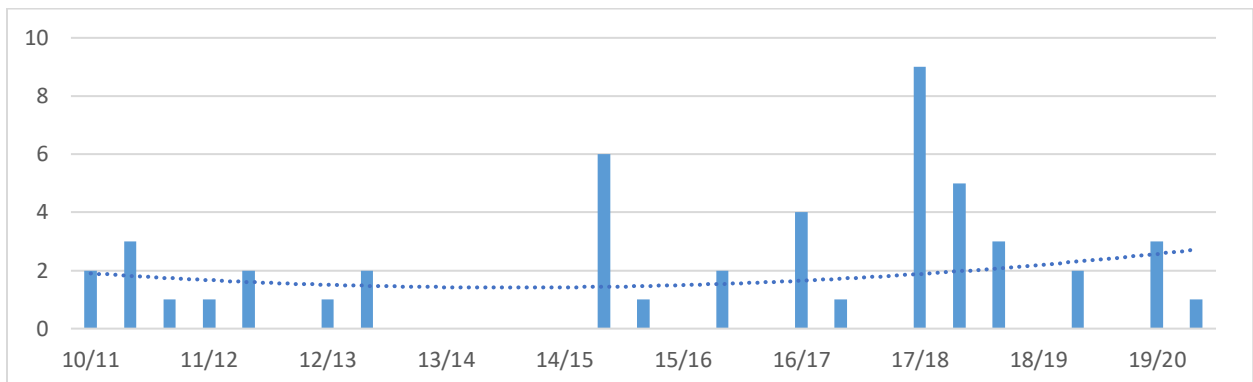
## Robin



Robins show an average increase over the period of the survey, although there is a slight decline in the last couple of years. Counts in winter are usually bolstered by wintering immigrants from the continent which may not have arrived in numbers in mild seasons.

Robins are Black listed.

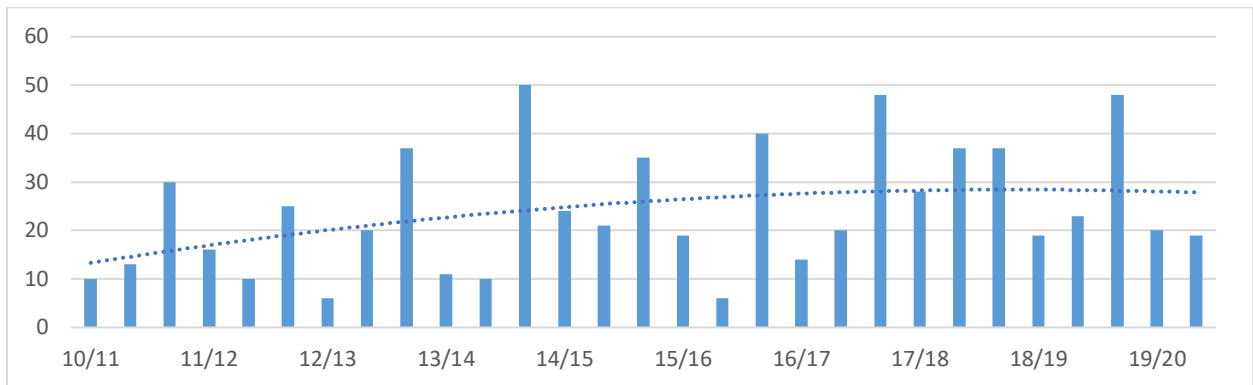
## Song Thrush



Very irregular counts during the winter period, they tend to be seen in more sheltered habitat such as in game plots and woodland rather than open arable land. Nationally there has been recorded a small increase in the population.

Song Thrush are Red listed.

