

# Norbury Hill Birds 2023

---

Caroline Uff PhD CIEEM



Stonechat by Ian Preston CC BY 2.0

## 1 Introduction

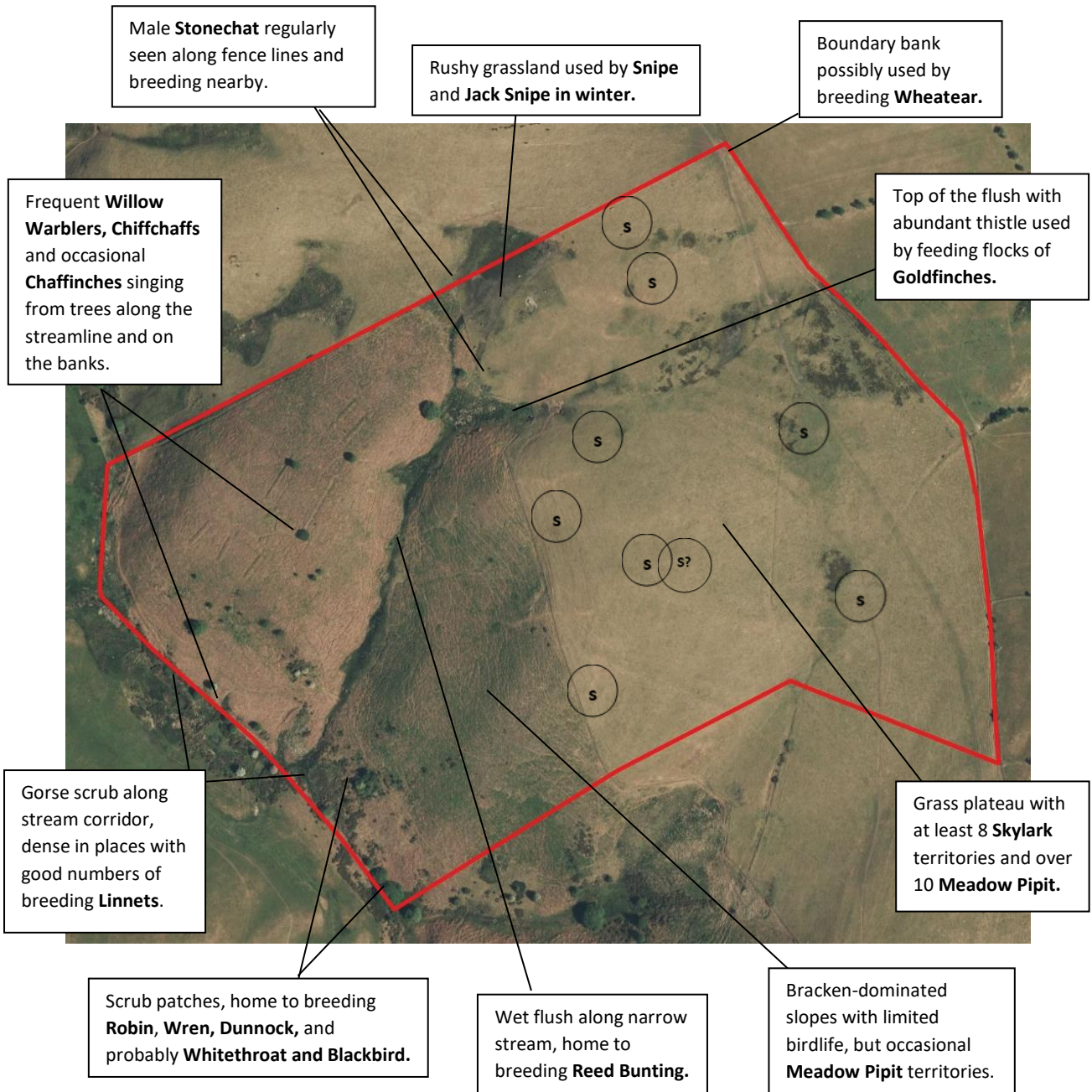
Situated above Norbury village in the Shopshire Hill Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Norbury Hill is an important wildlife site in its own right as well as providing a 'stepping stone' between the Stiperstones NNR and Long Mynd SSSI. The eastern half of the site is mainly semi-improved rough grassland with some rushy areas. A north/south fence separates the western section which is characterised by an extensive bracken area sloping steeply down to a valley bottom stream. A widely flushed small stream runs from the high ground to the valley bottom, along which gorse scrub and scattered trees provide an additional important habitat.

