



LOHP Bird Surveys 2011: Webbs Fen, Broomscot Common & Scarfe Meadows

Rowena H W Langston & Reg A Langston

Little Ouse Headwaters Project



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Abstract

Territory mapping surveys of breeding birds were undertaken in 2011, on Webbs Fen, Thelnetham, Broomscot Common and Scarfe Meadows in Garboldisham. This report outlines the survey methods and presents the results. Survey results for Webbs Fen were used to direct the timing and sequence of restoration management works to avoid disturbance to birds breeding on the site.

Introduction

Webbs Fen and Scarfe Meadows are owned and managed by the Little Ouse Headwaters' Project (LOHP), whilst Broomscot Common is managed by the LOHP on behalf of the Garboldisham Parish Charities. Funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund has enabled the purchase and restoration of Webbs Fen and is contributing to works on Broomscot Common and Scarfe Meadows. The bird surveys reported here are an important component of the LOHP's management of these sites for nature conservation, landscape and amenity, both to inform the timing and practical management measures and to enable us to assess the effects of our management in terms of the birds that use these sites.

Methods

A walking route around each site ensured coverage of all boundary features and internal features, covering the ground to within 100m of all parts of each site (RHWL & RAL). Three visits were made to Broomscot Common and Scarfe Meadows, in April, May and June, and four visits to Webbs Fen, the additional survey being undertaken in July. All visits were completed before 0900hrs. Bird registrations were recorded on one map per visit and the compiled visits summarised on a further map for each site, distinguishing between one-off and repeat records of territorial activity. A combination of standard British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) bird territory mapping and atlas codes were used to indicate bird activity/interpreted breeding status – possible, probable or confirmed (Table A1). In addition, for Webbs Fen, there were extra visits for nest-recording and to obtain confirmation of breeding outcomes for key species (RAL).

Results

All surveys were completed. The summary results for each site are presented in Figures 1, 2, and 3, and full species lists with breeding categories in Appendix I. The highest order categories of breeding evidence are presented in each case, ie confirmation of breeding where available.

Webbs Fen

Survey visits:

- 1 21 April
- 2 12 May
- 3 3 June
- 4 2 July

Webbs Fen is a remnant patch of valley fen that has been drained in the past and developed rough grassland with stands of *Phragmites*. Internal ditches and, prior to felling in winter 2010/11, a wind break of non-native poplar and alder subdivided the site. Restoration management aims to reinstate wet fen.

The internal ditches, scheduled for infilling as part of the fen restoration management, were the main internal features of the site associated with breeding birds, namely reed warbler (4 pairs), sedge warbler (3 pairs), reed bunting (2 pairs) and whitethroat (1 pair) (Figure 1). The rough grassland that covered most of the area of Webbs Fen was used regularly by hunting barn owls, nesting (successful) in an owl box on Thelnetham Fen (SWT) at the riverside end of the boundary with Webbs Fen. Other breeding bird species were associated with boundary features, ditches, scrub/hedges and the River Little Ouse.

Breeding was confirmed for whitethroat, reed and sedge warblers, and reed bunting. A grasshopper warbler held territory close to the river for several weeks, from mid-June, but is not thought to have bred. Recently fledged broods of great tit, blue tit and pheasant may have come from Webbs Fen or adjoining sites. Indications of probable breeding on or adjoining the site were obtained for wren, chiffchaff, robin, chaffinch, long-tailed tit and blackcap (Appendix I).

Broomscot Common

Survey visits:

- 1 22 April
- 2 13 May
- 3 26 June

Broomscot Common is a classic Breckland heath with extensive islands of mature and over-mature gorse, *Ulex europaeus*. The light soils support sparse vegetation, currently

dominated by ragwort. A small area of wet fen lies in the northern part of the site, with a copse of willow on the western margin. A pool sits on the eastern boundary, at the end of the ditch which bisects the site towards the northern end.

The gorse scrub was mainly occupied by semi-colonially breeding linnets, and yellowhammers (Figure 2). Patches of scrub, notably around the pool in the north-eastern corner, were associated with clusters of probable breeding birds. Most other breeding birds were found along the boundary hedges. Open ground provided feeding habitat for nesting mistle thrush, little owl, carrion crows and jackdaws.