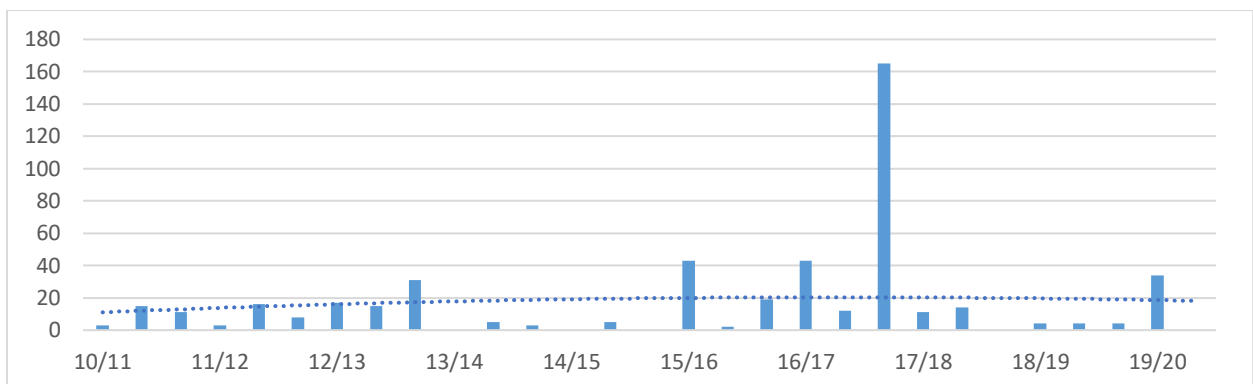
**Blackbird**



Winter numbers are always bolstered by winter immigrants from the continent. The graph clearly shows that the November counts each year are always the highest, when they arrive in large numbers on the east coast before moving further inland.

Blackbirds are Black listed.

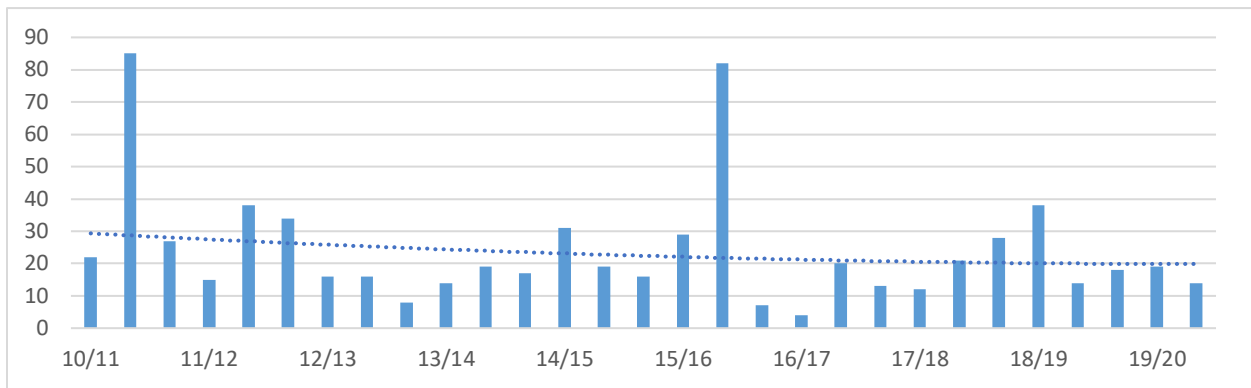
**Tree Sparrow**



Winter counts are increased by immigrants from the Continent and Scandinavia, occasionally being recorded in large flocks.

Tree Sparrows are Red listed.

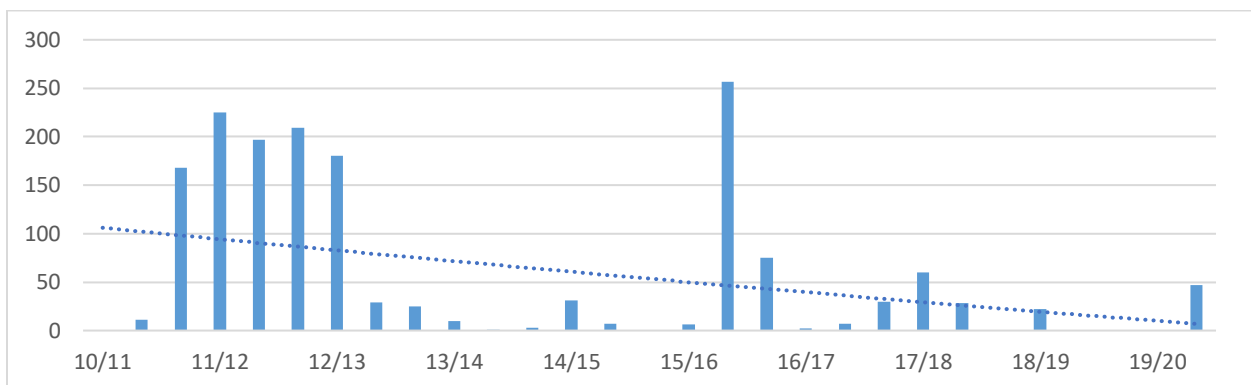
## Chaffinch



Flocking in winter, usually with other finches in mixed numbers. This also applies to most of the other Finches. Nationally chaffinch populations are falling but here they seem to be quite stable.