This report focuses on the birds that use the 19 hectares owned by Middle Marches Community Land Trust and complements a baseline ecological assessment carried out in 2021. It includes data collected from 5 visits over the spring and summer 2023 as well as observations from D.Stafford and R.Rowe. It is not a formally structured breeding bird survey, but breeding status is given where known.

## 2 Bird list and locations

Thirty-two species of bird were recorded from the site in 2021 and 2023, with a further 16 recorded either overhead or on the adjoining land. Of those recorded on site, Snipe and Jack Snipe were only wintering here, and Ring Ouzel and Whinchat (seen only in 2021) were presumed to be on passage. The remaining 26 were potentially breeding on or near the site, with clear signs of breeding of 12 species.

### 2.1 Key Habitat Areas for Birds



(s) = Displaying Skylarks 1<sup>st</sup> May23

## 2.2 Tables of Birds Recorded

The following birds were recorded using the site in 2021 and / or 2023. Birds with likely or confirmed breeding are shown in bold, and the status of the birds are colour coded as described later.

English name	Taxon	Breeding status on site	UK red list status	Comments
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	likely breeding	green	singing regularly on site
Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	unknown	green	recorded in 2021 only
Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	possible breeding on or near site	green	singing occasionally on site
<b>Carrion Crow</b>	<b><i>Corvus corone</i></b>	<b>breeding</b>	green	nest noted, several crows seen harassing nesting skylarks
Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	likely breeding	green	singing regularly on site
Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	likely breeding	green	several singing regularly on site
<b>Dunnock</b>	<b><i>Prunella modularis</i></b>	<b>breeding</b>	amber	males singing in shrubs on multiple visits. Feeding young
Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	possible breeding on or near site	green	flocks seen regularly overhead and feeding on thistles
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	possible breeding on or near site	green	singing occasionally on site
Jack Snipe	<i>Lymnocyptes minimus</i>	wintering	green	recorded in 2021 only
<b>Linnet</b>	<b><i>Linaria cannabina</i></b>	<b>breeding</b>	red	multiple nests in scrub
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	unknown	green	recorded in 2021 only
Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	unknown	green	recorded in 2021 only
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	breeding adjacent to site	amber	dead mallard on site
<b>Meadow Pipit</b>	<b><i>Anthus pratensis</i></b>	<b>breeding</b>	amber	multiple territories and nest with eggs found
Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	possible breeding on or near site	green	recorded on several occasions
<b>Reed Bunting</b>	<b><i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i></b>	<b>breeding</b>	amber	one pair nesting in 2023
Ring Ouzel	<i>Turdus torquatus</i>	on passage	red	2 birds present on site for around 1 wk. in 2021
<b>Robin</b>	<b><i>Erithacus rubecula</i></b>	<b>breeding</b>	green	1 or 2 pairs breeding in valley bottom
<b>Skylark</b>	<b><i>Alauda arvensis</i></b>	<b>breeding</b>	red	8+ territories on plateau
Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	wintering	amber	groups regularly flushed in winter
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	possible breeding on or near site	amber	singing on multiple visits on edge of site
Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	unknown	amber	fly-through
Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	unknown	red	autumn flock of 8
<b>Stonechat</b>	<b><i>Saxicola rubicola</i></b>	<b>breeding</b>	green	1 or 2 pairs breeding on hillside
<b>Wheatear</b>	<b><i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i></b>	<b>breeding on or near site</b>	amber	adults and juveniles seen on site 2021, but only adults in 2023
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	on passage	red	several seen in 2021 only
<b>Whitethroat</b>	<b><i>Curruca communis</i></b>	<b>breeding on or near site</b>	amber	singing on site in 2021, juvenile seen 2023
<b>Willow Warbler</b>	<b><i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i></b>	<b>breeding</b>	amber	many singing throughout
Wood pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	possible breeding on or near site	amber	recorded on several occasions
<b>Wren</b>	<b><i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i></b>	<b>breeding</b>	amber	singing regularly and feeding young
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	unknown	red	Recorded on lower slopes in 2021 but only on adjacent land in 2023

The following birds were recorded overhead or on adjacent land.