Breeding was confirmed for linnet and robin. Many of the species recorded were noted as possible or probable breeders (Appendix I). Broomscot Common has fen, wood and gardens adjoining it, forming a varied habitat mosaic.

Scarfe Meadows

Survey visits:

- 1 15 April
- 2 30 May
- 3 30 June

Scarfe Meadows comprises three grass fields separated by ditches. The site's external boundaries are formed by mature, albeit gappy, hedges to the north and west, Garboldisham Old Fen to the east, and the River Little Ouse to the south. The site is grazed by cattle and the vegetation is currently species-poor. There are several mature maiden trees within the fields.

Breeding birds were associated with the mature hedges and scrub, notably in the north-western corner of the site and along the ditch there; also along the western boundary and close to the river in a cluster of trees and scrub (Figure 3).

Breeding was confirmed for long-tailed tit, great tit and blue tit, although these may have moved on to the site from adjoining breeding locations. Probable breeding was indicated for reed bunting, yellowhammer, chaffinch, robin, blackcap, wren, chiffchaff and woodpigeon (Appendix I).

Discussion

It was more difficult to confirm breeding on Broomscot Common and Scarfe Meadows on the basis of 3 survey visits, without the supplementary observations and nest-finding. However, it is thought likely that many of the possible and probable breeders bred on these sites, or on adjoining sites. It is also likely that some birds that were singing early on in the breeding season moved to other sites to breed.

