

NORTHUMBERLAND ESTATES BIRD SURVEY.

REPORT FOR APRIL 2022 – FEBRUARY 2023.

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

About this Report

No surveys were carried out during the breeding season of 2020 due to Coronavirus restrictions. In order to produce realistic graphs, the records for the three previous years have been averaged and used to fill this gap in our data. The Cuckoo is again included in this report.

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 and includes a Botanical survey which is being added to each year.

Areas of the Survey

The survey is taking place on four areas where Northumberland Estates are attempting to encourage 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 has been 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.

The five sites are normally 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 similar 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 conditions.

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. BTO also produce some figures for the North East of England but this is by no means a complete list. 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 last 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 and the BTO Breeding Bird Survey which are made annually.

There are many factors affecting bird populations. Weather is easily shown to be the most important. Periods of severe winter conditions lead 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 (e.g., 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.

It is accepted that the populations of many of our bird species have fallen in recent years. The probable reasons are given as damaging agricultural practices, loss of habitat, global warming, etc. It may be that any of the target species in this survey which has maintained its numbers over a period of years could be claimed as a success within the scope of this survey.

An interesting exercise is to compare the graphs in this report with those produced by BTO from their Breeding Bird Surveys. (bto. population trend graphs.)

Botanical List

The vegetation list for the five areas included in the NEBS surveys is now presented as a separate "NEBS Plant Records" item and can be found along with the results of other surveys in the "Archive" pages of the Alnwick Wildlife Group web site. (alnwickwildlifegroup.co.uk)

Breeding Period Results for Target Species.

(3)

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

- Green.** 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 1995-2019

(B) A Breeding Bird Survey trend as an estimated average % rise or fall over the period 2019-2021

BTO North East figures give: -

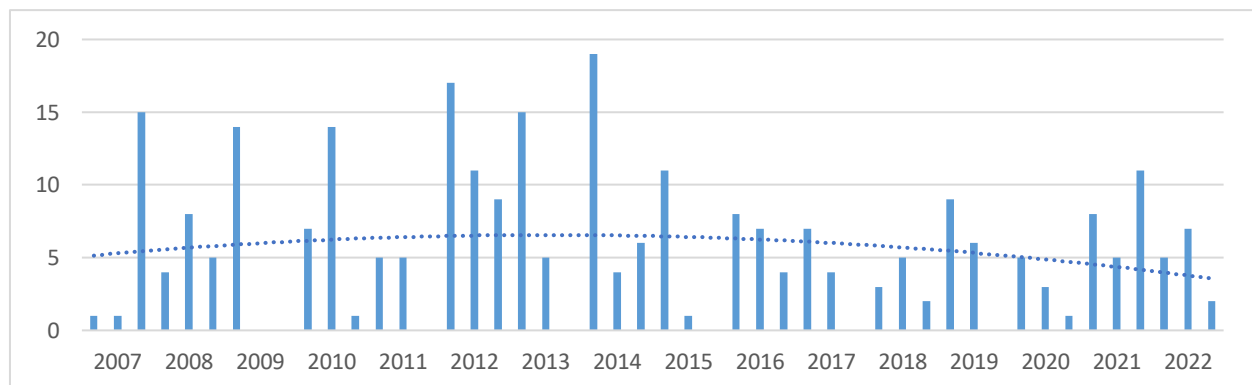
(C) A long-term trend as a % rise or fall over the period 1995-2019.

Please note that these are the latest complete figures published by BTO.

Information taken from the BTO National Bird Atlas is shown as “**(BA)**” and from the Northumbria Bird Atlas as “**(NBA)**”. These figures and the altered 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, although very often the June counts are oddly, the lowest of the season and may not give a true picture of their breeding status. It would seem that there has been a gradual decrease in average 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.

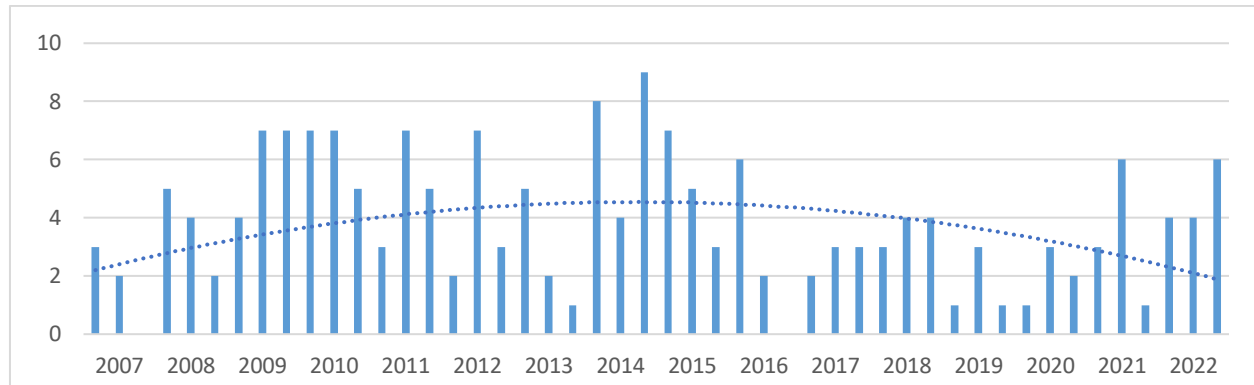
Amber listed

(A) +16%

(B) +5%

Buzzard.

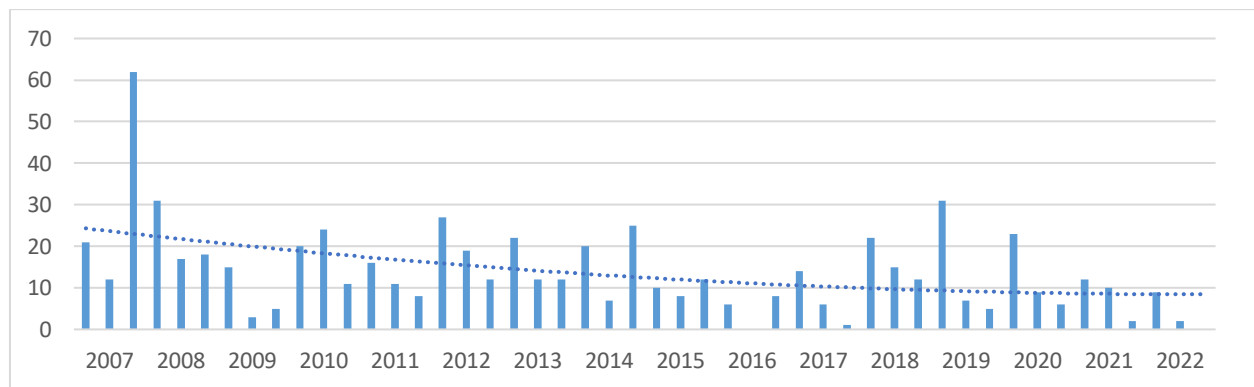
(4)



