

BIRD SURVEY - FIELDHOUSE AND TOWNFOOT.

REPORT FOR NOVEMBER 2012 TO JULY 2013.

This report covers the third complete year of the survey.

The aims, methodology and area covered by this survey remain the same as detailed in previous reports.

Records of birds seen on the coast at Seaton Point and on the river Aln at Townfoot are not included in the counts of target species for this survey. They are of interest since their movement to and from the arable areas of the survey for feeding, roosting and at times, shelter from severe weather, are all part of the normal pattern affecting the local populations. The redevelopment of wetland on the estuary of the river Aln is also likely to affect, in particular, the Townfoot area.

The wide open space, which was the wartime airfield at Fieldhouse, is very different from all the other sites included in Northumberland Estates Grey Partridge survey. Without hedges or any hedgerow trees it is lacking in the cover they require. Most Grey Partridge records made here are from the smaller fields between the coast and the coast road. The airfield area being more suitable for breeding Waders and ground nesting birds, Lapwing, Oystercatcher and Curlew as well as Skylark, Meadow Pipit and possibly, one day, Corn Bunting. It is good to see that the counts of Waders at Fieldhouse in the breeding period, has been much higher this year than in 2012 when there were very low numbers recorded.

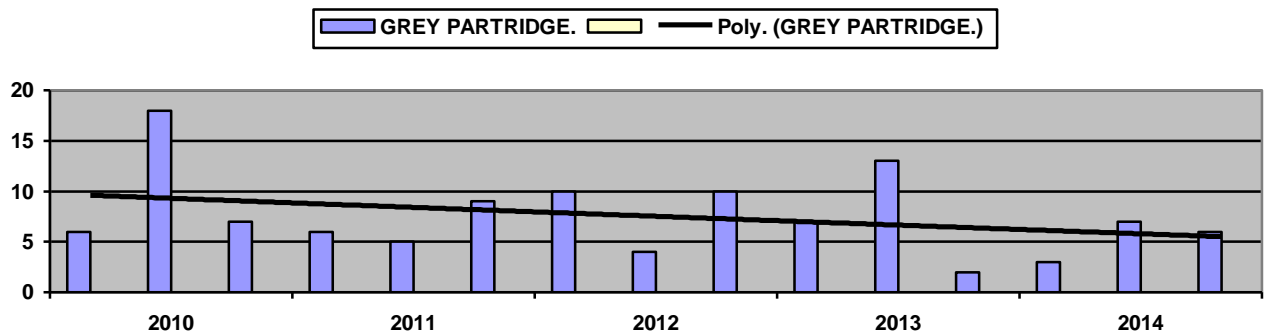
Very few Grey Partridge were recorded in the last visits of the breeding period, probably due to the very delayed breeding this year. More comparable counts would probably have been made if visits had also been delayed by a couple of weeks. The long cold spring delayed the arrival of many of our migrants and delayed breeding for many species but the long, warm and dry period which followed should have helped to make this year a better than average breeding season.

There have been few records of unusual species in the past year but one count of 110 Twite at Townfoot in Nov. is well worth noting. Linnet are seen in good numbers at Fieldhouse each winter and flocks of Curlew continue to be recorded on both farms.

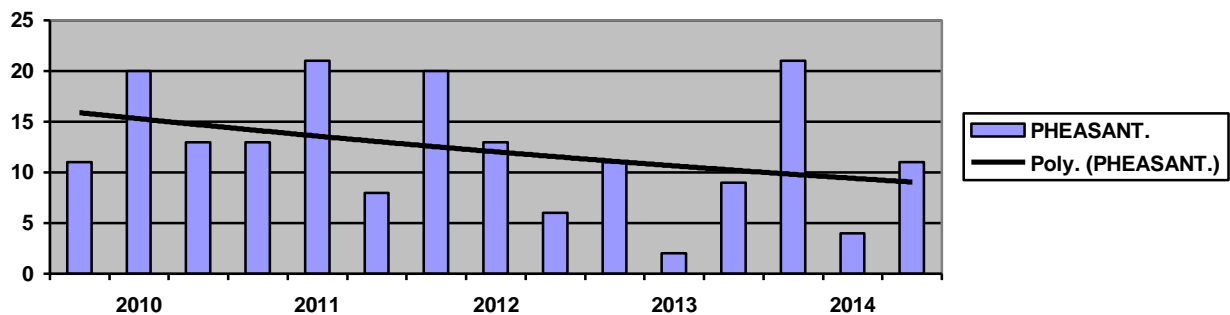
The breeding period records in this report are presented in the form of graphs although it is too soon to recognize any regular pattern.