English name	<i>taxon</i>	Breeding status on site	UK 'red list' status	Comments
Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	unknown	green	overhead
Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	breeding adjacent to site	green	wider landscape
Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	unknown	red	wider landscape; 2021 only
Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	breeding in wider landscape	red	occasionally feeding on and near site
Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	winter visitor feeding nearby	red	wider landscape
Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>	unknown	green	wider landscape; 2021 only
Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	unknown	green	overhead
Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	unknown	green	overhead
Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	breeding nearby	amber	overhead
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	possible breeding nearby	red	wider landscape
Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	unknown	green	overhead
Red kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	unknown	green	overhead
Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	breeding nearby	amber	wider landscape
Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	winter visitor feeding nearby	amber	wider landscape
Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	unknown	green	overhead
Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	unknown	red	overhead

In addition to the species in the tables above, there were single unconfirmed sightings of red-listed Tree pipit and Spotted flycatcher.

Birds of Conservation Concern, also known as the 'red list' is compiled by the UK's leading bird conservation organisations and reviews the status of birds in the UK. The most recent review was carried out in 2021 and categorises the birds as red (of highest conservation concern), amber, or green (least concern).

### 3 Key Breeding Species

The following birds, of conservation concern in the UK, are described in more detail as Norbury Hill appears to be an important local breeding site for them.

The key habitats that these species are using are the upland rough grassland plateau, and the scrub along the stream and flushes in the valley bottom. The top boundary bank is also important for Wheatear. The bracken-dominated slopes are a poor habitat for birds, and current action to reduce the bracken vigour in favour of grassland and to increase the number of trees on the steeper slopes in these areas will benefit a wider range of species.

### 3.1 Skylark

Perhaps the most iconic species on the site. On sunny days, particularly during in spring and summer, the Skylark can be heard singing its intricate song from high above. It is on the UK 'red list' as its numbers have undergone a significant decline nationally.

On the Middle Marches area of Norbury Hill there are at least 8 territories, albeit currently restricted to the grass-dominated plateau areas to the north of the central fence line. However, the current work to reduce the bracken dominance south of the fence should help to increase its range. It nests on the ground, the nests being well hidden, and is likely to have at least 2 or 3 broods each year.



Skylark by cazalegg CC BY 2.0

### 3.2 Meadow Pipit

This bird is often considered to be one of the most abundant birds in the uplands, but like the Skylark has undergone decline and is now included on the UK amber list. During the breeding season, males can be seen characteristically parachuting down to the ground with a high piping call.

On Norbury Hill the numbers and distribution appear similar to those of the Skylark, although they are slightly more widespread with at least two territories in bracken-dominated areas (to the south of the fence). Nests are well hidden in the grassland, often at the base of grassy tussocks, as for the one pictured. Meadow Pipits will benefit from the bracken management being carried out on site.



Meadow pipit nest on Norbury Hill

### 3.3 Linnet

Although widespread, these gregarious farmland birds are also on the UK Red list due to substantial UK declines.

In the spring, the gorse scrub along the valley bottom of Norbury Hill is a hive of activity, with nesting Linnets seen gathering nest material and later, feeding young. Retaining or ideally increasing the scrub habitat on the site, should allow this little finch to thrive.



Linnet by Joe Pell CC BY 2.0

### 3.4 Other Breeding Birds of Conservation Concern. (Whitethroat, Willow Warbler, Wren, Dunnock, Reed Bunting, and Wheatear).

The tree and scrub habitat along the valley streamside is the richest bird area on the site, with a range of amber listed breeding birds including Wren, Dunnock, Whitethroat, and Willow Warbler. The latter two are both summer migrants, with Willow Warblers present in good numbers and heard singing from almost every mature tree. Whitethroats, a scrub loving species, were heard singing from hawthorns on Middle Marches land in 2021 and presumed breeding. In 2023, although territorial males were not heard here, a juvenile Whitethroat was recorded, possibly having bred on adjacent land. Other breeding species present in this habitat were Wrens and Dunnocks, both widespread but declining species.



Reed Bunting by Ian Preston CC BY 2.0



Wheatear by calvinfix CC BY 2.0

The Reed bunting, also on the Amber list, is a resident bird that favours wetlands. Although uncommon on the hill, a breeding pair were regularly seen along the banks of the widely flushed stream running down the hillside.

Another uncommon breeding bird on the site is the Wheatear. Both adults and juveniles of this migrant species were seen on the top boundary in 2021, and an adult in a similar place in 2023. These amber listed birds often breed in holes in dry stone walls, but here on Norbury Hill it is likely that they are using rabbit holes in the boundary bank.