The vast spread of Common Buzzard into the eastern counties in the last 30 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 followed the national figures. Counts have increased again in 2021 and 2022

Green listed (A) +220% (B) -3%

Red Grouse

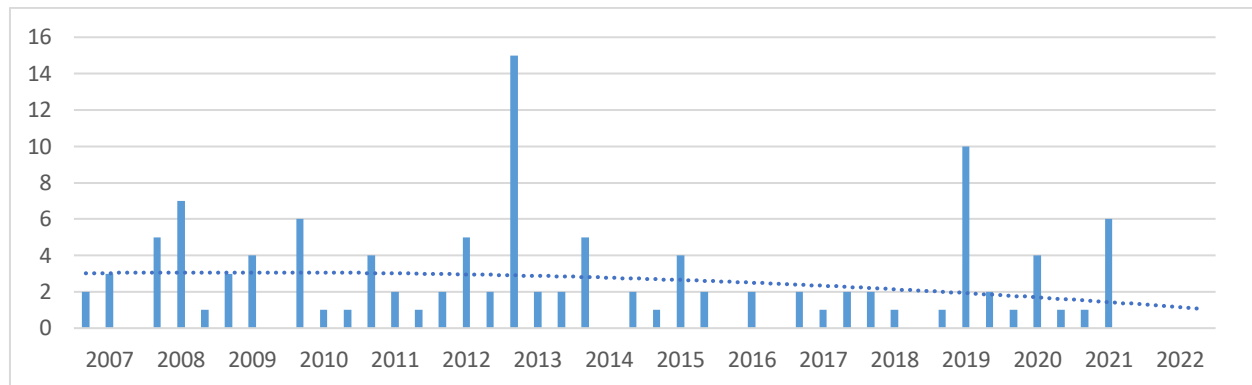


The population of Red Grouse appears to have disappointingly reduced gradually over the last few years. None were shot in the 2016 to 2018 seasons, and very limited shooting in 2019 when approximately twenty birds were shot. Since then, for the last three years there has been no organised shooting on the moors. 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, which is not seen in our results.

Amber listed (A) +9% (B) +6%

Red Legged Partridge.

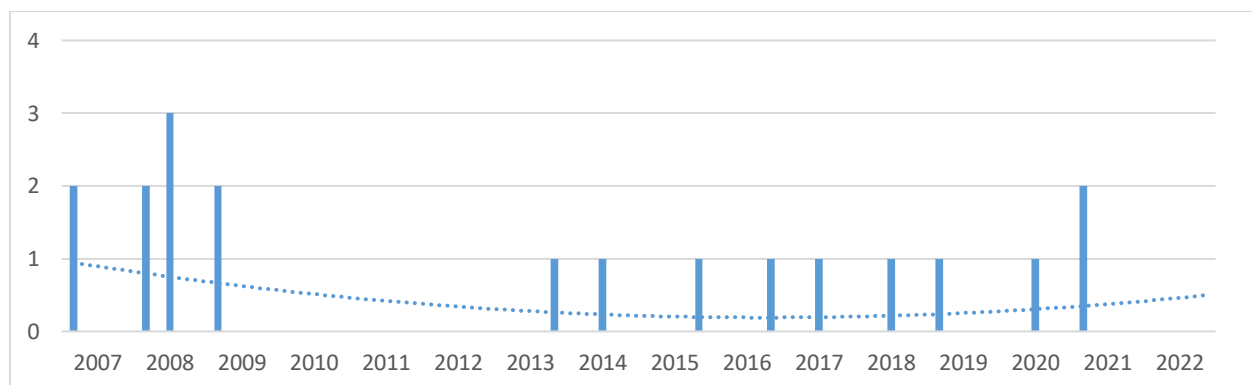
(5)



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. None were recorded in the 2022 breeding season.

Green listed (A) +27% (B) +6%

Grey Partridge

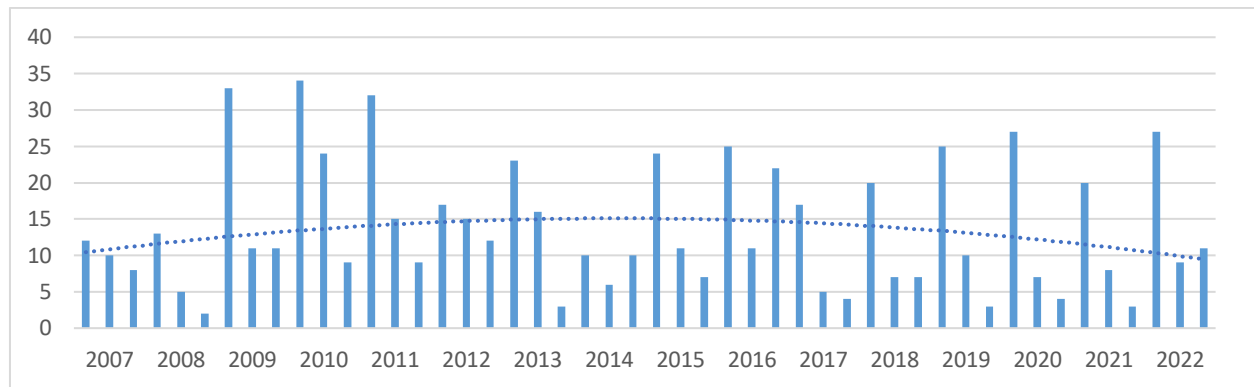


The areas covered by the survey are not natural habitat for Grey Partridge. It is therefore not surprising that the population has remained very low, but (NBA) records a healthy increase in Grey Partridge counts in the area to the east of Alnwick which will no doubt be due to the Partridge scheme being carried out by Northumberland Estates in that area. It would not be surprising to see some movement of Greys into the NEBS survey areas on the Alnwick Moors.

Red listed (A) -60% (B) +12%

Pheasant.