Breeding period graphs of Target Species.

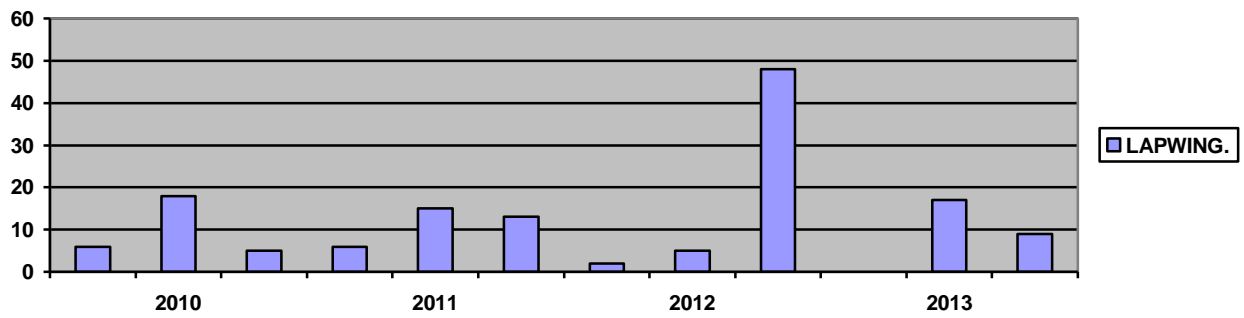
No regular pattern is appearing in the Buzzard population.



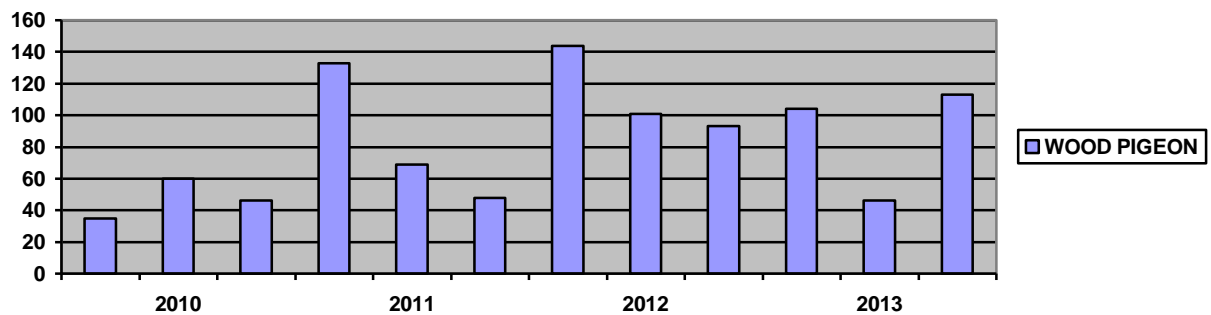
Counts of Grey Partridge have not maintained the increase that was hoped for due to the severe winter and breeding period weather conditions over the last three years, during which there has been little or no shooting carried out. It is hoped that the last breeding period will have been much more successful even though it had such a late start.



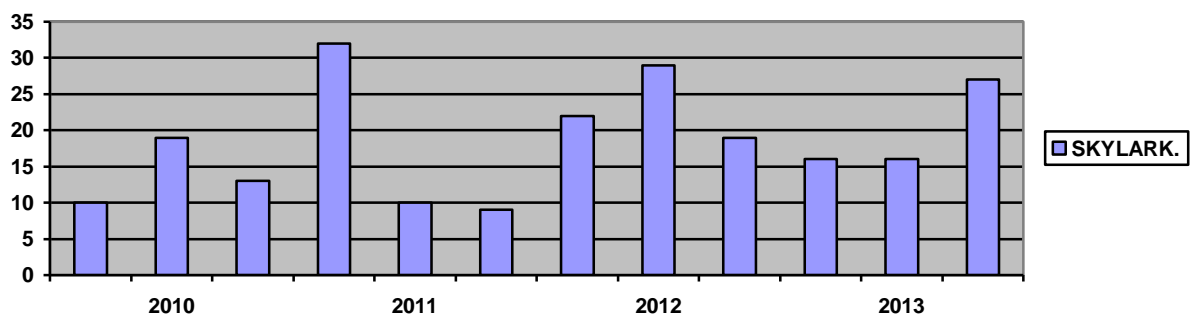
The Pheasant population is following a similar pattern to the Grey Partridge.



