



Land off Biddestone Lane, Yatton Keynell,
Chippenham, SN14 7BA

Breeding Skylark Survey



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The results of the survey and assessment work undertaken by All Ecology are representative at the time of surveying.

Every endeavour has been made to identify the presence of protected species on site, where this falls within the agreed scope of works.

The flora and fauna detailed within this report are those noted during the field survey and from anecdotal evidence. It should not be viewed as a complete list of flora and fauna species that may frequent or exist on site at other times of the year.

Up to date standard methodologies have been used, which are accepted by Natural England and other statutory conservation bodies. No responsibility will be accepted where these methodologies fail to identify all species on-site.

All Ecology cannot take responsibility where Government, national bodies or industry subsequently modify standards.

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Reference to sections or particular paragraphs of this document taken out of context may lead to misrepresentation.

Contents

Contents	1
1.0 Introduction	2
Background	2
Objectives and Aim	2
Site Location & Aerial Photograph	3
2.0 Legislation and Status	4
Personnel	4
3.0 Methodology	5
Personnel	5
Field Survey	5
Limitations	5
4.0 Results	6
Field Survey Results	6
5.0 Evaluation	8
Presence/absence	8
Site Status Assessment	8
Impacts	8
Mitigation	9
6.0 References	11
7.0 Plans	12
Plan 1 – Survey Results	12

1.0 Introduction

Background

- 1.1 In April 2024, All Ecology Ltd was commissioned to undertake a Breeding Skylark Survey at a site known as Land off Biddestone Lane, Yatton Keynell, Chippenham, SN14 7BA. The main part of the site consists of an arable field containing a pond with surrounding vegetation and the field is bound by hedgerows and trees. A small portion of the arable field to the south is also included within the site. The site is immediately surrounded by the local village hall amenity ground to the northeast, arable field to the southwest, road with arable field beyond to the northwest and a field of scrub and grassland mosaic to the southeast. The site is located to the southwest of the small village of Yatton Keynell and the local area is a mosaic of arable and grass fields with connecting field boundary vegetation. There are also areas of woodland further to the west.
- 1.2 The proposals for the site are for a new housing development comprising 55 new dwellings with associated infrastructure and greenspace as well as attenuation basin and swale. A new access will be created off Biddestone Road. Landscape buffers to the boundary hedges will be retained around the development.
- 1.3 A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of the site was carried out by All Ecology Ltd in March 2024. Skylarks were heard in the surrounding area and could utilise the arable field for breeding.

Objectives and Aim

- 1.4 The present survey was carried out in order to establish the following:
 - Whether breeding Skylarks are present on site.
 - Level of activity associated with the site, if present.
 - Assess the direct and indirect impact the development may have on the local Skylark population.
 - Which type of mitigation/compensations measures would need to be employed.

Site Location & Aerial Photograph



Figure 1: Site location plan.



Figure 2: Aerial view of the site.

2.0 Legislation and Status

Personnel

- 2.1 All wild birds are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), whilst they are actively nesting. Section 1 of this Act, makes it an offence to kill, injure or take any wild bird, and to intentionally take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while that nest is in use or being built. It is also an offence to take or destroy any wild bird eggs.
- 2.2 The skylark is also fully protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, which makes it an offence to kill, injure or take an adult Skylark, or to take, damage or destroy an active nest or its contents. The only exception is legitimate farming practices that cannot be reasonably delayed.
- 2.3 The Skylark is one of 49 species that are listed as Species of Principal Importance in England under section 41 of the NERC Act, which must be protected from adverse effects of any development

3.0 Methodology

Personnel

- 3.1 The survey was carried out by James Godbeer BSc Hons MCIEEM, an ecologist with over 17 years' experience working as a consultant and an experienced bird surveyor. James has extensive experience of managing environmental contracts, and particular experience in surveying, assessment and mitigation for rare and protected species. He has considerable knowledge of the development and planning process including Ecological Impact Assessments, sustainable ecological design and he has completed ecology chapters of Environmental Statements. James holds a number of protected species licences including bats (all species, all counties, Class Licence Registration No. 2015-12313-CLS-CLS), and Great Crested Newts (Class Licence Registration No. 2019-44282-CLS-CLS). He has successfully obtained European Protected Species mitigation licences for a number of bat species including Lesser Horseshoe, Greater Horseshoe, Serotine, Brown Long-eared, Common Pipistrelle and Natterer's bats, for a number of roost types including maternity and hibernation sites.