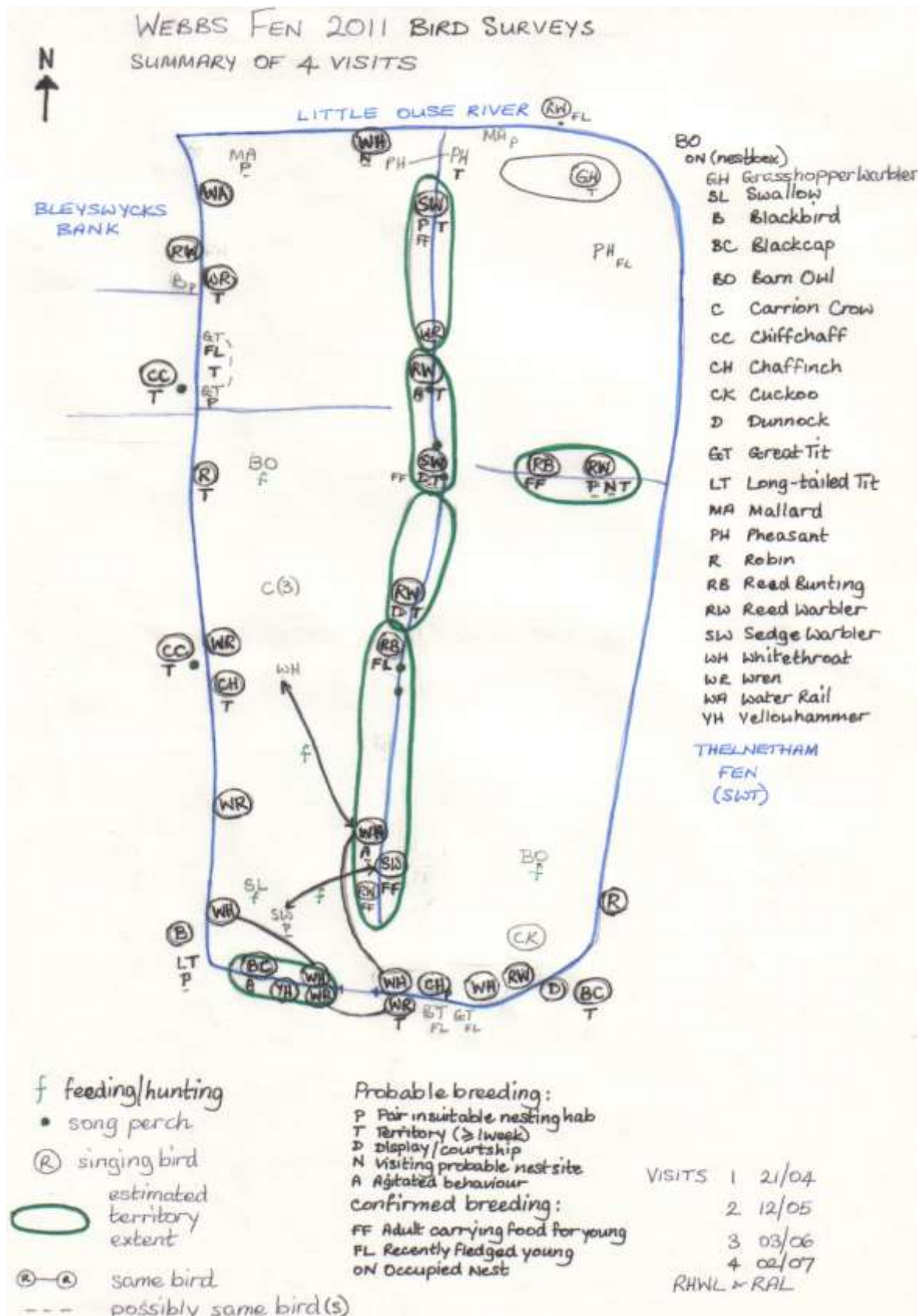


Figure 1. Webb's Fen summary of four bird territory mapping surveys in 2011.



Figure 2. Broomscot Common summary of three bird territory mapping surveys in 2011.

