

Wick Country Park – Wildlife Sightings – 2020

Introduction

Starting in February 2020, it was decided to carry out a monthly wildlife walk in the Wick County Park, on the 3rd Wednesday of each month – weather depending! The aims of the walk are:

1. To enjoy the park, it's wildlife and to get some fresh air.
2. To record and count the wildlife we see/hear, namely, birds, butterflies, dragonflies, mammals and anything else of note, e.g. reptiles.
3. To gain a greater understanding of what wildlife lives in and/or uses the park and monitor any changes in their populations.
4. To promote the wildlife of the park to the Friends and general public via the Website and Facebook etc.

Methodology

We will walk roughly the same route each month, covering the most likely wildlife friendly habitats of the park. The number of each individual species seen or heard is recorded to gain some idea of abundance/population. We will also attempt to record whether a species is definitely breeding in the park.

As you will all realise, it is impossible to count 100% of any of the wildlife in the park but over time, by carrying out a regular count, we will be able to record most of the wildlife that exists in the park and get a rough estimate of their numbers. However, for some species e.g. nocturnal species, a more targeted approach may be needed i.e. specific walks to try and record specific animal groups.

Reporting

Each month, an email report will be issued, recording the wildlife seen/heard that month. Every 6 months, a summary report of the year so far will also be issued. For subsequent years after 2020, it becomes a little bit more complicated as we can then compare year to year. The bi-annual reports will then probably contain more information, for example a "highlights" section, highlighting any noticeable differences between the years.

All bird records will be sent to the Essex Bird Recorder, as part of the wider monitoring of UK bird populations. Similarly, all butterfly and dragonfly records will be sent to the Essex recorders for these orders of insects. Mammals have not been included in this process at the moment, mainly because we have seen so few but this is something to consider in the future.

Birds – 53 Species

Summary of Birds recorded in WCP – 2020				
Number of Species	53	Visits	11	
Common Name	Scientific Name	Max Day Count	No of Sightings	% of Visits
Barn Swallow	Hirundo rustica	8	4	36%
Black-headed Gull	Chroicocephalus ridibundus	105	11	100%
Canada Goose	Branta canadensis	17	11	100%
Carrion Crow	Corvus corone	10	11	100%
Cetti's Warbler	Cettia cetti	1	1	9%
Common Blackbird	Turdus merula	9	8	73%
Common Chaffinch	Fringilla coelebs	2	3	27%
Common Chiffchaff	Phylloscopus collybita	5	5	45%
Common Gull (Mew Gull)	Larus canus	2	2	18%

Common House Martin	Delichon urbicum	4	2	18%
Common Kestrel	Falco tinnunculus	1	1	9%
Common Moorhen	Gallinula chloropus	6	10	91%
Common Pheasant	Phasianus colchicus	1	1	9%
Common Starling	Sturnus vulgaris	30	10	91%
Common Swift	Apus apus	11	3	27%
Common Whitethroat	Sylvia communis	5	3	27%
Common Wood Pigeon	Columba palumbus	40	11	100%
Dunnock	Prunella modularis	5	5	45%
Eurasian Blackcap	Sylvia atricapilla	7	3	27%
Eurasian Blue Tit	Cyanistes caeruleus	22	11	100%
Eurasian Collared Dove	Streptopelia decaocto	8	4	36%
Eurasian Coot	Fulica atra	4	9	82%
Eurasian Jay	Garrulus glandarius	4	2	18%
Eurasian Magpie	Pica pica	13	11	100%
Eurasian Reed Warbler	Acrocephalus scirpaceus	6	3	27%
Eurasian Skylark	Alauda arvensis	1	1	9%
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	Accipiter nisus	1	1	9%
Eurasian Wren	Troglodytes troglodytes	10	7	64%
European Goldfinch	Carduelis carduelis	23	10	91%
European Green Woodpecker	Picus viridis	5	7	64%
European Greenfinch	Chloris chloris	7	6	55%
European Herring Gull	Larus argentatus	3	5	45%
European Robin	Erithacus rubecula	19	11	100%
Fieldfare	Turdus pilaris	30	1	9%
Goldcrest	Regulus regulus	1	1	9%
Great Cormorant	Phalacrocorax carbo	1	2	18%
Great Spotted Woodpecker	Dendrocopos major	1	2	18%
Great Tit	Parus major	7	7	64%
Grey Heron	Ardea cinerea	3	1	9%
Greylag Goose	Anser anser	2	2	18%
House Sparrow	Passer domesticus	3	4	36%
Lesser Black-backed Gull	Larus fuscus	2	2	18%
Lesser Whitethroat	Sylvia curruca	2	2	18%
Long-tailed Tit	Aegithalos caudatus	17	7	64%
Mallard	Anas platyrhynchos	5	10	91%
Mute Swan	Cygnus olor	1	1	9%
Redwing	Turdus iliacus	40	1	9%
Rook	Corvus frugilegus	1	1	9%
Song Thrush	Turdus philomelos	2	5	45%
Stock Dove	Columba oenas	1	2	18%
Town Pigeon (Feral Rock Dove)	Columba livia 'feral'	6	2	18%
Tufted Duck	Aythya fuligula	3	1	9%
Western Jackdaw	Coloeus monedula	21	1	9%