Chaffinch are Black listed.

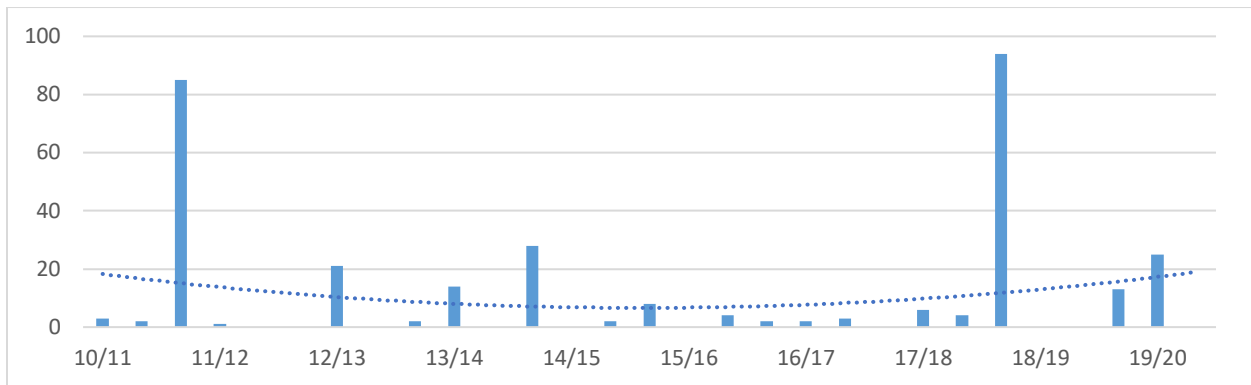
## Linnet



Linnet are showing a steep decline here in the winter period. Normally they winter in large flocks which were seen regularly in the early years of the survey. Possibly a change in crop rotation has moved these flocks on to pastures new and out of the survey area.

Linnet are Red listed.

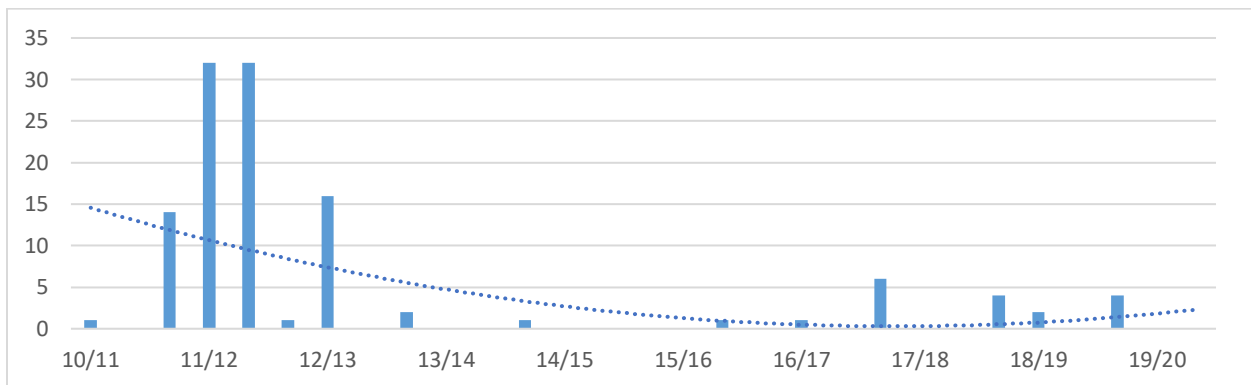
## Goldfinch



Very occasionally seen in larger numbers but usually mixed with other finches.