Field Survey

- 3.2 The surveys were conducted on the following dates and at the following times:
- 22nd April 2024 – 06:30 to 10:00
 - 14th May 2024 – 06:00 to 09:30
 - 14th June 2024 – 05:30 to 09:00
- 3.3 A total of four vantage points were taken by two surveyors. These points were chosen based on elevation and each had unobstructed views over the areas in questions which were the whole of the field and small portion of the field to the south. Notes were made on the location and nature of any Skylark activity, which at the time of year that the survey began would be mainly that of displaying males, later moving to nest surveys should any be recorded.

Limitations

- 3.4 The site was fully accessible with no limitations to undertaking the survey in accordance with the stated methodology. No breeding was recorded on site but activity in the surrounding area

4.0 Results

Field Survey Results

- 4.1 The survey began in April when a germinated crop of barley was present. This continued to grow throughout the survey period, covering most of the field but with a few areas where the crop had partially failed, leaving sparsely vegetated areas.

22nd April 2024

- 4.2 At least two individual male Skylarks were heard and seen displaying over the field to the east of the site. These sightings were made simultaneously and as such this was the minimum number encountered observed. Displaying males were recorded in two separate locations over the course of the survey. No activity was recorded over the site itself.

14th May 2024

- 4.3 During this survey single male Skylarks were heard and seen displaying over the fields to the east and west of the site. No activity was recorded over the site itself.

14th June 2024

- 4.4 No Skylark activity was recorded over the site or the surrounding area.

Other notable activity

- 4.5 On the 14th May a single Yellowhammer was heard calling from the south boundary hedge. The presence of birds was otherwise limited to common species recorded overhead and in the surrounding hedgerows. Species included Wren, Rook, Woodpigeon, Robin, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Dunnock, Song Thrush, Blackbird, Goldfinch and Chaffinch.



Photograph 1: View of the field.



Photograph 2: View of sparsely vegetated area.

5.0 Evaluation

Presence/absence

- 5.1 It has been established that at least two displaying males were present to the east of the site at the time of the surveys but no activity was recorded over the site itself.
- 5.2 The presence of nests, and nests with eggs and/or young could not be established as there was no access available to this area. The presence of displaying males indicates that breeding attempts will be made and their presence is likely to result in breeding in. It is concluded that breeding Skylarks are absent from the site itself.

Site Status Assessment

- 5.3 The site was not confirmed as a breeding site for Skylarks. The confirmed breeding area extended over the field off-site to the east in 2024, the year covered by the survey. The site itself does not appear to be in use but does nevertheless appear to provide suitable habitat that could be used in other years. The value of any particular site to this species is dependent on the crops being grown and the farming methods, with harvesting times most critical to the breeding success of this species. Most cereal crops are now sown during the autumn, which means that the crops are too tall and dense to allow Skylarks to raise more than one early brood (RSPB, 2015). This is likely to be the case on this site for the present year. Skylarks need two or three broods of young each year in order to maintain their population and the current status of the fields means that this will not be achievable even if Skylarks were breeding. It is therefore considered unlikely that the parts of the fields proposed for development are important for Skylarks on a national or regional level. They may have local importance in other years as the present survey has recorded them in the locality. However, they are deemed to be absent at this time and any development of the site will not have any permanent impact on the off-site area where they were recorded by reducing openness etc.