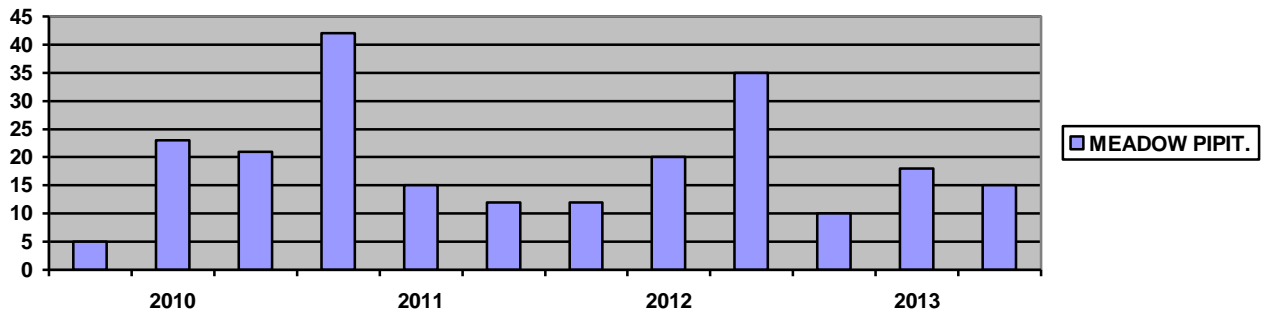
On this graph the first count in April of each year gives an indication of the number of breeding adult birds in the area. Higher numbers in May and June will include juveniles. The very high count in June of 2012 is as a result of early flocking, probably made up of mainly young birds of the year. The absence of any Lapwing in April of 2013 is possibly a result of the very late spring when adult birds had not settled down in their breeding areas.



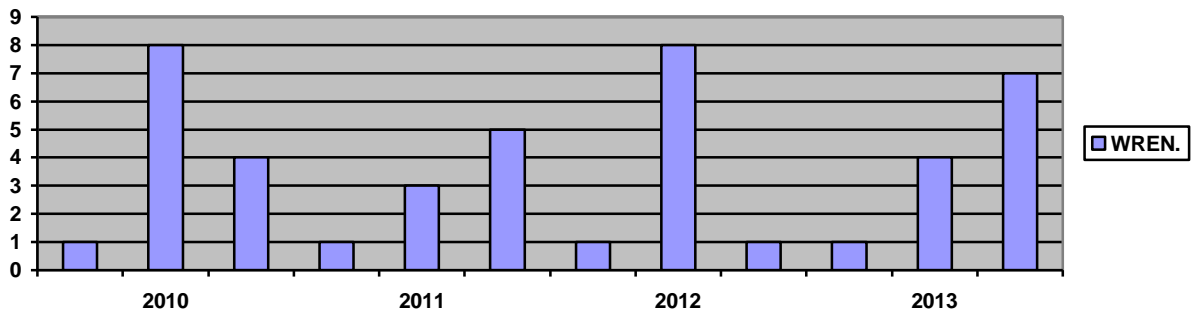
A general increase in Woodpigeon numbers, probably due, in part, to the easy availability of food at the game feeders, attracting breeding birds and also non breeding juveniles.



