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Wintering Bird Survey 2003/2004, Manor Farm, Wellow, Isle of Wight

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1 Introduction

In 2003 a survey of the breeding birds of Manor Farm, Wellow, Isle of Wight was undertaken by Jonathan Cox Associates to provide baseline information on breeding birds which could be used in undertaking an environmental impact assessment. The report of that survey¹ described the survey site and its land use. Following the breeding bird survey, a second survey of wintering birds was commissioned. This report presents the results of the winter bird survey. This was undertaken over six survey visits between November 2003 and March 2004.

The land use at the time of survey is shown in figure 1. This comprised the following:-

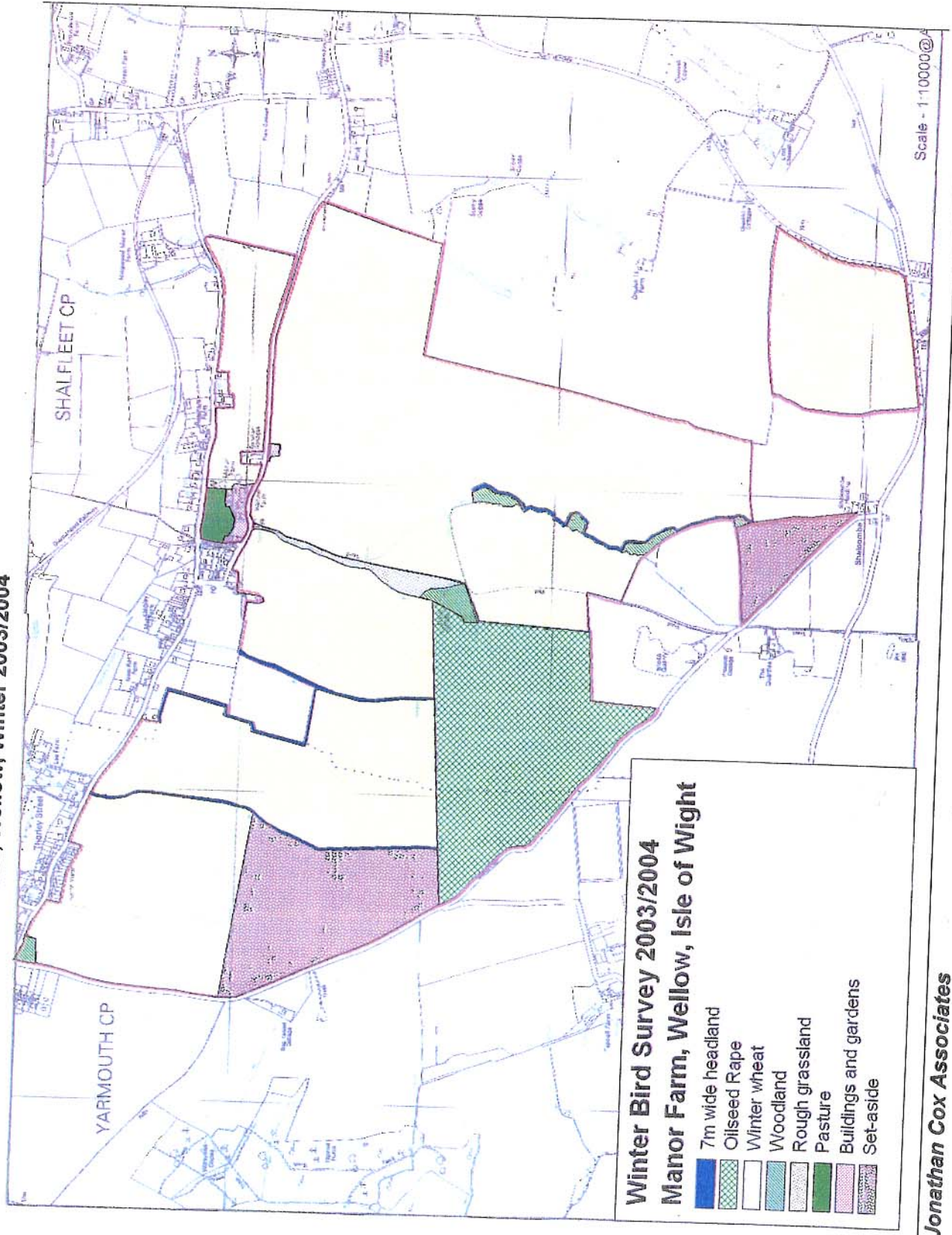
	Hectares
Winter wheat	245.28
Oil-seed Rape	37.98
Set-aside	30.08
Rough grassland	2.2
Woodland	2.9
Headlands	3.0
Buildings and gardens	1.2
Pasture	1.45
Total	324.09