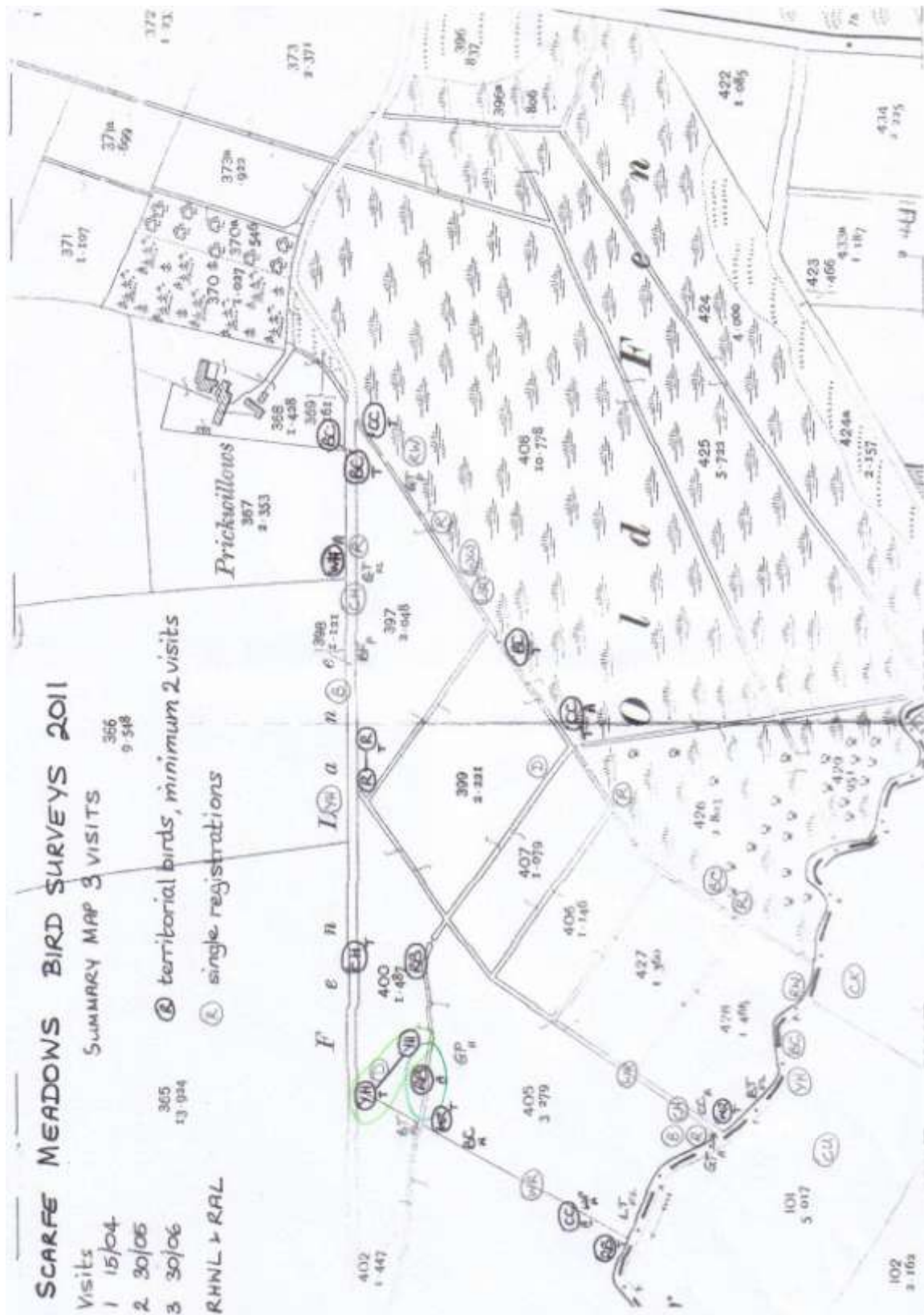


Figure 3. Scarfe Meadows summary of three bird territory mapping surveys in 2011.

Appendix I. Bird species lists with breeding categories for Webbs Fen, Broomscot Common and Scarfe Meadows 2011.

Species	Webbs Fen	Broomscot Common	Scarfe Meadows	Code
Greylag Goose	F			FG
Mallard	P			MA
Grey Partridge			H	P
Pheasant	FL		P	PH
Kestrel		F		K
Water rail	S			WA
Oystercatcher		F		OC
Lapwing	F			L
Wood Pigeon	F		N	WP
Collared Dove		D		CD
Cuckoo	S			CK
Barn Owl	√			BO
Little Owl		√		LO
Swift		F		SI
Green Woodpecker		F		G
Great spotted Woodpecker	H	F	H	GS
Magpie		H	H	MG
Jackdaw	F	√		JD
Rook	F		F	RO
Carrion Crow	√	√	F	C
Goldcrest		T		GC
Blue Tit	FL	FL	FL	BT
Great Tit	FL	FL	FL	GT
Marsh Tit	√			MT
Swallow	√	√	√	SL
House Martin		F		HM
Long-tailed tit	P	FL	FL	LT
Chiffchaff	T	T	A	CC
Willow Warbler		T		WW
Blackcap	A	S	N	BC
Garden Warbler		T		GW
Lesser Whitethroat		S		LW
Whitethroat	FF	A	A	WH
Grasshopper Warbler	T			GH
Sedge Warbler	FF			SW
Reed Warbler	FF		S	RW
Wren	T	T	T	WR
Starling			F	SG
Blackbird	P	T	P	B
Song Thrush		S		ST

Species	Webbs Fen	Broomscot Common	Scarfe Meadows	
Mistle Thrush		FL		M
Robin	T	FL	T	R
Dunnock	S	T	S	D
House Sparrow	H			HS
Pied Wagtail		H		PW
Chaffinch	P	P	T	CH
Greenfinch	H			GR
Linnet		FL		LI
Bullfinch		A	P	BF
Yellowhammer	S	T	T	YH
Reed Bunting	FL		A	RB

V using site for feeding but no evidence of breeding, not in suitable breeding habitat

F flying over

BTO atlas categories of breeding evidence

Possible breeder:

H observed in suitable nesting Habitat

S Singing male

Probable breeder:

P Pair in suitable nesting habitat

T Territory defended over at least one week

D courtship and Display

N visiting probable Nest site

A Agitated behaviour

B nest Building

Confirmed breeder:

FL recently FLedged young or downy young

ON adults entering or leaving nest-site in circumstances indicating Occupied Nest

FF Adult carrying Faecal sac or Food for young