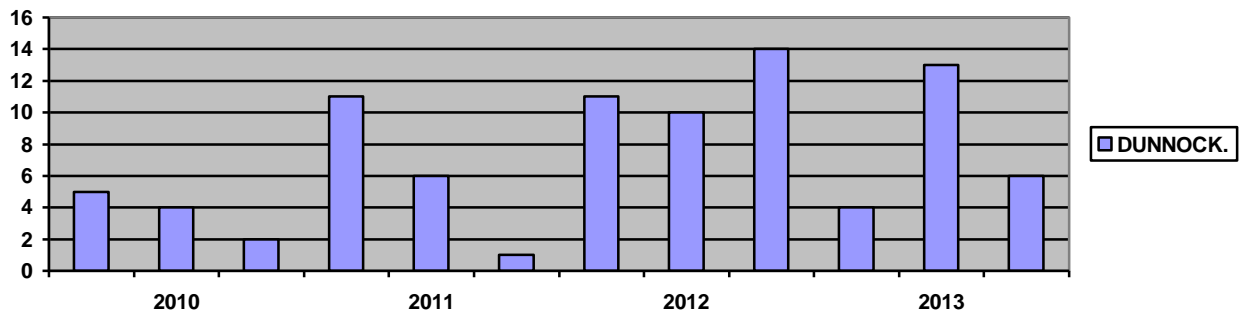
These would be high numbers in the case of an average arable farm in Northumberland but the very open nature of Fieldhouse in particular, provides a better habitat for Skylarks.



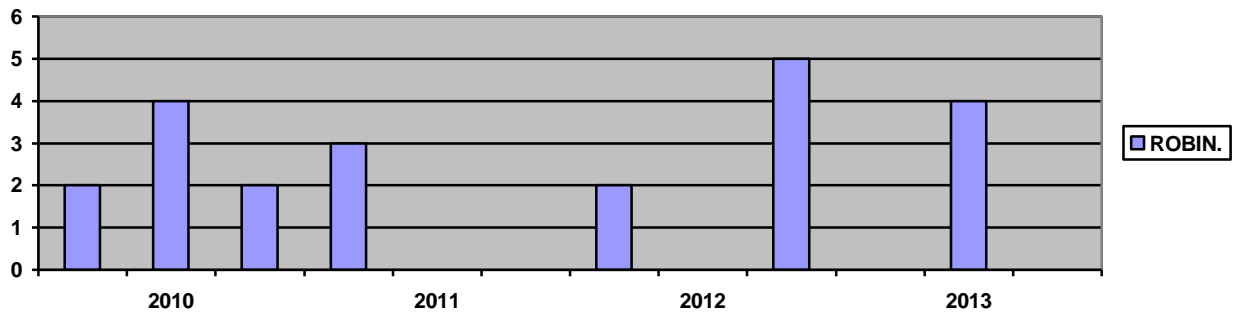
Similar conditions will apply to Meadow Pipits as to Skylarks.



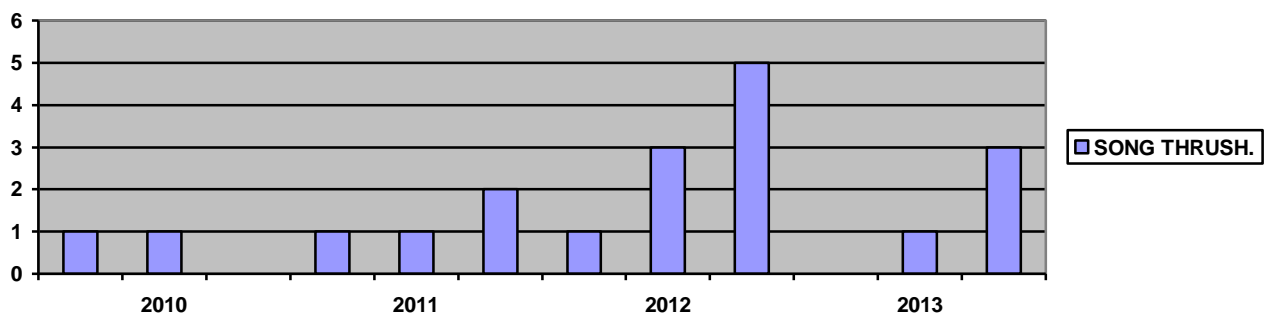
Wren numbers here illustrate the difference between the low ground nearer to the coast, where numbers have not been so severely affected by recent periods of bad weather, and higher land further from the coast, where the effects have been much more severe. The chart would seem to show an annual increase in numbers as the season progresses. Losses in a normal winter are estimated to be about 50% of the population.