Goldfinch are Black listed.

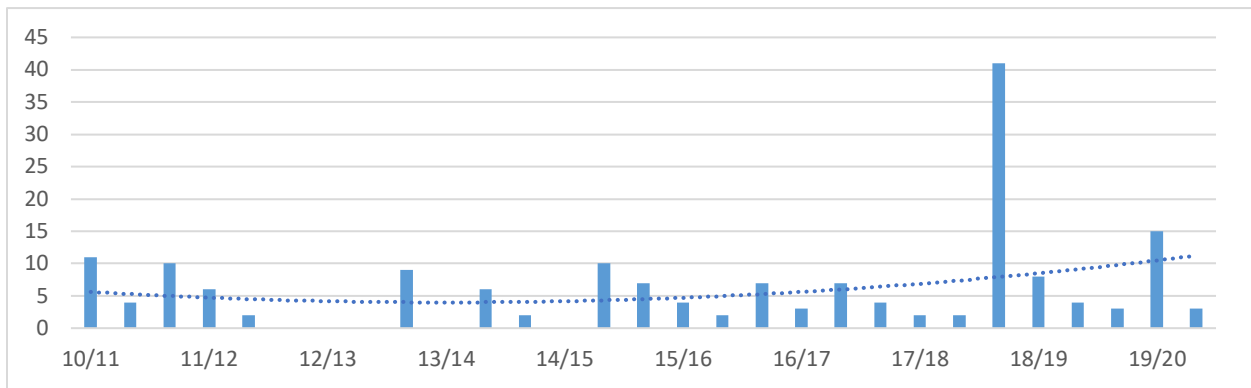
## Greenfinch



It is becoming unusual to see Greenfinch in numbers. Nationally they are reducing due to the disease trichomonosis, which is also affecting some other species. They are now seen more commonly in urban gardens.

Greenfinch are Black listed.

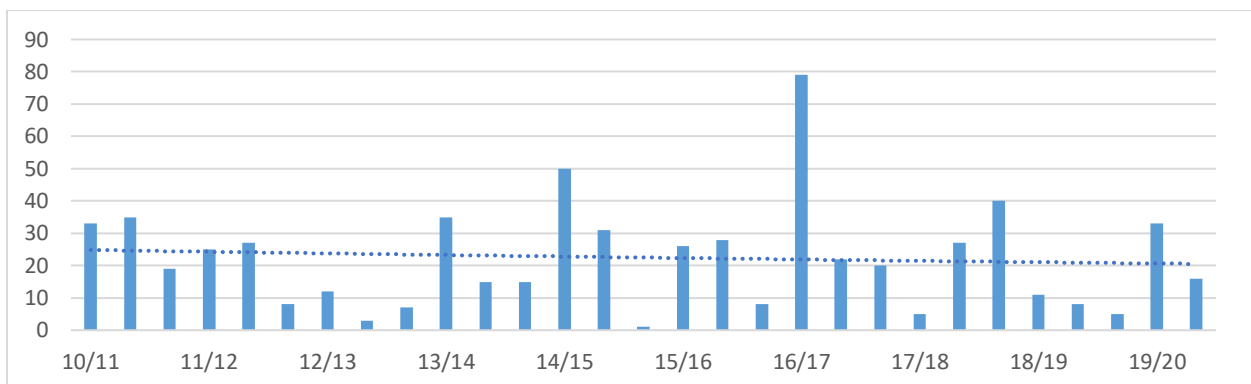
## Reed Bunting



Reed bunting are seen more often during the winter in mixed flocks of Finches than in the breeding season. There is little in the way of good breeding habitat for them in the survey area, except on the banks of the river Aln.

Reed Bunting are Amber listed.