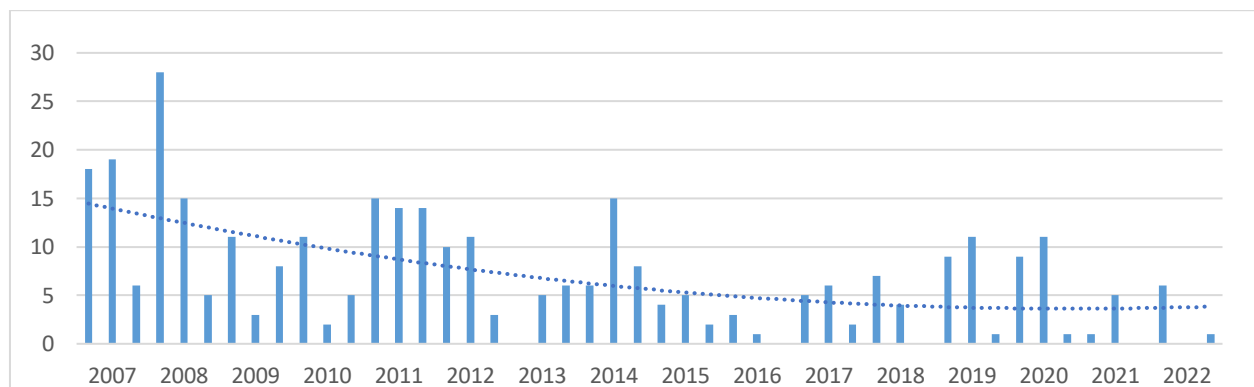
(6)



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. This graph shows that the highest counts are almost always made at the April visit and the lowest counts are made at the last visit in June. Can anyone explain this? Is it the result of predation of juvenile birds?

Green listed (A) +44% (B) +11% (C)+38%

Lapwing

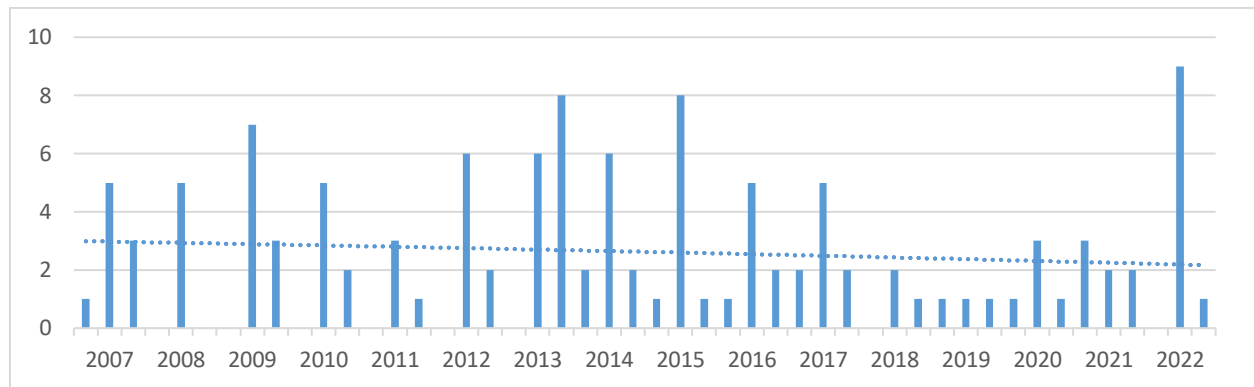


Another poor year for Lapwing. The apparent slow decline shown in this graph would seem to be following the general trend both nationally and locally. Lapwing are early breeders and will start to flock and move before the last visits in June, which is clearly indicated. (BA) shows the highest losses 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 were left in the past and Lapwing numbers did increase.

Red listed (A) -34% (B) -2% (C) -19%

Cuckoo.

(8)



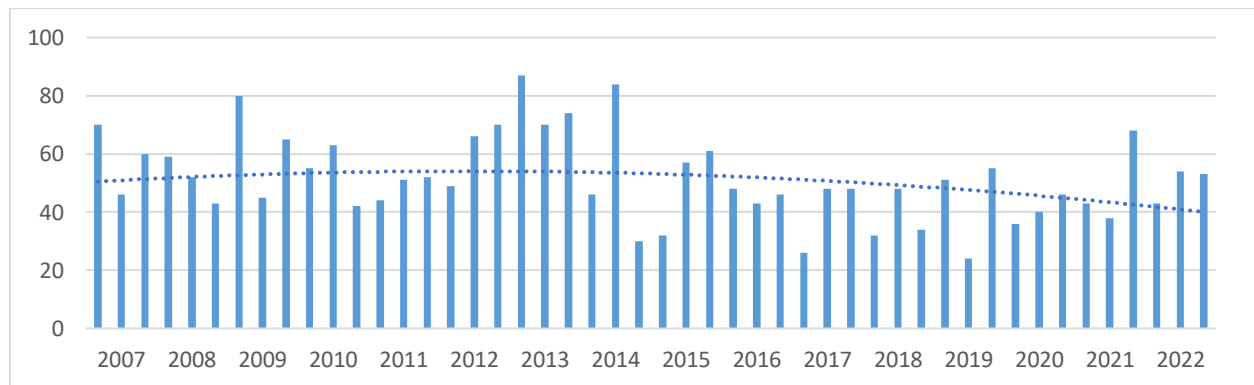
This graph is of Cuckoos recorded on the NEBS areas of Moorland only. More of these birds are normally heard on the higher ground than on lowland and arable areas. The graph would agree with the feeling that they are in decline but the May record in 2022 is very welcome. In several years they have not arrived in time for the first survey in April. It is interesting to note that Cuckoos have been recorded on only two occasions at the four lowland arable farms being surveyed.

Red listed

(A) - 71%

(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

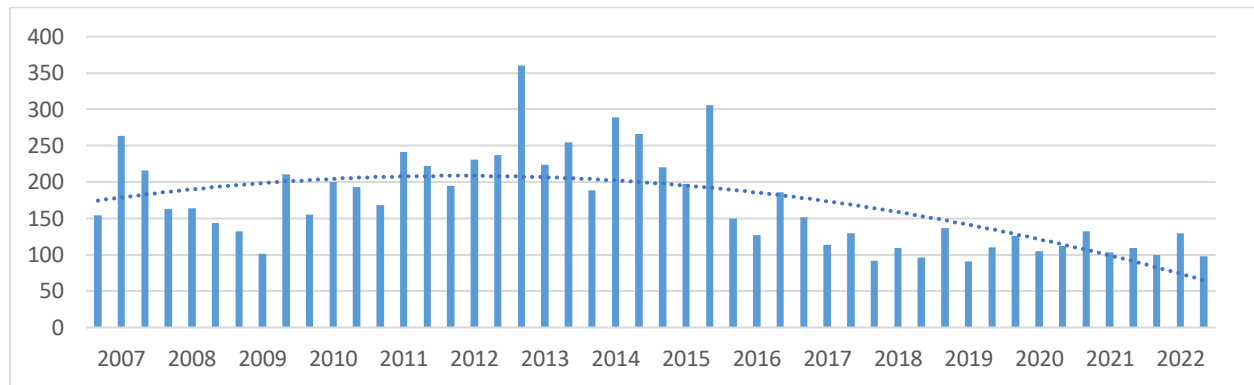
(A) -19%

(B) +7%

(C) -24%

Meadow Pipit.

