



Summer 2016 Newsletter



SUMMER GREENERY COVERING THE FARM TRACKS.
PHOTO BY TAMARA WEBSTER

Welcome to the *SUMMER 2016* edition of Wildlife Matters!

Wildlife and technology are becoming closer. The use of strategically positioned cameras and the new innovation where drones can be used to photograph the landscapes from above to help us plan are now significant tools when it comes to land management.

We find it fascinating that from an editorial standpoint we do not really have to work that hard to put our newsletters together because we just let events unfold. The interest in the Zeidler tree hive has been significant and we will be covering that in the next edition of the newsletter. Nick Adams continues to do an outstanding job of managing and reporting our wildlife programme as the seasons come and go.

We are in the midst of harvest at the moment and here is holding thumbs that our crop of Oats and Malting Barley comes off successfully. Happy reading!



A BIRD'S-EYE-VIEW OF THE BALING



Wildlife Review Summer 2016

BY NICK ADAMS

This **April** was typical of recent years weather-wise with cold weather and showers of rain, hail, sleet and snow to deal with. The birds do struggle, they know they should be thinking of getting down to nesting, but often it's still a case of surviving. This is why we were still putting tailings onto our wildbird covers to supplement the dwindling stock of grown seed that was all but gone. Species like yellowhammer and linnets were in the hedgerows singing and displaying one day, the next they were back in flocks in the covers.

One species that always breeds early is the long-tailed tit, whilst looking along a hedgerow I spotted a pair busily building their amazing nest of lichen and cobwebs, designed to expand as their family grows. This pair had cleverly chosen a nesting site below an active crow's nest deep in a blackthorn bush. The thorn was too thick for the crow to get through, but close enough to the crow's nest to be afforded protection from the crows who would see off any potential egg thieves that close to their nest.

The ewes were busy lambing, I was lucky enough to see this little fellow arrive the one morning.



THIS PICTURE SHOWS A KEY PART OF MOTHER/OFFSPRING BONDING, WHEN THE EWE CLEANS THE LAMB.

Migrants leaving Africa and heading north were not aware of the weather here so they started to arrive on cue. Species like chiffchaff, blackcap, swallow and wheatear have now arrived, the first three staying to breed, the wheatear moving on to sites further north and west. Other species were just starting to pass through like redstart, yellow wagtail and tree pipit.

The star bird of the month was a willow warbler and not just any willow warbler. Tim and Richard captured this bird during their bird ringing, this was the third breeding season in a row they had encountered this bird at Peewit's Gorse. Willow warblers weigh around 10 grams, this bird had flown to its wintering grounds in Ghana/Ivory Coast and back at least three times now, that is roughly a round trip of 6,000 miles, making a total of at least 18,000 miles., that's three quarters of the Earth's circumference, fingers crossed we see her next year for the complete circumnavigation of the Earth! Amazing!!

May saw the weather slowly starting to warm up, not without a late frost or two in the early days. Birds continued to arrive and the resident species mostly started to get down to the business of breeding. The obvious exception being the corn bunting. Some of the males were singing from around the farm, the majority however were still in a flock in Wet Field that numbered in excess of 300 birds, pictured above.

Alison and her team of volunteers had checked the kestrel boxes as they nest first, to see if any of the three pairs we have were using them. As always it was a mixed picture. The pair that reared three chicks in a box last year have beaten off a grey squirrel for their site and are sitting on five eggs - phew! A second pair have been seen for months around another box and we all thought they would be nesting in there, however when the box was checked (using a small camera on a carbon pole for minimal disturbance) there was

however a scrape made by the birds but no eggs. I even saw the birds going in and out of the box in a very excited manner – next year perhaps.

I do occasionally see other things, and a badger walked by me when I was watching the kestrels.



A BADGER ON AN EVENING WANDER.

In May and June Richard and I were completing a yellowhammer breeding survey – details later in the newsletter. Other species breeding in good numbers on the farm this year were meadow pipit (twelve territories), willow warbler (seven territories), marsh tit (six territories), sparrowhawk (two territories) and spotted flycatcher (two territories). There seemed to be less whitethroat this year, they winter in the Sahel region of Africa and I suspect they had a hard time there. All we can do is give them some great habitat when they arrive to help boost the numbers.