In addition to providing the results of the 2003/2004 winter bird survey of Manor Farm, this report seeks to put the results into context by reference to other bird records on the Isle of Wight and the current status of birds recorded in 'Birds of Conservation Concern' (RSPB, 2002)². Reference is also made to protected species listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) and species of European conservation concern that are listed on Annex 1 of the EU Birds Directive (1979).

¹ Cox, J and Marston, K. 2003. Breeding Bird Survey 2003, Manor Farm, Wellow, Isle of Wight. Report by Jonathan Cox Associates

² RSPB, 2002. The population status of birds in the UK: Birds of conservation concern: 2002-2007

Figure 1: Land use at Manor Farm, Wellow, Winter 2003/2004



2 Methods

A total of 6 survey visits were undertaken between 18th November 2003 and 26th March 2004. Each survey took place between dawn and early afternoon giving a total of 36 hours field survey. The six surveys were undertaken once a month from November to February with two being undertaken in March. Visibility was good on each survey, being in excess of 500m.

A 10 kilometre route was followed on each survey visit which included all field boundaries and ditches. This bought every part of the farm within sight and sound for all surveyed bird species.

The order in which the route was walked was intentionally varied between visits to ensure that the peak bird activity was observed on each part of the land over the survey period.

Bird activity and behaviour was recorded onto 1:5,000 scale base maps during each survey using standard British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) Common Bird Census (CBC) nomenclature.

The land-use of the survey area was also mapped.

All surveys were undertaken by Keith Marston.

Details of survey dates and weather conditions are shown in appendix 1.

2.1 Limitations of survey

This survey was confined to six visits made between November and March in one year. The results therefore reflect the number and diversity of bird species using the survey area under the specific weather conditions and land-use pattern prevailing on the survey dates. The number and diversity of birds could vary between years in relation to a number of variables, in particular variation in winter weather conditions, national and local population trends and changes in land-use or farming patterns.

All surveys were undertaken between dawn and early afternoon which means that nocturnal or crepuscular species would not be recorded by this survey method.

The survey started in November and was consequently unable to record most autumn passage migrants which generally pass through the Isle of Wight in late summer and early autumn (August to October).

3 Results

The results of the survey are produced in Table 1 and shown in map form in maps 1 - 17. Species are listed in alphabetical order for ease of reference. Comments on the habitat preferences and distribution of each species are given in the table. A total of 51 species were recorded during the survey of which 25 species were resident i.e. they were also recorded as breeding in the area during the previous summer survey. The conservation status of each species is recorded. This includes those on the Red or Amber list of Birds of Conservation Concern, Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act or Annex 1 of the EU Birds Directive.