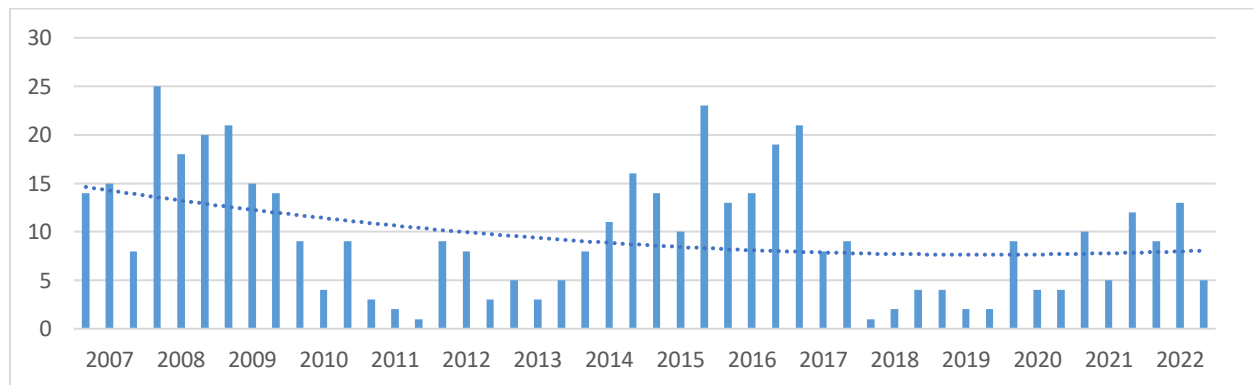
(9)



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. This loss appears to be continuing over all the survey sites. 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) -21% (B) +9% (C) -16%

Wren

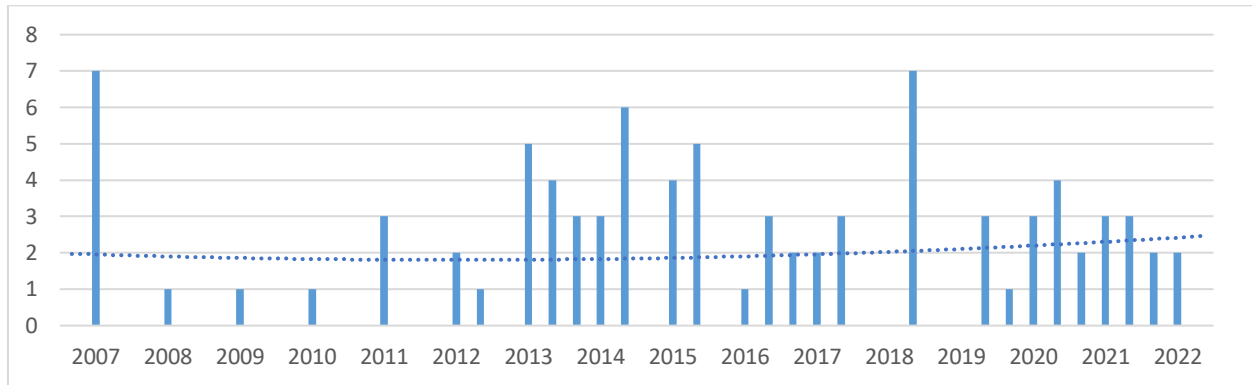


After the catastrophic fall in Wren numbers due to weather conditions in 2010 to 2012, counts then showed a dramatic improvement only to be hammered again in the 2017/18 winter when a short period of snow cover and low temperatures was followed by a late, cold and dry spring. This graph compares closely with that for the winter period. It is hoped that better conditions will now allow them to bounce back again as it would appear that they are doing. 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, has been very slow compared to more favourable areas of more sheltered woodland or coastal habitats.

Green listed (A) +19% (B) -3% (C) +24%

Whinchat.

(10)



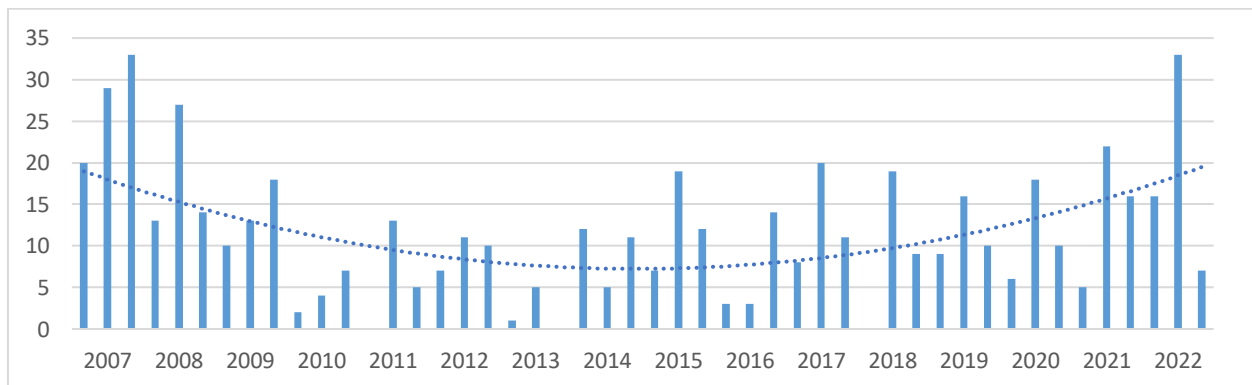
Whinchats have had several better years, with sightings of successful family groups on several occasions. National losses have been general throughout the British Isles over a long period, losing breeding habitat in England more than in Scotland or Wales (BA). This trend appears to have been reversed 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) -54%

(B) -36%

Stonechat



Stonechats in the survey area show signs of recovery after the period between 2010/13, which the graph would indicate, had 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.