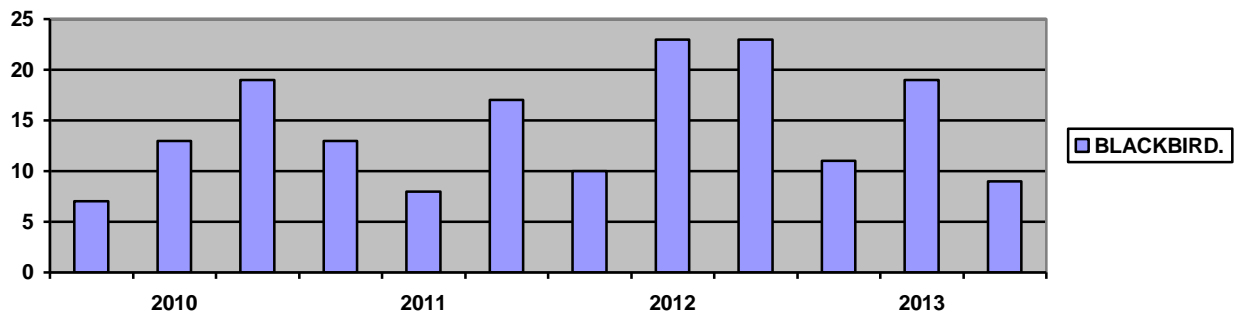
On average there appears to have been an increase in Dunnock numbers over the period of the survey.



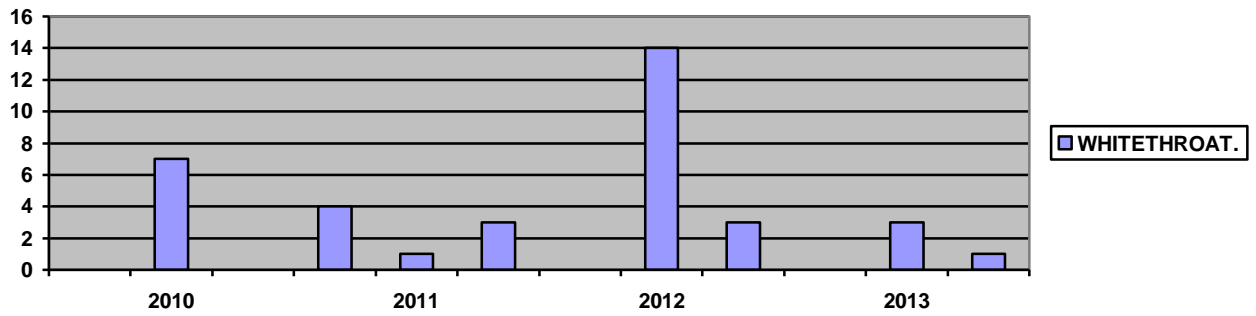
There have been very irregular counts of Robins which can be very secretive birds during the breeding season. There is therefore likely to be a higher population than has been recorded.



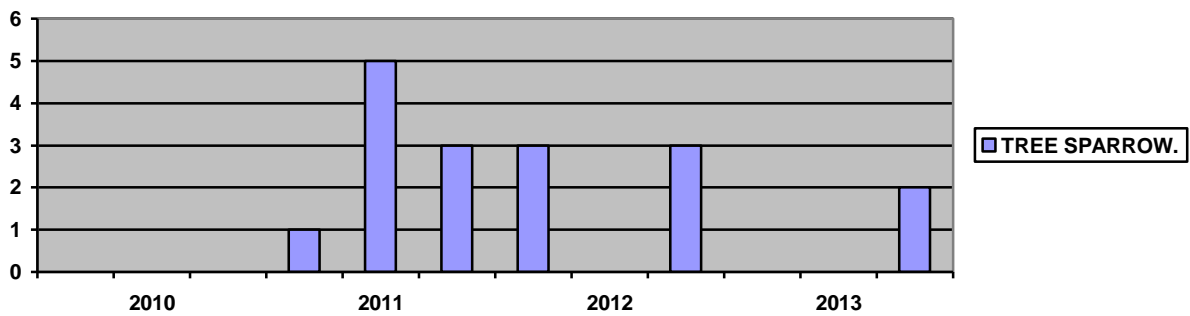
This chart would indicate an increase in Song Thrush numbers. Further recording will show if this trend is continued, which would be contrary to the national trend.