Table 1:
Species recorded during the winter of 2003/04 from Manor Farm, Wellow

Species	Status	Maximum count on any one visit	No. of surveys species recorded	Comments
Blackbird		13	6	Hedgerows or woodland
Black-headed gull		70	2	Flock observed feeding in field of winter wheat in February. Small flocks over-flying the land
Blue tit		9	6	Mostly in woodland
Buzzard		3	5	Individuals roost in woodland and hunt over the land; individuals from outside of the farm boundaries hunt over the land
Canada goose		31	2	The flock observed in a field of winter wheat in November was seen only once, with only one other record of this species over-flying the land
Carrion crow		6	6	Roosting in woods, feeding in fields
Chaffinch		28	6	Mainly in woodland; also on edge of land bordering gardens
Chiffchaff		1	1	A returning migrant in late March, feeding on passage
Collared dove		2	3	In close proximity of buildings on periphery of land
Curlew	Amber	3	1	Feeding in a field of pasture adjacent to the southern boundary of survey area.
Dunnock	Amber	2	6	In hedgerows and scrub on field margins
Feral pigeon		30	4	Flock feeding on spilt grain at barn
Fieldfare	Amber (breeding only)/ Schedule 1	175	4	Large flock feeding in fields of newly-sown winter wheat in November. Small returning flocks on land in early March
Goldcrest	Amber	2	3	In two woods with coniferous trees
Golden plover		104	3	A single flock of 90 roosting in a field of winter oil-seed rape in November
Goldfinch		4	3	In woodland and trees in hedgerows
Gt. Spotted woodpecker		1	4	In trees close to farm buildings and in two woods
Great tit		11	5	Mainly in woodland
Greenfinch		5	3	Mainly in gardens of residential areas on northern edge of land

Species	Status	Maximum count on any one visit	No. of surveys species recorded	Comments
Grey heron		1	1	Observed once, perched on roof on boundary of land in March
Grey partridge	Red	4	3	Two territories established on the land by early March
Herring gull		2	1	Observed feeding on land on one occasion in March
House sparrow	Red	2	2	In hedgerows of residential areas on northern edge of land
Jackdaw		45	3	Flock of 45 feeding in winter oil-seed rape
Jay		2	1	Two birds recorded in December
Kestrel	Amber	2	6	Up to 2 individuals resident over the winter
Linnet	Red	1	1	Only one individual recorded over-flying the area in December
Long-tailed tit		8	4	In woodland and hedgerows
Magpie		2	4	Seven birds recorded during surveys
Mallard		4	3	Pair observed rising out of small pond east of Hummet Copse during two of the surveys
Meadow pipit	Amber	25	3	Most records made in late March as returning migrants flew north overhead
Merlin	Amber Schedule 1 Annex 1	1	1	An individual hunting across land in December
Peregrine	Amber Schedule 1 Annex 1	3	1	Pair observed entering the land from the south and hunting and feeding on Red-legged partridges
Pheasant		21	6	Field margins and woodland where cover is available
Pink-footed goose	Amber	3	1	A scarce winter visitor to the Isle of Wight. Three individuals observed feeding on young winter wheat in during the December survey
Raven		1	1	Individual flew in low from south and flew northwards, apparently hunting
Red-legged partridge		45	6	Field margins, woods and roughland adjacent to ditches favoured by this species; pairing and territories established from February
Redwing	Amber (breeding only) Schedule 1	21	2	Small parties on land in November and in early March
Reed bunting	Red	2	3	The four individuals recorded in ditches, likely to have overwintered on the land
Robin		11	6	In woodland and hedgerows
Rook		118	6	Largest flocks feeding in the stubble of the set-aside land

Species	Status	Maximum count on any one visit	No. of surveys species recorded	Comments
Skylark	Red	26	4	Only three individuals were recorded on the land before the end of March when 23 birds were setting up territory in stubble on set-aside land and on fields of winter wheat and oil-seed rape
Snipe	Amber	3	1	Three individuals flew out of ditches during the early March survey. The species is likely to overwinter in small numbers on the land.
Song thrush	Red	4	5	The four individuals recorded in woods, ditches and hedgerows
Sparrow hawk		1	1	Recorded hunting on the land on two occasions
Starling	Red	15	3	Flock of 15 feeding in ditch margin in November. Individuals in vicinity of farm buildings
Stonechat	Amber	2	3	Two males remained over the winter in the grassy area adjacent to a ditch
Wheatear		2	1	Returning migrants in late March
Wood pigeon		515	6	Flocks congregating in the wooded areas, flying out to feed in nearby fields in flock
Wren		15	6	Woodland and ditches
Yellowhammer	Red	35	6	Overwintering in hedgerows and in grassy field margins. Flocks feed on spilt grain at barn. First territories established in February.