53 bird species were recorded on our visits, which is a very good total for the park. There are 7 species we have seen on every visit - Black-headed Gull, Canada Goose, Carrion Crow, Common Wood Pigeon, Eurasian Blue Tit, Eurasian Magpie and European Robin. In addition, we have Common Moorhen, Common Starling, Eurasian Coot, European Goldfinch, and Mallard which were seen on 80% to 90% of our visits. These 12 birds are our most common residents and you will see all of these on most visits to the park. Blackbird too can probably be added to this list as we saw this on 73% of our walks.

Wren, Green Woodpecker, Great Tit, Long Tailed Tit and very pleasingly Greenfinch were seen on more than 50% of our walks – Greenfinch having suffered big declines over the last few years and it is nice to see that it is present in the park. Song Thrush can be bracketed in this group too as we saw this species on 45% of our walks – another much reduced species living in the park.

We are also very lucky to get many summer visitors in the park, in total 8 summer migrants were seen on our walks and all are probably breeding in the park or nearby. These are: Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Common & Lesser Whitethroats, Reed Warbler, Swallow, House Martin and Swift.

The most notable winter visitors this year were Redwings and Fieldfares, both of which are thrush species and migrate here from Scandinavia and Russia. Other winter visitors included Gulls - the Black Headed Gull flock was over 100 in December, plus Herring Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull and Common Gull. Also, it is very likely that “our” Robin, Blackbird, and Blue Tit numbers are boosted by visitors from Northern Europe.

In respect of breeding birds, all of the lake birds look to have successfully raised young this year. We all saw Canada Goose, Mallard, Coot and Moorhen chicks. Reed Warblers almost certainly were breeding too around the lake. It is difficult to estimate how successful other species breeding was during this year. We did see a lot of Swallows later in the year, which could mean they had a good breeding year. At the moment there are large flocks of Blue Tits and Long Tailed Tits in the park, so they look to have done well but there are few Great Tits in the flocks so they may have not have done so well. In addition, we may be seeing birds in winter that have migrated from Europe. We will only really gain some knowledge of breeding success over the years when we can compare numbers of birds from one year to the next.

Butterflies – 21 Species

Summary of Butterflies recorded in WCP - 2020				
Number of Species	21	Visits	11	
Common Name	Scientific Name	Max Day Count	No of Sightings	% Sightings
Brown Argus	<i>Aricia agestis</i>	1	1	9%
Brimstone	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>	1	1	9%
Comma Butterfly	<i>Polygonia c-album</i>	1	1	9%
Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>	6	3	27%
Essex Skipper	<i>Thymelicus lineola</i>	1	1	9%
Gatekeeper	<i>Pyronia tithonus</i>	43	2	18%
Green-veined White	<i>Artogeia napi</i>	6	4	36%
Holly Blue	<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>	2	2	18%
Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>	23	3	27%
Large Skipper	<i>Ochlodes venatus</i>	1	1	9%
Marbled White	<i>Melanargia galathea</i>	1	2	18%
Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>	36	3	27%
Orange Tip	<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>	2	1	9%
Peacock Butterfly	<i>Inachis io</i>	2	2	18%
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>	1	1	9%
Ringlet	<i>Aphantopus hyperantus</i>	6	1	9%