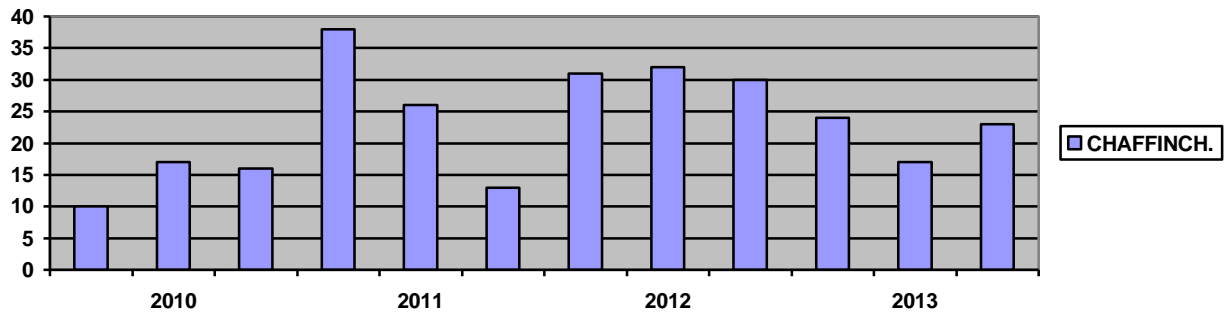
Blackbirds are one of the commonest species in the survey habitat and are therefore an important indicator of the effects of the management of the area. More data is required before any definite trends are shown.



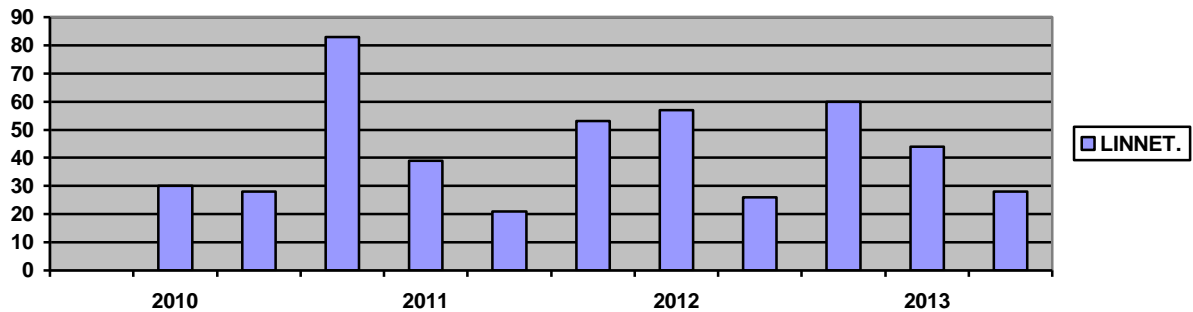
Whitethroats are the only summer visitor included in the target list. The population in our survey area depends, not only on the conditions here but also on those in their wintering habitat in Africa, and during its movements to and fro. It is therefore not a good indicator of the effects of any management in this country alone.



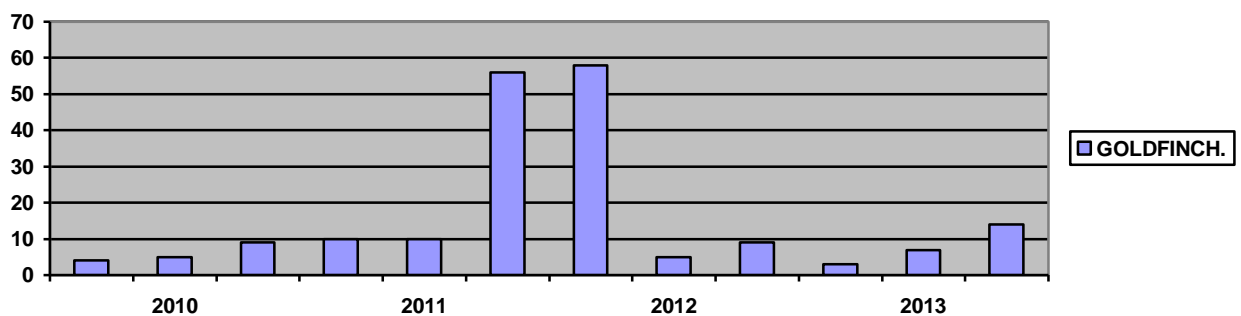
Tree Sparrows were reduced to a very small breeding population in Northumberland but in recent years have been on the increase. This increase would seem to have followed a big rise in the number of wintering birds mainly on the east coast with some remaining to breed here. Like other members of the Finch family they are attracted to game plots and are therefore much better able to withstand adverse winter conditions than many other species.