3.1 Status of wintering birds

3.1.1 Birds of Conservation Concern

The status of birds in Britain has been assessed in Birds of Conservation Concern. This places species into three categories based on levels of threat and rarity; Red, Amber and Green.

Red list species are those that are Globally Threatened according to IUCN criteria; those whose population or range has declined rapidly in recent years; and those that have declined historically and not shown a substantial recent recovery.

Amber list species are those with an unfavourable population status in Europe; those whose population or range has declined moderately in recent years; those whose population has declined historically but made a substantial recent recovery; rare breeders; and those with internationally important or localised populations.

Species that fulfil none of the criteria are **green-listed**.

A total of 40 species are included on the Red list and 121 on the Amber list.

The survey identified a total of eight Red list species and 12 Amber list species present within the survey area during the winter. This included resident species, those feeding within the survey area

and those on passage migration. Red and Amber list species recorded in the survey are listed in table 2.

Table 2:

Red and Amber list species recorded during winter 2003/04 from Manor Farm Wellow

Red list	Grey partridge, House sparrow, Linnet, Reed bunting, Skylark, Song thrush, Starling, Yellow hammer.
Amber list	Curlew, Dunnock, Fieldfare*, Goldcrest, Kestrel, Meadow pipit, Merlin, Peregrine, Pink-footed goose, Redwing*, Snipe, Stonechat

*Fieldfare and redwing only qualify as Amber list species on the basis of their breeding populations

All of the eight Red list species have undergone dramatic population declines of >50% in the UK in the past 25 years. The Amber list species have undergone moderate population declines of between 25 – 49% in the UK over the past 25 years.

3.1.2 Schedule 1 species

A number of bird species are given specific legal protection in the UK being listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981). Two Schedule 1 species were recorded during the survey, namely the peregrine falcon and merlin.

3.1.3 EU Birds Directive Annex 1 species

Species of birds whose status within the EU is of concern are listed in Annex 1 of the Birds Directive for special conservation measures. This requires Member States to classify Special Protection Areas to conserve the most important places ('suitable territories') for these species. Both the merlin and peregrine falcon are listed on Annex 1 of the Directive. Although Manor Farm, Wellow is not classified as a SPA, the nearby coast of the Solent forms part of the Solent and Southampton Water SPA. This SPA has been selected for the conservation of populations of migrant waterfowl and breeding seabirds and not wintering or breeding populations of merlin or peregrine falcon. Wintering merlin populations are however a qualifying feature for which the Dorset Heathlands SPA has been classified (<http://www.jncc.gov.uk/UKSPA/Species/accounts/A6-50B.pdf>). This site is less than 24 km to the west of Manor Farm.

4 Species and habitat assessment

4.1 Birds of prey

Five species of bird of prey were recorded during the winter survey hunting over the survey area. Of these the merlin and peregrine falcon are of greatest nature conservation importance as both are included on the Amber list of Birds of Conservation Concern as well as Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) and Annex 1 of the EU Birds Directive.

A pair of peregrine falcons was seen hunting on the land for the best part of a morning during the February survey when they shared two Red-legged partridges caught on the farm. The peregrines were seen to come in from the chalk downs to the south. The chalk cliffs on the south side of the Isle of Wight are known to support several breeding pairs of peregrine falcons and it is likely that those seen at Manor Farm were resident birds.

The merlin observed in December may have over-wintered on the farm, as an unverified sighting of a second merlin was made during the late March survey. A record of merlin at Thorley is also reported in the Isle of Wight Bird Report for 14th February 2002. Merlins nest on heather moorland but move to the lowlands of Britain in winter where they hunt over farmland and coastal wetlands. They can form communal winter roosts. Wintering merlin populations are one of the qualifying features of the Dorset Heathlands SPA.