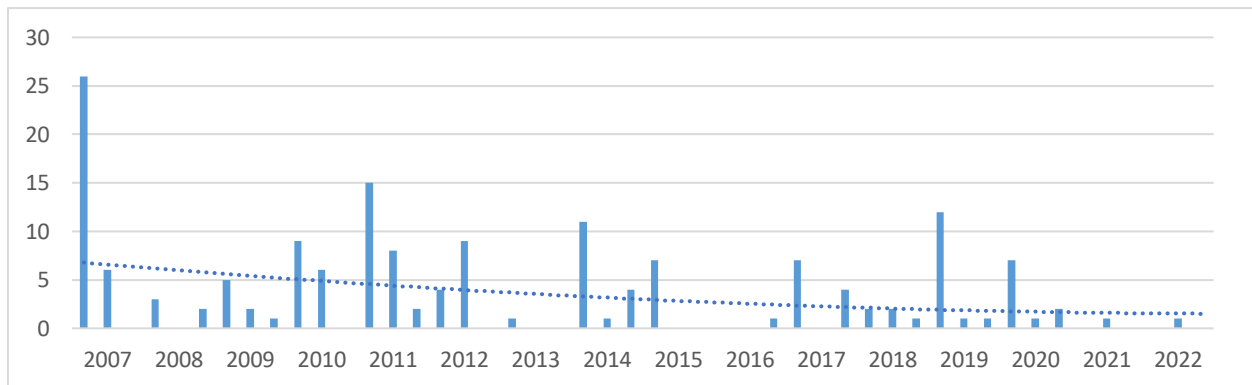
Green listed

(A) +170%

(B) +11%

Wheatear.

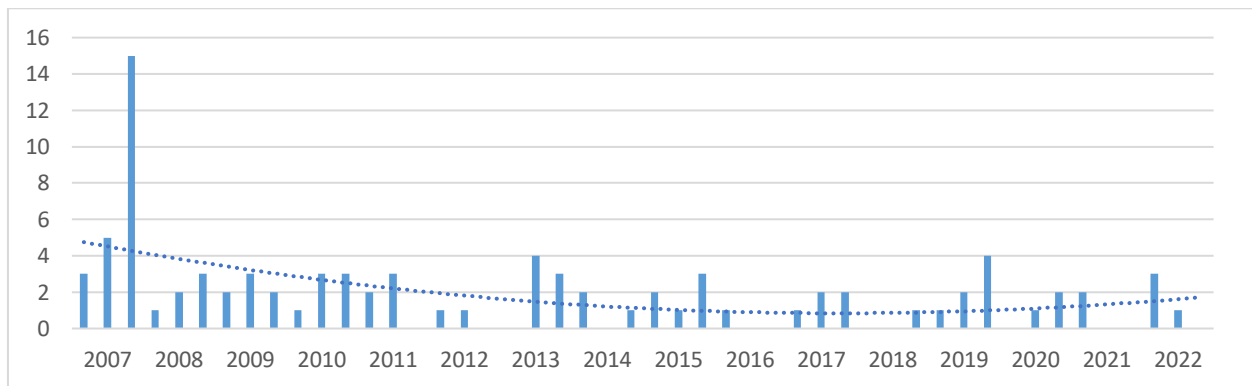
(11)



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.

Green listed (A) -23% (B) +36%

Song Thrush

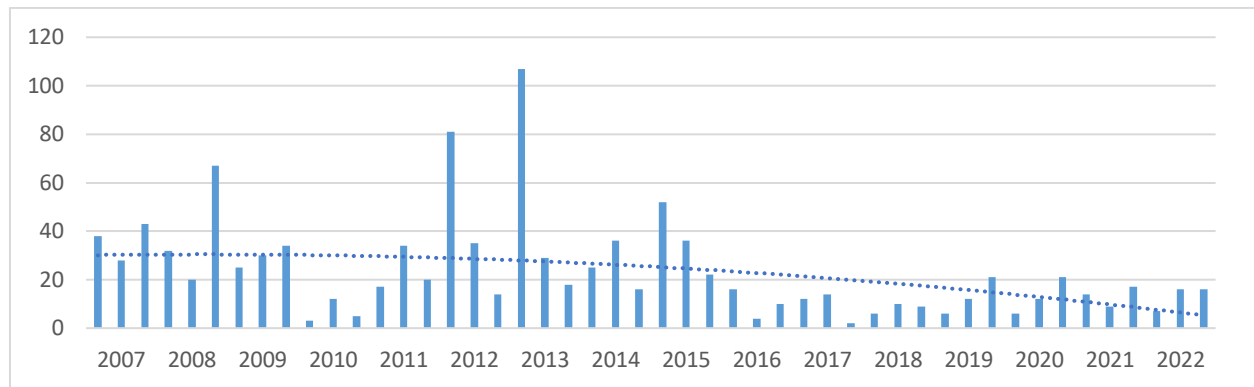


Song Thrush continue to be seen in very small numbers. Most records are made at the edges of the survey areas where forestry plantations form the boundary. More of these trees have now been removed, which will obviously have an effect on numbers recorded and make this graph inaccurate. Nationally there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

Red listed (A) +22% (B) +13% (C) +7%

Linnet.

(13)



Similar to the Yellowhammer. There are very few areas of suitable breeding habitat here for Linnets. 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 2010/11, then increased in numbers until the last seven 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.

