



South Downs Farmland Bird Initiative

## **SOUTH DOWNS FARMLAND BIRD MONITORING**

### INSTRUCTIONS

The South Downs Farmland Bird Initiative (SDFBI) monitoring project aims to determine breeding population trends of farmland birds within the South Downs National Park in Sussex and Hampshire. The project is a collaboration between the RSPB, Natural England, the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, the South Downs National Park Authority, the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), the South Downs Land Management Group and the Sussex and Hampshire Ornithological Societies. The project combines data from the BTO Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) with additional data from randomly-distributed squares within the South Downs National Park that are surveyed annually.

The South Downs Farmland Bird Initiative is a wider project which involves working with farmers and landowners to provide the 'Big 3' for farmland birds: safe nesting areas, summer feeding areas and winter feeding areas. Focusing on lapwing, grey partridge and corn bunting, the habitat created will also benefit other bird species such as skylark, linnet and yellowhammer, as well as other farmland wildlife including brown hares, rare arable plants and bumblebees. By taking part in this monitoring project, you will be helping to assess the effectiveness of this work across the South Downs National Park.

### **SURVEY SITES**

If you survey a BBS square within the South Downs National Park, and the habitat in your square is predominantly farmland, then please conduct your surveys as normal according to the standard BBS instructions, and please submit your BBS results directly to the BTO as normal. Your data will be used for the SDFBI monitoring project without any further action on your part.

Further randomly-distributed 1-km squares have been selected within the South Downs National Park, and these have been selected to include only squares with predominantly farmland habitat (more than 50% arable land or grassland). If you have been allocated one of these survey sites, please follow the survey instructions below. These squares cannot currently be surveyed for the BBS because they are not part of the national BBS random sample.

### **TRANSECT ROUTES**

Please establish a transect route in your square according to the BBS instructions that are available at <http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/bbs> or on request. Your route should ideally consist of two parallel lines, north-south or east-west, each 1 km long. Transect lines should ideally be 500 m apart and 250 m in from the edge of the square. In practice the transect lines are likely to deviate from the ideal because they will follow public rights of way or avoid physical features. Please access private land only with the permission of the landowner, and please take account when planning your route of the need to avoid disturbance to nesting birds during your survey visits. Please mark your route on a map and return this to the survey organiser, and please use the same transect route each year.

## **SURVEY METHOD**

You should aim to visit your allocated 1-km square twice during each breeding season. The early visit should be made between early April and mid-May, and the late visit between mid-May and the end of June. On each visit please walk your established transect route. Walk at a slow methodical pace, recording all birds seen and heard along the route. You can pause to scan for birds but do not stop for long periods. If you are familiar with the BBS method, then please do not attempt to record birds according to 200-m transect sections or distance bands but simply record one tally for each species for the entire survey. Use your normal field notebook.

Survey visits should take place during the morning, ideally starting before 9 a.m. BBS visits should always start before 9 a.m. but it is acceptable for SDFBI survey visits to start later in the morning. Please do not attempt to survey birds in persistent heavy rain, very poor visibility or strong wind. For each visit note the date, and the start and finish times of the outward and return routes. Include all bird species, including feral and introduced species, and include birds seen in flight.

## **RETURNING RESULTS**

Once you have completed both visits to your allocated square, please return your results promptly to the survey organiser using the form provided (ideally by email). Results should be submitted by the end of August at the latest. In addition, if you do make contact with any landowners in your survey square, please report to them what you have recorded. This helps to maintain good relations with the farming community, and can help to inform and improve habitat management for farmland birds.

## **OPTIONAL FURTHER SURVEYS**

If you have the time available, please consider taking on one or more further squares for the SDFBI monitoring project. Please contact the survey organiser to be allocated further randomly-selected squares. BBS squares should always take priority, as results from these squares have the most value, both nationally and locally. However, the more relaxed survey method employed for the SDFBI monitoring project should enable you to consider, for example, surveying two squares in one morning.

## **USEFUL INFORMATION**

Use <http://getamap.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/getamap/frames.htm> to view and print an OS map of your square. Please read the general health and safety information for volunteer fieldworkers that is published by the BTO and available at <http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/bbs> or on request.

## **CONTACT DETAILS**

Please contact the survey organiser if you have any queries or problems: Helen Crabtree, BTO Regional Representative for Sussex, 3 Myrtle Cottages, Ardingly Road, Cuckfield, RH17 5HD. Email [hcrabtree@gmail.com](mailto:hcrabtree@gmail.com). Tel. 01444 441687.

## **APPENDIX: THE FARMLAND BIRD INDICATOR**

The UK Farmland Bird Indicator is widely accepted as a reliable measure of trends in farmland bird populations, and is used by the UK Government and country administrations to measure progress in safeguarding and enhancing biodiversity. The indicator combines population trend information for 19 species that are dependent on farmland and not able to thrive in other habitats: tree sparrow, corn bunting, turtle dove, grey partridge, yellow wagtail, starling, linnet, lapwing, yellowhammer, skylark, kestrel, reed bunting, whitethroat, greenfinch, rook, stock dove, goldfinch, woodpigeon and jackdaw. The SDFBI monitoring project aims to determine breeding population trends for some of these species, and to compare these with regional and national trends.