As mentioned in the last newsletter, we have been lucky enough to have butterfly surveys being carried



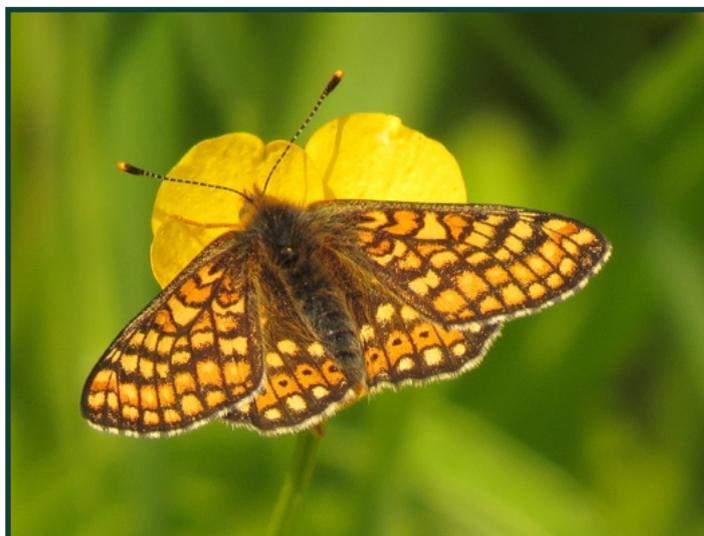
KESTREL SHOWING A LOT OF INTEREST IN THE NEST BOX

out this year by the Hugo and Mike from the Wiltshire branch of Butterfly Conservation. They have been targeting the downland and have already found us a new species – green hairstreak!

Here's a picture taken by Hugo of the butterfly – what a colour! The guys also managed to get permission to survey a piece of downland adjoining ours and were lucky enough to see marsh fritillary and small blue. These are pretty important species and ones we hope to encourage onto the far more with both habitat management and creation. Here's a picture of a marsh fritillary I was lucky enough to find last year elsewhere in Wiltshire - beautiful!



GREEN HAIRSTREAK



MARSH FRITILLARY



Species Spotlight: HONEYBEE

Following on from the exciting news in the previous newsletter about the building of and occupation of our tree hive it seemed only right to talk a bit more about the focus of that work – the honey bee. But first a quick update on the tree hive. We think the swarm that arrived was relatively small and for a while we saw steady but not that great an amount of activity, no doubt due to the relatively dull June we had. Anyway, things have started to pick up with the warmer, sunnier July and the last couple of times I have been to check the numbers and activity have increased, presumably the first lot of bees reared in the tree hive have now hatched and are part of the activity. Great stuff!

So what type of honey bee are we talking about here?

This is the Western honey bee *Apis mellifera*, there are a number of different races and the bees we have in the UK tend to be hybrids of the Northern European *A m mellifera* and Italian honey bee *A m ligustica* races. There is some variation in colour between the worker bees (drones) as seen in the picture I took of the bees just after they had arrived, most are pretty dark, but the individual at the top of the picture is paler.

The year in the life of a bee colony is a fascinating story. At the start of the year the colony, as with most types of wildlife are just surviving, they will have hopefully put enough food aside for the winter, the number of workers in the colony will be at perhaps 10% of the capacity. The queen will be alive, as she is the beating heart of the colony. Once the days start to lengthen, the drones start to head out to collect food and the queen will start to lay more eggs. If left alone a queen might live for five years, during that time she might well have moved two or three times. This is done by the process that brought bees to our tree hive – swarming.

If the year is going well and numbers are building well in the hive, the colony will make a special cell, where the egg of a new queen is put. Once hatched its



fed on special food, royal jelly. At the same time, other types of bees – scout bees are being reared and these will head out ahead of and with the swarm to seek out new homes. When everything is ready the old queen will leave with about half of the colony, the scouts might have already found and agreed on a site. They do this through a democratic process. Each will go out and search, then return to the hive to let their fellow scouts know their findings, hopefully a few will come with you next time to check it out, if they are keen they try to recruit others and once around 80% are on board the site is approved!