Small Copper	Lycaena phlaeas	2	1	9%
Small Skipper	Thymelicus sylvestris	3	2	18%
Small Tortoiseshell	Aglais urticae	1	1	9%
Small White	Artogeia rapae	2	4	36%
Speckled Wood	Pararge aegeria	6	5	45%

One of the highlights of this year has been the fabulous colourful butterflies in the park. However, it was a bit of a mixed year for butterflies with a very good total number of species seen but on some visits we saw hardly any. The very early warm weather brought out lots of butterflies in March/April but this seemed to lead to a lull in late spring, as the initial brood died off. We then had a mass of butterflies on the wing in summer, with incredible numbers of Gatekeepers, Meadow Browns and Large Whites, followed by another lull in late summer only for an autumn burst in September, where we saw some very nice Common Blues and Small Coppers.

Notable sightings for the park were, Brown Argus, Large Skipper, and Marbled White. Marbled White in particular looks now to be established in the park and hopefully numbers will increase over the coming years.

I am sure we are all looking forward to some warm weather when we will hopefully see lots more butterflies in 2021.

Dragonflies – 3 Species

Summary of Dragonflies/Damselflies recorded in WCP - 2020				
Number of Species	3	Visits	11	
Common Name	Scientific Name	Max Day Count	No of Sightings	% Sightings
Black-tailed Skimmer	Orthetrum cancellatum	4	2	18%
Brown Hawker	Aeshna grandis	2	1	9%
Migrant Hawker	Aeshna mixta	13	2	18%

A disappointing total when we know that there are more species in the park. This proves you will not capture everything on our walks. My own records show that I saw Common Blue Damselfly, Blue-tailed Damselfly and Large Red Damselfly, in addition to the above. I am sure there are other species present too. Perhaps next year we will manage to record more species.

Mammals – 3 Species

Summary of Mammals recorded in WCP - 2020				
Number of Species	3	Visits	11	
Common Name	Scientific Name	Max Day Count	No of Sightings	% Sightings
Common Pipistrelle	Pipistrellus pipistrellus	10	1	9%
Eastern Grey Squirrel	Sciurus carolinensis	2	3	27%
Soprano Pipistrelle	Pipistrellus pygmaeus	5	1	9%

A disappointing but not surprising total bearing in mind that many mammals are nocturnal and very wary of disturbance. Our night walk produced 2 species of bat that we managed to identify and at least 1 other that we did not. Our best chance of seeing mammals will be during an evening/night walk and we will go ahead with at least one of these in 2021.

Additional Targeted Visits

As already mentioned, we will arrange an additional evening/night walk during the summer to try and record mammals and other nocturnal creatures such as Owls. I will try and see if someone from the Essex Bat group can attend to try and record more Bat species.

We could also extend our normal monthly walk during the late spring or summer to spend more time at the lake to record more dragonflies and damselflies. A lakeside picnic perhaps on that day?

Finally, I hope we can go ahead with a "moth night" at some stage next year. I think the park would be really good for such an event and we should be able to record quite a few species.

Full Year Summary 2020

If we look back to the aims of our wildlife walks I think we can say that we have achieved all of these and the walks have been a real success. We now have a much greater knowledge of what wildlife lives in and uses the park and the walks have been very enjoyable too.

My personal highlights of 2020, were:

- The Goldcrests we saw on our very first visit.
- The number of summer migrant birds.
- The fabulous butterflies in spring and summer.
- Seeing Jupiter and Saturn so clearly on our night walk.
- The large number of Redwings in the park in winter.

I am sure you will all have your own personal highlights to remember.

We can now all look forward to 2021 when we can build on what we saw last year and extend our walks to try and record even more species.

Regards

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