Buzzards were recorded on five out of the six survey visits when they were seen soaring over Manor Farm and hunting when thermic weather conditions permitted. Buzzards were seen to fly in to the survey site from the nearby Brighstone Forest where several pairs are known to breed. Buzzard populations on the Isle of Wight have increased dramatically over the past 15 years and they are now a regular and widespread breeding species on the Island.

Kestrels were resident throughout the winter with up to two individuals being recorded on all six survey visits. At least one pair of this Amber listed species is also known to breed on the farm.

A single sparrow hawk was recorded hunting over the land on two occasions on one visit. This species typically hunts in well wooded countryside and it is not surprising that the open landscape of Manor Farm is not well used by hunting sparrow hawks.

Also of interest was the record of a single raven that flew northwards over the Farm. This bird was apparently hunting over the survey area. Ravens are known to breed on the cliffs on the south coast of the Island and it is likely that this was a resident Isle of Wight bird.

4.2 Wintering farmland birds

4.2.1 Grey partridge

The Red listed grey partridge was probably present on Manor Farm throughout the winter although it was only recorded on three of the six survey visits (January and the two March visits). These were confined to the northern part of the survey area around Manor Farm. One of the potential weaknesses of the 2003 breeding bird survey was that it started too late in the spring to record partridge territories, however, the March surveys of 2004 did not show any increase in grey partridge numbers and it is likely that the 2003 breeding bird survey was able to record all potential nesting birds.

4.2.2 House sparrow

No large flocks of the Red listed house sparrow were recorded wintering on the land with a maximum count of only two birds recorded on only two occasions. These were associated with hedges and residential areas to the north of the survey area.

4.2.3 Linnets

Linnets are also Red listed and made extensive use of Manor Farm during the breeding season, both as a nesting site and for feeding on oilseed rape. However, linnets were hardly present during the winter with only one individual being recorded over-flying the area in December. They are believed to winter on the downland to the south of the Farm.

4.2.4 Reed bunting

In contrast to the linnets and house sparrow, reed buntings did over winter on Manor Farm in small numbers with four individuals recorded along the ditches that cross the land. The vegetation of these ditches is described in the breeding bird report and supports dense wetland and tall grassland vegetation that provide good habitat for breeding and wintering passerine birds.

4.2.5 Skylark

Skylarks depart from Manor Farm in late autumn to over winter on the downland to the south. No significant flocks of wintering skylark were present throughout the winter with only three individuals being recorded before March. During March, the skylarks returned to Manor Farm with 23 birds recorded setting up breeding territories in set-aside, winter wheat and oilseed rape fields.

4.2.6 Song thrush

Song thrush did over winter on Manor Farm with four individuals recorded from woods, ditches and hedgerows on the Farm.

4.2.7 Starling

Small numbers of starling were present on Manor Farm over the winter with the largest flock being of 15 birds feeding in a ditch margin in November. Other birds were seen in the vicinity of farm buildings, but Manor Farm is clearly not a preferred habitat for wintering starling.

4.2.8 Yellow hammer

Yellow hammers were also resident throughout the winter on Manor Farm with a significant count of 35 recorded in early March. Yellow hammers were recorded over wintering in hedgerows and in grassy field margins with small flocks seen feeding on spilt grain around the grain silos. Indeed, the spilt grain provided an important food source for a number of wintering birds in addition to the yellow hammers, including chaffinches, feral pigeons and jackdaws. The first yellow hammer territories were being established in February.

4.3 Wetland birds

The Solent and Southampton Water SPA and Ramsar Site is situated only just over 1 km away from the Manor Farm survey area to the west. However, the use of Manor Farm by migrant waterfowl populations from the SPA and Ramsar Site was limited. The following review highlights those species recorded during the survey.