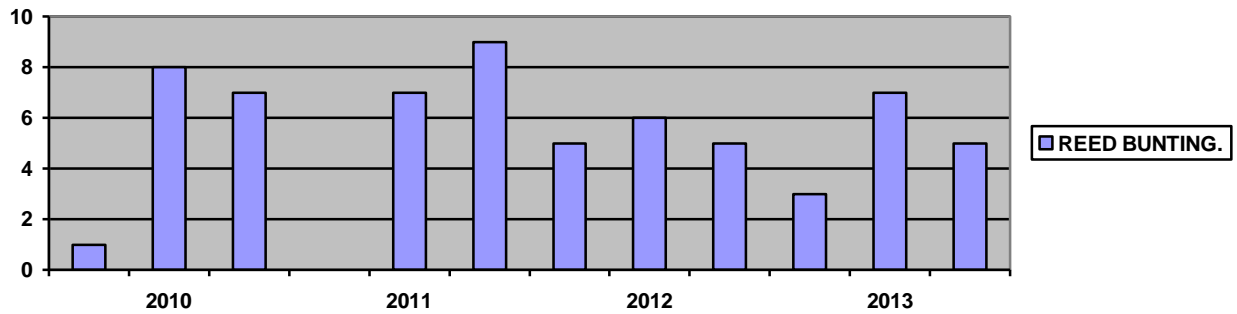
The Chaffinch is, like the Blackbird, one of the commonest species in the survey area and is therefore important in the monitoring of the effects of the Estate management. So far the counts show a good population with very little change.



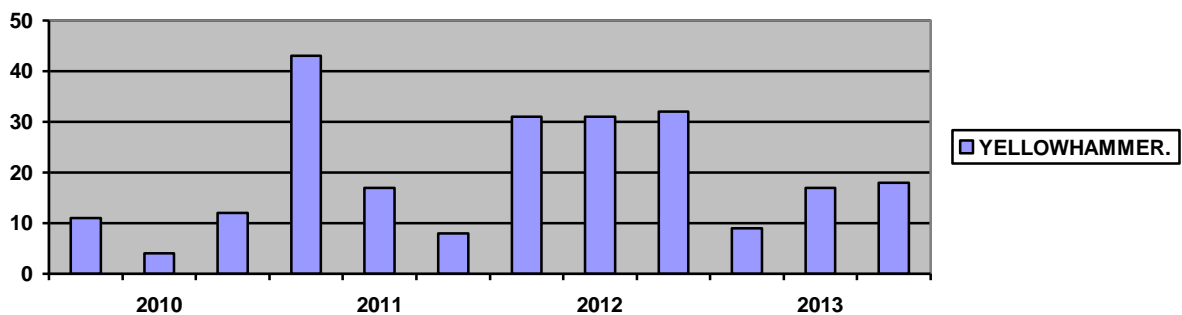
This survey has a higher population of Linnets than most other arable farms in this area.



The high numbers of Goldfinches in late 2011 will be birds flocking together after breeding and probably mainly juveniles. In early 2012 the higher count will probably be of a similar group prior to dispersing to their breeding territories. Other counts show a fairly regular population in the survey area.



A regular small population of Reed Bunting, mainly along the river Aln at Townfoot.



There have been irregular counts of Yellowhammers but on average the population is higher here than on many arable farms.

Winter period.

The summer breeding population will always be used as the most effective measure of success for this scheme, since the winter counts are likely to be very variable, they have not been shown as graphs but are included as a chart.

Although not one of the target species, we are continuing to record the numbers of waders, in particular Curlews, and the fields that they are using. This applies mainly to the winter period.

The average counts of several of the target species have fallen during the last winter period. Reduced numbers include Grey Partridge and Pheasant.

Fieldhouse and Townfoot are regular sites for flocks of wintering Linnet, with several hundred birds recorded on some occasions.