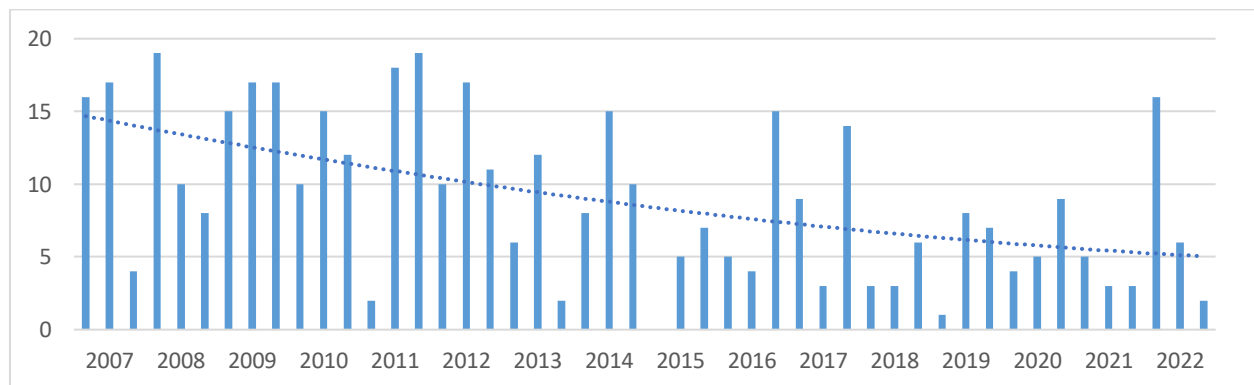
Red listed

(A) -24%

(B) +13%

(C) -40%

Reed Bunting

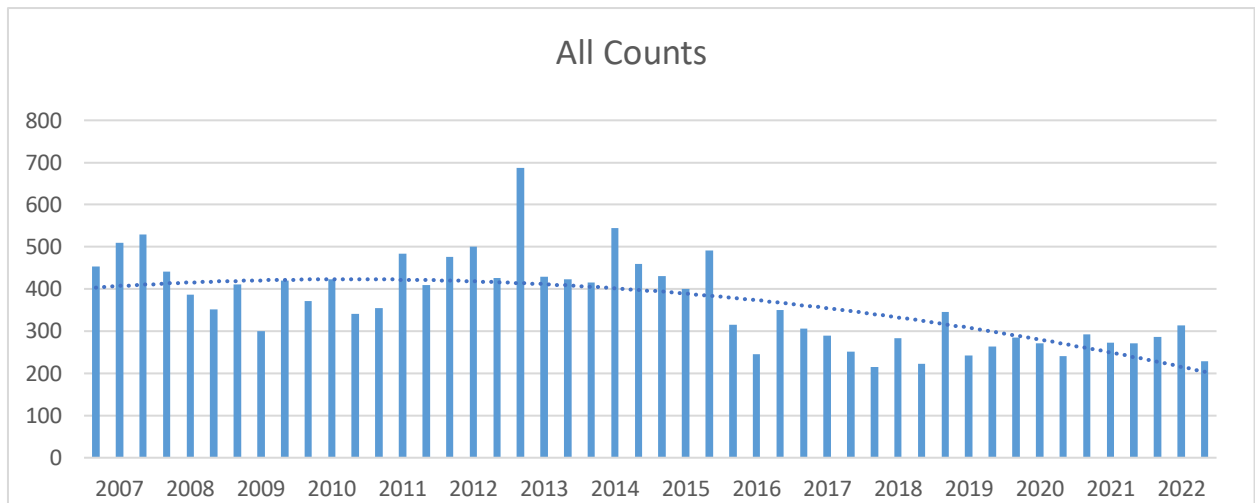


Reed Bunting numbers have slowly fallen in the survey areas. Only a relatively small part of the area is suitable breeding habitat. Nationally the population is said to be stable (BA). This is not indicated by our counts.

Amber listed

(A) +35%

(B) -5%



As the trend line shows, the counts of target species in the last few years of the survey are little more than half that of the first few years. This is following the national downward trend which is being recorded in the majority of species, by all other ornithological organisations with warnings that it is likely to continue.

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. Other sightings of interest are also included here.

Merlin

Recorded occasionally in four areas, not including Kimmer Lough, and seen in April, with no evidence of breeding. Most records are in the winter. 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 as a bird of passage in the spring 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. Two other flocks were reported, both again from Alnwick Moor, one of 96 in Dec of 2021 and a 200 strong flock in Feb. 2022. These may well have moved inland for shelter in a period of severe weather.

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. There is still a small number of breeding territories in our area but these are gradually being reduced.

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.

(16)

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.

Trend lines on the graphs, which are computer produced, give a very negative reading for the breeding records of most of the target species.

Taking into account the sixteen years of the survey, the following table is a result which should be viewed critically. Other opinions would be welcome.

In view of the fact that there is a reduction in numbers of many species nationally, it could 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 recent breeding periods than National averages.

Skylark (Red listed)
Whinchat (based on very small counts) (Amber listed)
Stonechat (Green listed)
Wren (weather related, Green listed)

Species with lower counts during recent seasons than the National averages.

Red Grouse. (Green listed)
Red Legged Partridge (Green listed)
Linnet (Red listed)
Reed Bunting (Amber listed)
Grey Partridge (Red listed)
Cuckoo (Red listed)
Meadow Pipit (Amber listed)
Curlew (Red listed)
Lapwing (Red listed)
Wheatear (Amber listed) Based on very small numbers.

Species with little variation in recent seasons from the National averages.

Pheasant (affected by birds released for shooting) (Green listed)
Song Thrush (Red Listed)
Yellowhammer (Red listed)
Snipe (Green listed)
Mallard (Amber listed)
Buzzard (Green listed)
Carrion Crow (Green listed)
Snipe (Amber listed)

Summary of the five areas.

(17)

Kimmer Lough. Breeding Season 2022.

The weather this spring in North Northumberland has been largely cool and dry but otherwise has been unremarkable. All three survey visits were carried out in quite good conditions for seeing and hearing birds.

Of the target species, no Red Grouse were seen or heard, but this is unsurprising since none have been recorded in the Kimmer breeding season since 2011. Skylark numbers were poor at all three visits. Reed Bunting records were low, in line with the pattern in recent years. Wheatear, despite being a target bird, has rarely been recorded at Kimmer and once again none were seen in 2022.

Of all the target birds, perhaps the most surprising result was that no Meadow Pipits were seen at the June visit despite good counts in April and May.

Willow Warblers, such a reliable breeding visitor throughout the previous fourteen years of the surveys, gave disappointing counts this year, with none at all being recorded at the May visit.

Until 2019 Whinchat had been a regular breeder, although in very low numbers, but none has been recorded since then. More surprising was the absence of any Blackbird records this year despite this being a successful breeding species in our general area.

Kimmer Lough. Winter 2022/23 Summary.

The winter has been largely mild and dry, but interspersed by a very cold week in December and another, shorter cold spell in January. The December count preceded the cold spell and the February count was some time after the second cold spell, so neither was likely to have had a significant effect on the results.

The total count in December (part of which was beset by heavy rain-showers) was 113 birds, although, as has more than once been the case in previous Decembers, 60+ of these were Mallard. Two Great Tits were the first winter record for this species in the 17 years of these surveys.

The February count was 108 birds and in this case the total was swollen by 50 Greylag Geese that came into the Lough at the end of the visit. The three Feral Pigeons also represented a first winter record at Kimmer.

The two surveys together resulted in just 23 species out of the cumulative total of 55 species recorded in these winter counts. But none of the "absentee" species this winter was a surprise since all these were birds that have been seen in some years but not in others.

The Kimmer Lough site has always tended to have Roe deer present, but on the December visit the sighting of 11 animals, including 3 immatures, was exceptional.

Richard Poppleton.

1/3/23.

Black Lough. Summary for 2022/23

(18)

Bird surveying at Black Lough during winter is enjoyable as you never know what you might find. Black lough lake held 38 Mallard in December and 4 Canada Geese in early February. One Red Grouse was seen in December but none were recorded in February with the exception of fresh faeces. Three Woodcock were flushed during the survey in February – this species is not regularly on the winter list for the site. I suspect that night surveys might reveal more of this specialist. Two Common Snipe were recorded in December.