## Yellowhammer

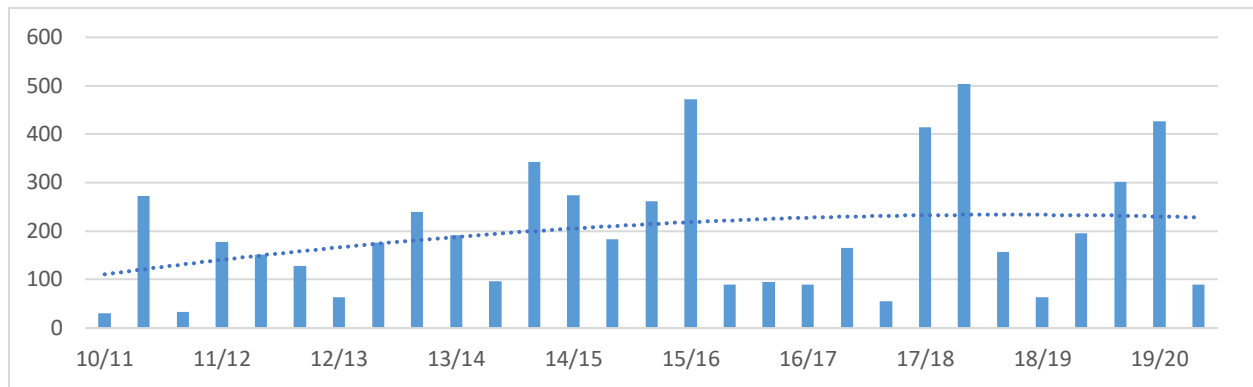


Along with most of the finches Yellowhammers tend to winter in the mixed flocks. The average numbers counted in the winter are fairly regular.

Yellowhammers are Red listed.



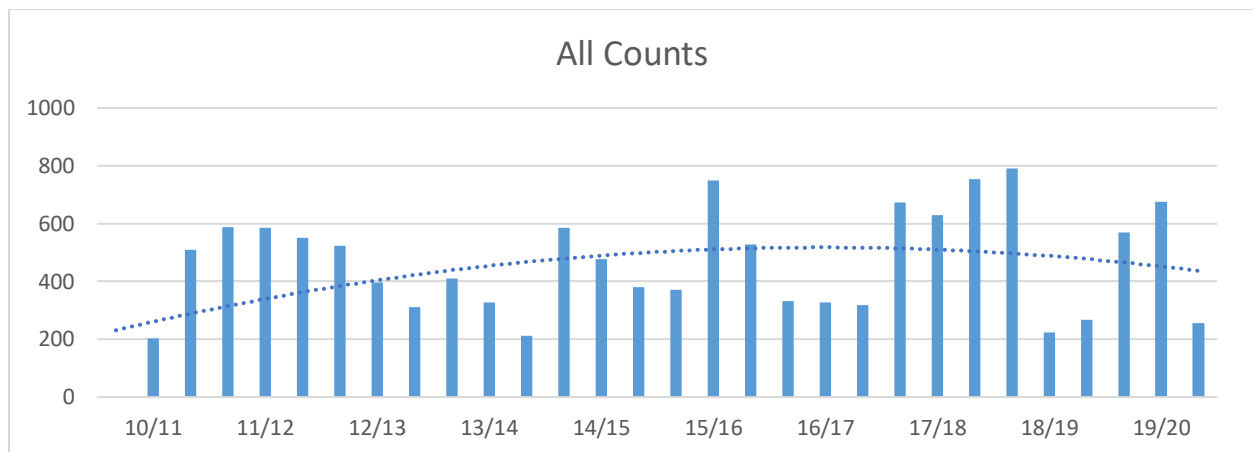
## Woodpigeon



Winter numbers are increased by visiting birds from the Continent. The numbers arriving each winter depend to some extent on weather conditions on the Continent and in Scandinavia and the availability of food there. Crops of Oil Seed Rape are an attraction to Woodpigeons and they can be seen in very large numbers. Increased numbers of woodpigeon are not popular with farms as they are capable of doing considerable damage to both Rape and Cereal crops.

Woodpigeons are Black listed.

## Total of All Winter Period Counts (Target Species)



The average counts at each visit is a little over 400 birds. During the survey there has not been any big change in the total numbers counted annually.

All the finch species above tend to flock together in winter to areas which provide food and shelter. The game plots on Fieldhouse and Townfoot provide good examples of this and at times high numbers of finches have been recorded here. It is often impossible to count the numbers of individual species and estimates have to be made.

The winter of 2019/2020 was at first very wet and windy with more reasonable conditions during the first three months of 2020. Survival rates should have been good.

J.C. (May 2020)