If it's a good summer, other smaller swarms might leave, but it could just a case of getting ready for the winter again by making the honey reserves.

By NICK ADAMS



BARN OWL BOX CHECKS

We are delighted with the results from this morning's ringing on Lower Pertwood Farm. We did two boxes. Firstly at Mole Barn three owlets were ringed, (as seen in the picture). All were a good weight with full stomachs. The second was Manor Farm Barn where again, three were ringed, and again they were a good weight. Given that it is not a terribly good year for barn owls, these are excellent results.

We shall be checking the top Summerslade and Field Barn boxes again in September. Both boxes had owls earlier in the season but had not laid eggs. I shall be surprised if the top Summerslade pair do not have a brood this year too!

UPDATE AND PHOTO FROM ALISON RYMELL
OF THE DEVERILL RAPTOR AND OWL GROUP (DROG)

Bird Breeding Survey: YELLOWHAMMER

Hopefully you will remember we're fans of corn buntings at Lower Pertwood and we did a breeding survey for them last year, this resulted in recording no fewer than 134 territories, around 2% of the UK population of a bird of High Conservation Concern breeding on the farm - brilliant!



MALE CORN BUNTING UTILISING ONE OF OUR DOCKS AS A SINGING POST.

So in 2016 we thought we would concentrate on another species of high conservation concern we have here - the yellowhammer. They are both buntings but nest in very different habitats and ways. Corn bunting are polygamous and nest on the ground, yellowhammers are in pairs and nest in bushes.

Again, some of you will recall we had a lot of yellowhammer on Lower Pertwood during the winter, with numbers peaking at 600 birds. But they do move

further than corn bunting to find winter food, but we hoped there would be 50 or so pairs.

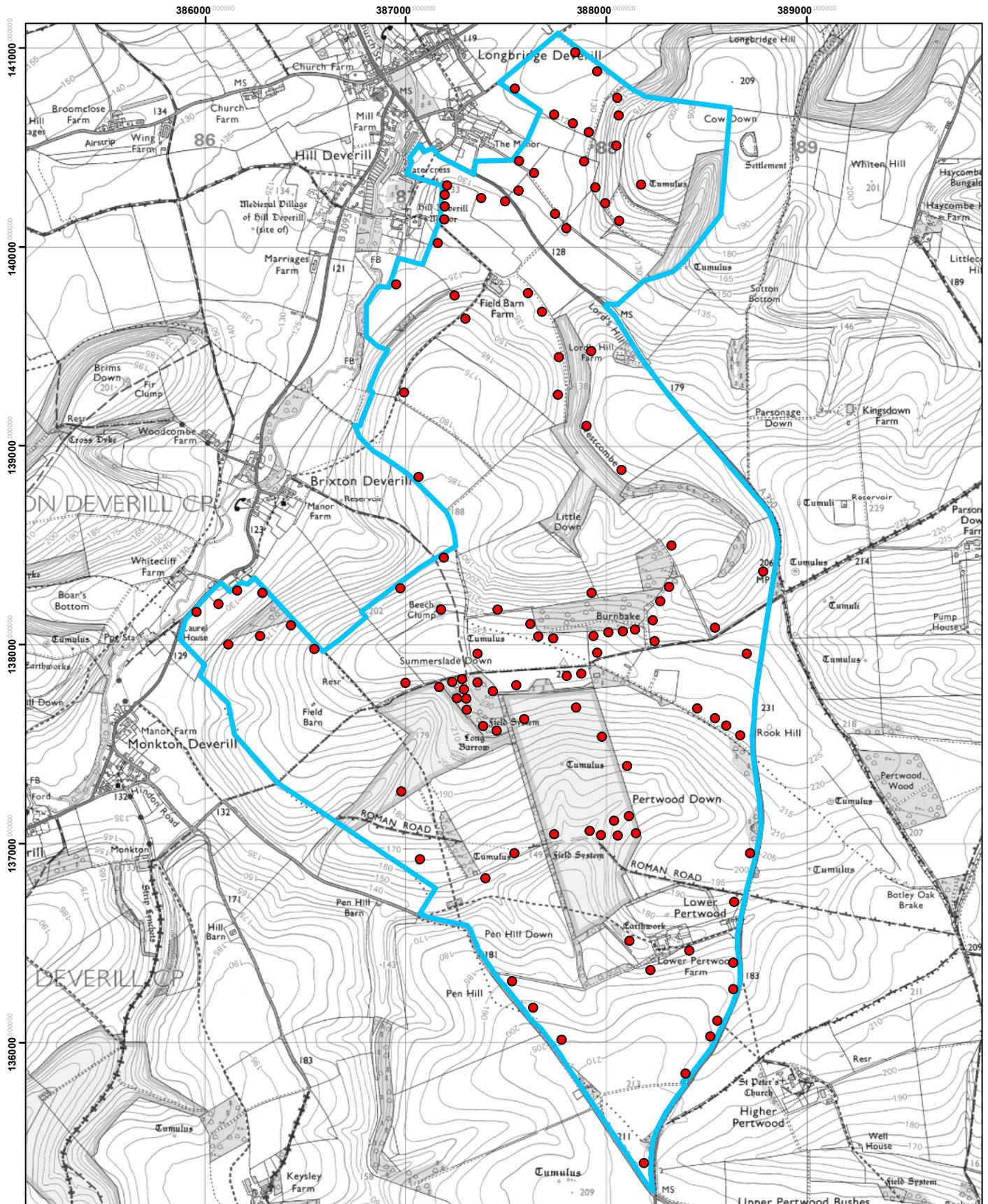
The final total was 114 pairs a fantastic number and with additional hedgerows planted over the last couple of years and other ones gapped up (extra bushes planted in the gaps) the habitat should continue to improve in the future.