Carrion Crows were few in number with only one recorded in February. Probably the highlight of the winter counts was a hunting Short-eared Owl in December. This species would have been attracted by rough grassland and Voles on the neighbouring areas of new planting.

Up to five Wrens had taken up territories by the February count as well as two Stonechats and a male Dunnock. As expected, Meadow Pipits were seen in very low numbers (one on each survey). Numbers will start to build in the coming months as birds return from the continent and coastal areas in the south. A pleasant surprise where two female Common Crossbills feeding on a fruiting Scot's Pine within the Black Lough survey area.

George Dodds.

Alnwick and Hulne Moors. Summary of 2022 breeding period.

Small numbers of Greylag Geese and Mallard have been recorded at both the Freeman's Pool and at the Gull Ponds on Alnwick Moor but no Tufted Duck appear to have bred at either this year.

Only very small numbers of Red Grouse have been recorded at any of the breeding period visits on either moor. The two areas of moorland can be taken as one site since they are only divided by the Duke's wall which the Grouse find is a very useful perch. Numbers seem to have taken a big drop from those in previous years. I have no record of the results of shooting during the last year.

Buzzards have retained their territory here with good breeding sites in the woodland in Hulne Park.

Twelve Curlew were recorded on Alnwick Moor in April, the highest number since the surveys began. Also one pair on Hulne Moor were they are not regular breeders. Only six Lapwing were seen on Alnwick Moor, a number which has been reducing gradually over the last few years.

Ravens are regularly seen here and there are good sites for them to breed in the Park.

Both Skylarks and Meadow Pipits have been seen in good numbers, as they have been in recent counts but these are all lower counts when compared to those made in the early years of the survey.

The west end of both these areas is wetland as a result of the over flow from the Freemans Pool and a very different habitat to the rest of the moorland. Birch, Willow and Gorse provide a very suitable site for Willow Warblers, Chiffchaff and a Blackcap, which is a new addition to the list. Snipe, Chaffinch and Wrens also approve. Yellowhammers and Reed Bunting appeared in good numbers in the early spring but must have moved on to breed else where.

Twelve Stonechat recorded in May must have been more than one family group and a pair of Whinchat were a first for the Alnwick Moor list.

A group of 18 Fallow deer were seen on Hulne Moor in May but no Red Deer have been seen here for some time.

Alnwick and Hulme Moor. Summary of Winter Period 2022/23.

In Dec. 25 Teal were counted on the old Gull Ponds, were no Gulls have bred during the survey years. 50 Red Legged Partridge, which must have been released locally, also 16 Grey Partridge. I wonder if these had been imported from the Lowground farms and released on the moors, in which case they will probably be missing all that extra feed and migrate back again. A single Marsh Tit was the first record for any of the moorland sites, but the lower end of Alnwick Moor is a good spot for any of the Tit family. Bullfinches are often on the moor in winter where they spend time feeding on Heather seed.

Always an interesting place birdwise the Freemans Pool held 50 Wigeon in December, a hand full of Teal and a Little Grebe. Red Grouse Numbers were good and one Black Cock surprised the surveyors and was the first to be recorded during any of the surveys.

Jim Clark.

Post Office Pylon. Summary of breeding period 2022.

Curlew have again maintained their small breeding population with probably three pairs. Only three Red Grouse were seen in April.

Stonechat have again been recorded at each visit. POP is proving to be a good place to see and hear Cuckoos and the two small clumps of willow on the south side never fail to produce some Willow Warblers and a Chiffchaff features in this years sightings.

Meadow Pipits were seen in good numbers and one Tree Pipit was recorded, a first for this site. Skylarks maintained their usual numbers, even though none were seen in April, 32 were recorded in June.

Wrens seem to be building up their numbers on the moorland again as we had hoped that they would with better weather conditions.

One lonely pair of Reed Bunting are regularly recorded. Magpie and Coal tit are both new to the list.

Post Office Pylon in winter 2022/23. Only three Red Grouse were recorded in both December and February and 4 Stonechats in Dec. Otherwise it has been very quiet with totals of only 22 birds in Dec. and 17 in Feb.

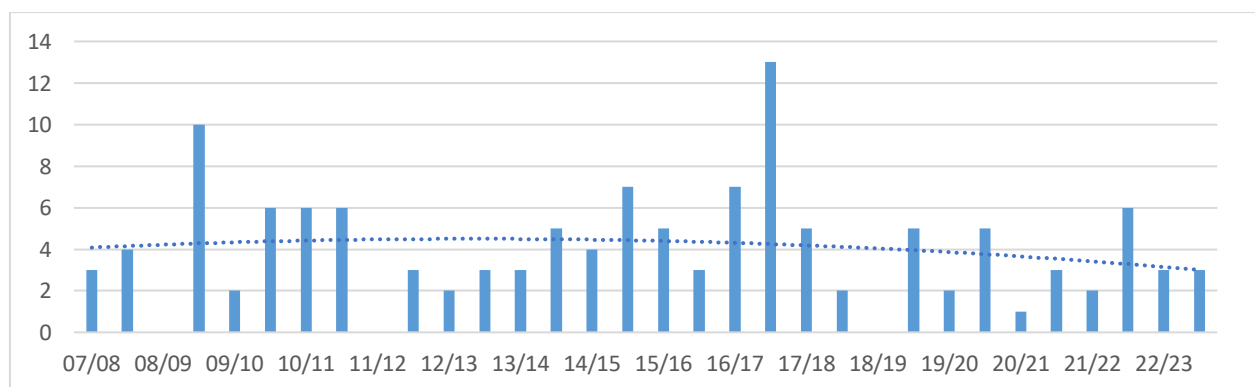
Jim Clark.

Winter 2022/23

Two periods of cold weather with some snow and freezing conditions in mid Dec. and Jan. will have tested the survival abilities of the species that are dependent on insects for food. December frost followed heavy rains and waterlogged land. More severe conditions followed in mid January with more snow and frost but for only a relatively short period. A further few days of colder weather occurred in early March when there was a light covering of snow but with very low temperatures, just when some species were making a start to their breeding season.