Golden plover were recorded during the autumn of 2003. In the November visit a total of 104 birds present in two flocks. The largest of these was a flock of 90 birds that circled low and fast over an area of oilseed rape before landing to roost. A preliminary survey on the 17th October 2003 also recorded 17 golden plover.

A single grey plover was seen to fly low over the farm and land in a recently ploughed field adjacent to the northern boundary of the survey area in October, joining a flock of 14 Lapwing. However, neither of these species were recorded again throughout the winter.

Snipe were recorded on one visit in early March when three birds flew out of a ditch in the north west of the survey area. These could have over-wintered on the farm or have been passage migrants.

Three curlew were recorded from a field adjacent to the survey area in December 2003.

A remarkable record was that of three pink-footed geese seen feeding on winter wheat in December. These may have been the same three birds reported from the Isle of Portland Observatory on the previous day. Pink footed geese typically over winter on estuaries and associated farmland in north Norfolk, Lancashire and Scotland but are rarely seen in the Solent.

4.4 Wintering and passage migrants

A number of bird species are recorded on the Isle of Wight either on passage migration in spring and autumn or move to the Island from more northerly breeding sites to over winter. The survey was initiated too late in the year to record the autumn passage movement but was able to record the spring passage and a number of over wintering species.

The most numerous migrant species was the meadow pipits which flew in from the south cross the Farm on a broad front during March. A peak count of 25 was made in the late March visit.

Wheatears and chiffchaffs also put down to feed while on passage in March with two wheatears and a single chiffchaff being recorded.

Flocks of fieldfare and to a lesser extent, redwing, fed on the land for part of the winter. A total of 175 fieldfare were recorded in November, which may have included some passage migrant birds. Smaller flocks of passage migrant birds were also recorded in March. A similar pattern of use was recorded for redwing with a maximum count of 21 birds in November and again smaller numbers of returning migrants in March.

4.5 Brown hare

Although not part of the bird survey, the numbers of brown hare *Lepus capensis* seen during the breeding bird survey were notable and a record was made of their location and numbers. This was continued through the winter. A peak count of 34 hares was made in January with around 30 being present for the remainder of the winter. Records of brown hare are tabulated in Appendix 2.

Location of brown hare records are shown on map 18.

4.6 Habitat assessment

4.6.1 Arable farmland and set-aside

The open arable fields were not well used by birds during the winter. There were no appreciable flocks of wintering farmland birds on the arable or set-aside. Most use of these fields was made during autumn and spring when small flocks of fieldfare and redwing were recorded.

The arable and set aside fields were used on one occasion by a flock of 104 golden plover in November. Apart from this the only other record of migrant waterfowl using the arable was of three pink-footed geese on winter wheat.

4.6.2 Drainage ditches and rough grassland

The narrow strips of tall vegetation associated with the drainage ditches and rough grassland proved to be the most important habitat for wintering birds including stonechats, wrens, song thrushes, reed buntings, yellow hammer, snipe, and red legged partridge. These habitat features also provided the best feeding habitat for kestrels. The creation of additional 7m wide grassy headlands on either side of the ditches in the autumn of 2003 is likely to have enhanced conditions for both wintering and breeding birds associated with this habitat.

4.6.3 Woodland and hedgerows

Hedges and woodland also provided good wintering habitat for a number of birds with species such as goldcrest, great spotted woodpecker, song thrush, yellow hammer, goldfinch, long tailed tit, dunnock, robin and house sparrow being largely confined to this habitat.

4.6.4 Farm buildings

The grain silos to the east of Manor Farm provided the most important built habitat for wintering birds where flocks of chaffinch, yellow hammer, jackdaw and feral pigeons congregated to feed on spilt grain.

5 Conclusions

The 2003 breeding bird survey of Manor Farm revealed its importance for farmland birds, including several species that have undergone significant population declines and have been identified as Red and Amber list birds of conservation concern.