Impacts

- 5.4 The proposals for the site are for a new housing development comprising 55 new dwellings with associated infrastructure and greenspace as well as attenuation basin and swale. A new access will be created off Biddestone Road. Landscape buffers to the boundary hedges will be retained around the development.
- 5.5 The proposed development will result in the permanent loss of the main field and part of the field to the south, currently arable farmland. The following impacts and potential impacts in relation to Skylarks have been identified.
- Direct permanent loss of 4.1 ha of the main, currently farmed for winter cereal crops.
 - Direct permanent loss of 0.15 ha of the south field, currently farmed for winter cereal crops.
 - Potential indirect permanent loss of an additional 0.2 ha of the remainder of the south field, currently farmed for winter cereal crops, due to a reduction in the openness of the locality through the construction of houses and landscaping.

- Direct disturbance of nesting Skylarks, and potentially other birds, if present and works are scheduled to begin during the nesting season.

Mitigation

- 5.6 It has been established that breeding Skylarks are currently absent from the site and as such no specific mitigation in terms of habitat creation/improvements are required. The location of the breeding Skylarks is screened from the site by a mature hedge and trees, and scrub so there is no reasonable likelihood of any visual disturbance. Skylarks are expected to continue breed here regardless of the development on site. Nevertheless, the site itself may provide continued suitability for Skylarks and they could begin nesting in the future.

Timing of works

- 5.7 All birds, including Skylarks, are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), whilst they are actively nesting. Section 1 of this Act, makes it an offence to kill, injure or take any wild bird, and to intentionally take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while that nest is in use or being built. As the site may continue to be suitable for Skylarks, initial ground works will need to take place outside the nesting season of March to August unless the fields can be rendered unsuitable for Skylarks prior to the nesting season. If suitable habitat is available to the Skylarks then any initial ground works during the nesting should be preceded with a nesting bird survey. If any are found then work would need to be suspended until the young have fledged and a revised mitigation strategy proposed. This could include negotiations with local farmers/landowners to provide Skylark plots. Skylark plots are undrilled patches in winter cereal fields that have been proven to boost nesting opportunities for Skylarks in areas of predominantly autumn-sown crops (RSPB, 2015a). Skylark Plots increase the number of chicks that Skylarks can rear in winter cereals. They are not generally used by nesting Skylarks but are instead used for foraging, allowing Skylarks to forage more easily into the later spring and summer when the crops might otherwise be too high, forcing them forage in adjacent areas where similar restrictions on foraging could also be present.

Enhancements

- 5.8 There will not be any scope to provide enhancements for Skylark within the development but other bird species are also present on and around the site. Any loss of nesting habitat will be minimal as scrub and boundary hedges will be retained with landscape buffers for the most part. There is also significant scope to enhance the development itself for nesting birds.
- 5.9 The new buildings are likely to provide a good opportunity to enhance the site for birds and the following options could be explored for inclusion on the sides of the buildings:
- Nest boxes for Swifts could be incorporated into the eaves. These not only provide nesting sites for Swifts but can also be used by other species such as House Sparrows and Starlings.
 - House Martin nests could be provided under the eaves or on the north to east sides of the building.
 - Individual boxes, such as the Schwegler Bird Home 1MR, could also be installed at a height of at least 2 m.

- Groups of multiple small bird boxes could also be installed at a height of least 2 m to provide nesting sites for birds such as House Sparrows
- 5.10 In order to compensate for any loss of foraging habitat and/or enhance the site, it is recommended that any new planting should concentrate on species that are native to the area and ideally produce a range of seeds and berries at varying times of the year. Nectar rich plants could also be used encourage invertebrates on to the site, which in turn provide food for birds as well as other species such as bats.

6.0 References

Joint Nature Conservation Committee (2018a). *UK BAP Priority Species*. [Online]. Available at: <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-5717> [accessed on 27th February 2025].

RSPB (2015) *Skylark: Breeding*. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.rspb.org.uk/discoverandenjoynature/discoverandlearn/birdguide/name/s/skylark/nesting.aspx> [accessed on 25th April 2015].

RSPB (2015a) *Skylark Plots*. [Online]. Available at: http://www.rspb.org.uk/images/skylarkplot_tcm9-132769.pdf [accessed on 25th April 2015].

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (and amendments). (c.69), London: HMSO.

7.0 Plans

Plan 1 – Survey Results



Key:

Vantage Point ●

Displaying Male Skylark 🐦