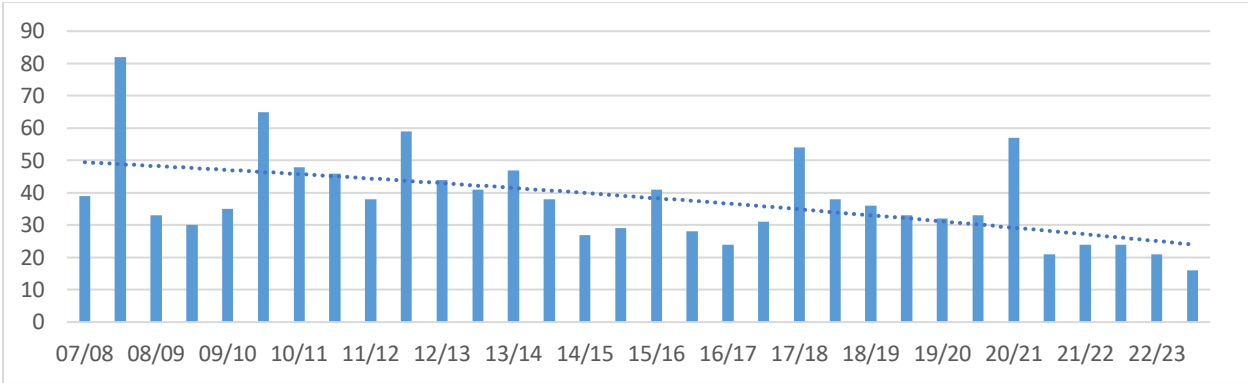
All species are recorded through the winter period, but sightings can be very irregular. Most species which breed on our moorlands are semi-migratory, often not leaving this country but moving to coastal areas or to places where food and shelter are more readily available. The areas of moorland covered 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.



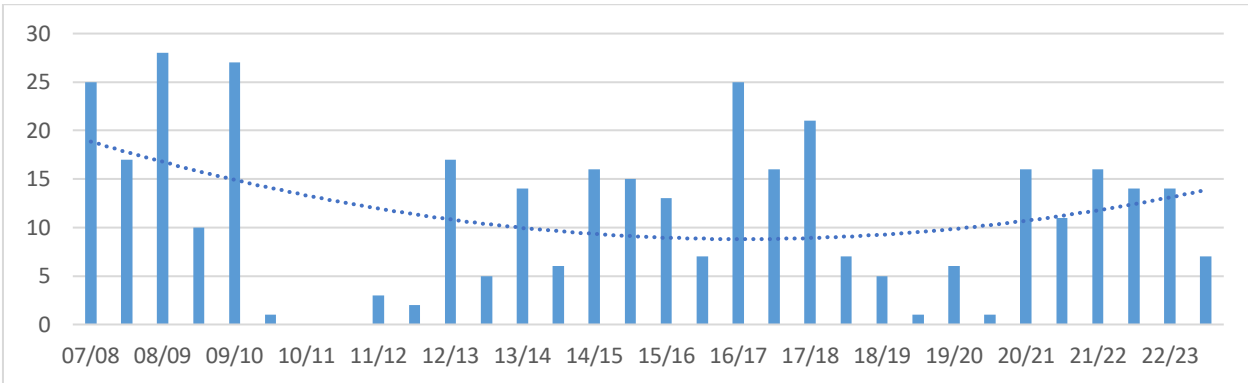
Buzzard numbers continue to maintain a more or less level population remaining in their chosen territories. In this part of Northumberland a regular source of food is supplied by “road kill” of Pheasants etc.

RedGrouse.

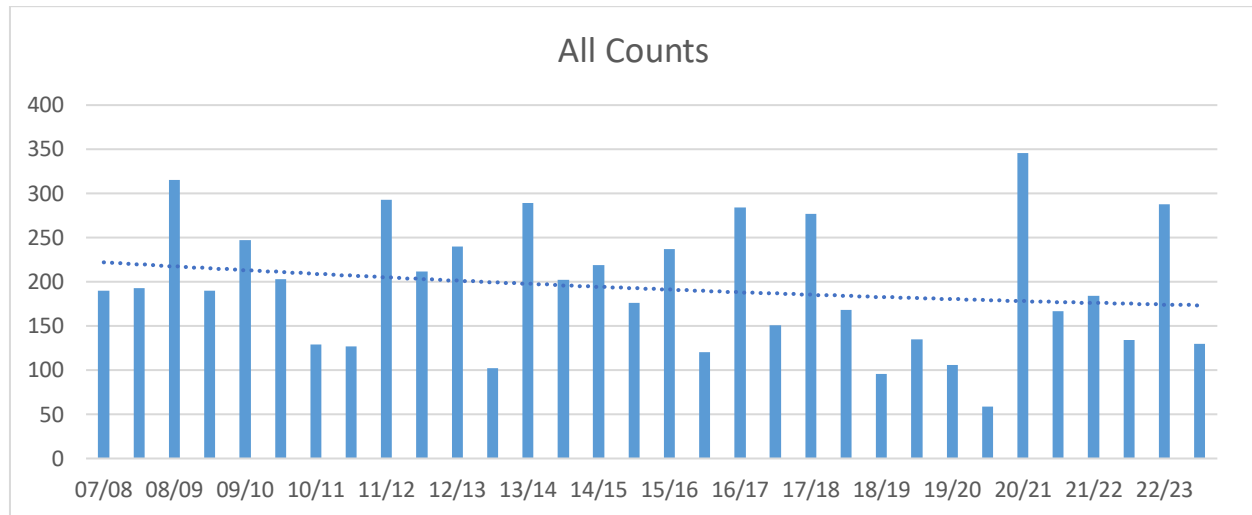


Counts of Red Grouse in the winter have always been higher than in the breeding season when they appear to be much more secretive. After several years without any shooting the proportion of birds that are now mature enough to breed should have formed a sound basis for a healthy increase in the population but this has not developed and numbers are still falling. There has been no increase in the populations at either of the outlying areas of Post Office Pylon or Black Lough.

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 fell dramatically again in 2018/19 and 2019/20. In the last two years there has been another revival. A good breeding season will hopefully see a continued increase in their numbers. It is very noticeable that the counts in February are always less than in December which supports the claim that Wrens lose approximately 50% of their numbers during an average winter.



Winter populations of the reduced number of species on the moorland are maintaining a fairly level average total count.

Others Species of interest 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, but small numbers of our local birds do occasionally remain on their home ground. Counts in February this year, 2023, are showing an earlier return to our Moorland survey sites than usual.

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. Skylarks are also returning to these areas earlier than usual this year.

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. These areas have now been returned to arable cropping.

Whinchat and Wheatear

(23)

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 recent years. Drought conditions in central Africa have continued for another year.

Stonechat

Some remain in the area, others move into southern UK or France, Spain and Ireland. There has been a gradual increase in the numbers of Stonechat wintering in our area over the past few years.

Reed Bunting

Mainly sedentary but leave 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.

Black Grouse.

A record of single Black Cock was made on Hulne Moor at the December visit. This is the first record during the surveys on any of the Moorland sites and the first in memory of the Gamekeepers.

Jim Clark. (15/3/2023)