The wintering bird survey shows that some of these species, such as the grey partridge, yellow hammer and reed bunting, remain on the Farm during the winter. However, other species, particularly the skylarks and linnets, depart from the Farm to over winter on the nearby downlands, returning in the spring to establish breeding territories.

The presence of grey and red-legged partridges on the farm may well be a reason for its attraction for hunting peregrine falcons. Although only recorded on one out of the six survey days, at least a pair of peregrines (and possibly a third) hunted over the Farm all morning on that occasion, when two red legged partridges were seen to have been taken.

A number of other birds of prey were also recorded hunting over the Farm including a merlin, regular records of kestrels and a sparrow hawk.

Given the proximity of the Solent and Southampton Water SPA and Ramsar Site it was possible that the open arable fields within the survey area would be used by wintering migrant wetland birds. However, very few such birds were seen with the only records during the six survey visits being of a flock of golden plover in November, a small group of vagrant pink footed geese in December and three snipe in March. Small numbers of mallard were also seen with a pair associated with a pond near Hummet Copse.

Appendix 1: Survey dates and weather conditions

Survey	Date	Weather and visibility	Cloud cover
Survey A	18.11.03	Force 3 wind from WSW Good visibility	7 oktas
Survey B	08.12.03	Force 3 wind from E Good visibility	8 oktas
Survey C	20.01.04	Force 3 wind from NW Good visibility, although moderate for a time in rain	8 oktas
Survey D	19.02.04	Force 4 wind from NE Good visibility	0 oktas
Survey E	03.03.04	Force 4 wind from SW Good visibility	8 oktas
Survey F	26.03.04	Force 3 wind from NE Good visibility	4 oktas

Visibility

Good	>500m
Moderate	250m – 500m
Poor	<250m

Appendix 2:
Numbers of brown hare recorded on each survey visit

Survey Visit	Date	No. of hares
Survey A	18.11.03	10
Survey B	08.12.03	13
Survey C	20.01.04	34
Survey D	19.02.04	31
Survey E	03.03.04	32
Survey F	26.03.04	30

6 Maps

6.1 Species registration maps (1 – 17)

Map 1	Buzzard, Kestrel, Merlin, Peregrine, Sparrow hawk
Map 2	Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Greenfinch
Map 3	Yellow hammer
Map 4	Wood pigeon, Collard dove, Feral pigeon
Map 5	Fieldfare, Redwing
Map 6	Grey partridge, Red legged partridge
Map 7	Canada geese, Mallard, Pink footed geese
Map 8	Black headed gull, Grey heron, Herring gull
Map 9	Linnet, Meadow pipit, Skylark, Stonechat
Map 10	Chiffchaff, Wheatear, Reed bunting
Map 11	Dunnock, House sparrow, Robin
Map 12	Blue tit, Great tit, Long-tailed tit
Map 13	Blackbird, Song thrush, Starling
Map 14	Goldcrest, Wren
Map 15	Curlew, Golden plover, Snipe
Map 16	Carrion crow, Jackdaw, Jay, Magpie, Raven, Rook
Map 17	Great spotted woodpecker, Pheasant

6.2 Key to survey dates

Survey	Date
Survey A	18.11.03
Survey B	08.12.03
Survey C	20.01.04
Survey D	19.02.04
Survey E	03.03.04
Survey F	26.03.04

6.3 Key to species notations

These standard British Trust for Ornithology conventions are used:

- R♂ Male Robin
R♀ Female Robin
R ♂♀ Pair of Robins
R Robin calling
R Robins giving alarm calls thought to have territorial significance
Ⓜ Robin in song
Ⓜ Ⓟ An aggressive encounter between a Rook and a Buzzard
→ Ⓤ → A calling Goldfinch flying over
→ Ⓚ A Skylark flying up and singing
w → w A Wren moving between two perches
Ⓚ --- Ⓚ Two Skylarks singing at the same time
Bz → A Buzzard perched then flying away (not seen to land)

N.B. For some species the abbreviation for the bird is omitted and just the letter indicating the survey date is used.