For more details, please see the map on the following page, kindly prepared by the RSPB (page 6).

We can repeat the whole, or part of the survey in the future to get a feel for how the birds are doing, this will certainly be very interesting to repeat in five or so years. Next year we will be perhaps repeating some of the the corn bunting survey and looking at another important species like skylark or linnet.



MALE YELLOWHAMMER WATCHING FROM HIS SONG-POST ON A HAWTHORN.



Lower Pertwood Farm yellowhammer survey 2016

● Yellowhammer territories

Scale = 1:18,000
Central Grid Reference: ST877382

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RSPB: LAND SHARING AND SPARING PROJECT 2016

As news of the work we're doing at Lower Pertwood spreads, we are occasionally contacted by people and organisations wanting to work with us, for example the Natural Beekeeping Trust. We were therefore pleased to be contacted by the RSPB about being part of a project they were carrying out – **the land sparing and sharing project**. The project compares farms in and out of Stewardship schemes as well as those who go the extra mile for wildlife to see what impact they have on the wildlife. It was great to be in the 'go-the-extra-mile' category!

The surveys were carried out on two 1km squares, walking two lines of about 1km long and hopefully about 500 metres apart. All birds are noted on a map on each visit, one in early May and the other in mid June. The survey at Field Barn produced 31 species, seven of which were **red-listed** (of high conservation concern) and four were **amber-listed** (of conservation concern). For complete explanation of how and why a species is categorised use the following [link](#).

The highlights were a pair of grey partridge on the May survey, hopefully they were tucked away breeding on the second survey so were not detected. Good numbers of skylark (max 17 in May), yellowhammer (max 19 in June) and corn bunting (max 29 in June) were worthy of note.

The survey at Pertwood Down produced 33 species, eight of which were red-listed and six were amber-listed. Highlights again included a pair of grey partridge on the May visit, a yellow wagtail on the May visit – a red-listed species that breeds further north in Wiltshire, so possibly a late migrant, yellowhammer (max 16 in May) and corn bunting (max 12 in June) were again in good numbers.

The survey will be repeated next year, it will be very interesting to see how the numbers compare and where I can track down any of these grey partridge with a covey of youngsters!

Many thanks to Ron McIntyre (ron.mcintyre@rspb.org.uk) and Will Peach (will.peach@rspb.org.uk) from the RSPB for taking the time to conduct these surveys and for sharing the results with us.

SPECIES	CONSERVATION CONCERN	PERTWOOD DOWN		FIELD BARN	
		1 ST VISIT 05/05/2016	2 ND VISIT 15/06/2016	1 ST VISIT 05/05/2016	2 ND VISIT 15/06/2016
Red-legged partridge	GREEN	0	0	3	0
Grey partridge	RED	2	0	2	0
Pheasant	GREEN	1	2	2	0
Red Kite	GREEN	0	0	0	1
Common buzzard	GREEN	0	0	1	1
Kestrel	AMBER	0	1	1	1
Lesser black-backed gull	AMBER	0	0	0	8
Stock dove	AMBER	0	2	13	3
Wood pigeon	GREEN	8	8	31	14
Skylark	RED	4	5	17	15
Swallow	GREEN	2	0	0	3
Meadow pipit	AMBER	1	2	0	0
Pied wagtail	GREEN	0	1	3	1
Yellow wagtail	RED	1	0	0	0
Duncock	AMBER	1	0	0	1
Robin	GREEN	4	2	4	3
Song thrush	RED	0	2	1	1
Blackbird	GREEN	1	3	2	3
Blackcap	GREEN	4	2	1	1
Whitethroat	GREEN	0	0	1	3
Willow warbler	AMBER	2	1	0	0
Chiffchaff	GREEN	1	2	1	1
Goldcrest	GREEN	2	1	0	0
Wren	GREEN	4	6	7	5
Great tit	GREEN	4	3	4	5
Coal tit	GREEN	0	1	0	0
Blue tit	GREEN	3	0	3	1
Marsh tit	RED	1	0	0	0
Long-tailed tit	GREEN	2	0	0	0
Jay	GREEN	1	0	0	0
Jackdaw	GREEN	0	0	2	1
Rook	GREEN	0	4	48	2
Carrion crow	GREEN	0	4	6	11
Chaffinch	GREEN	8	6	8	10
Linnet	RED	2	0	7	13
Redpoll	RED	0	0	1	0
Goldfinch	GREEN	3	0	0	2
Bullfinch	AMBER	2	0	0	0
Yellowhammer	RED	16	7	12	19

SPOTTED ON THE TRAIL CAM!



INQUISITIVE ROE DEER



THE ELUSIVE BADGER



RABBIT



HELLO THERE MR FOX

INTERESTING READING

ORGANIC FARMING: CAN IT KEEP UP?

Organic farming is often known for producing lower yields than conventional farming, even though its benefits to people and the planet easily compensate for this. Recent research has begun to show that farming organically can in fact be more profitable for a farmer than conventional farming, but also has the capability to produce the quantity of food the world needs. To read more please follow these links:

[Horticulture Week - Organic Farm Profitability](#)

[Organic Authority - Organic Can Feed the World](#)

WHY GAMEKEEPING HELPS BIRDS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

Gamekeepers make an often unappreciated contribution to the diversity of bird life in the countryside. Within the last century, farming and forestry have become intensive, taking a toll on wild birdlife through habitat destruction and altered food chains. Gamekeepers manage the countryside for species such as pheasants, partridges and grouse, and in doing so create an environment in which other bird species can thrive. This report from 2007 by the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust summarises the evidence, and shows the winners and losers from game conservation.

[Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust - Singing Fields](#)

BARN OWLS FURTHER AFIELD

These beautiful birds are found all over the world, but in the UK their numbers are relatively low when compared to the rest of Europe, or even Africa. Kinder climates and greater habitat area may help the owls to thrive in other countries, but habitat destruction around the world has forced owls to live in progressively more and more urban areas. South Africa, it turns out, is no exception, and barn owls face many of the same struggles as our owls here in the UK. To read more about these owls on the other side of the world, please follow the link:

[Owls: We Do Give a Hoot](#)

The 99th bird species at Pertwood!



PHOTO BY NICK ADAMS

This little **Pied Flycatcher** is the 99th bird species recorded by Nick, our wildlife expert, since he started his work at Lower Pertwood Farm. Thank you for your dedication Nick! It is always wonderful to see the results of our wildlife efforts. Fingers crossed that no. 100 won't be far off!

For Next Time....

Our butterfly bank, as seen from this drone photo, is well underway. Once complete, the bank will be planted with butterfly-friendly fauna to provide the ideal habitat for butterflies, in the perfect location. See the full story in the next edition of Wildlife Matters.



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