

THE PLEASURE GROUNDS AND STUDLAND COMMON



BREEDING BIRD SURVEY AND RINGING REPORT

March to August
2020

Produced for Milford Conservation Volunteers

By

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INDEX

Introduction.....	Page 3
Survey Techniques.....	Page 4
Map of the Site.....	Page 5
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS.....	Page 6
FULL LIST OF BIRDS.....	Page 7
RINGING REPORT.....	Page 15
Other Wildlife.....	Page 16
Acknowledgements and References....	Page 16

INTRODUCTION

The Pleasure Grounds is a 5½ Ha (14 acre strip) of mixed woodland, roughly running east to west from the village of Milford-on-Sea. The Danes Stream runs through the whole woodland. Studland Common is a 3¼ Ha (8 acre) area of grassland and scrub, which borders the Upper Pleasure Grounds and Studland Meadow. Within the Meadow there exists a small orchard, which was planted in 2014 and the Orchard is bordered by dense hedgerows. In addition to those habitats, the majority of the site is bordered by private gardens, which add a lot of extra green habitat.

The Pleasure Grounds, Studland Common and Studland Meadow are owned and managed by Milford-on-Sea Parish Council. The Milford Conservation Volunteers (MCV) helps to produce management plans and a volunteer workforce. Public footpaths run throughout the site and paths and bridges are well maintained. The funding for the Orchard came from MCV and other local sponsors.

Studland Common and the Meadow are recognised as being *Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation* and Natural England (NE) is funding their management through the Higher Level Stewardship Agreement (HLSA). A *Scrub Management and Grassland Restoration Project* is in place, which is helping to keep the habitat diverse and welcoming to a wide range of wildlife. Dexter cattle are used to graze the grassland areas, but they are removed in the early summer to allow wild flowers and grasses to grow.

Since 1991 MCV has kept records of the wildlife using these sites. In 2020 MCV asked me to carry out a detailed breeding bird survey, covering all of the sites that form the Pleasure Grounds, Studland Common and Meadow (including the Orchard).

Following the national and international outbreak of the Covid-19 Virus, the government implemented restrictions on social interaction and movement from late March until mid May. The bird survey was able to continue, but there was only limited coverage by MCV bird watchers. The BTO also had to fall into line with government guidelines and therefore during this period all ringing activities were suspended. Although extra survey visits were made, there may have been some loss of data from other contributors.

Weather during survey period: Overall conditions were good for the breeding birds. Following a very wet winter, the spring was blessed with long periods of fine weather. There were some outbreaks of rain in the summer, but for the most part it remained fine and dry. In August a very hot spell left the ground hard, but there were plenty of insects and berries on which birds could feed. August ended with a windy and wet spell, followed by more settled conditions.

SURVEY TECHNIQUES

The whole area was surveyed by walking the paths at key times. Singing birds, birds collecting nest material, birds feeding young or actual nests located indicated a species presence as a breeding species, as opposed to being a visitor or a passage migrant.

In some cases it was difficult to assess whether the presence of a singing male had led to breeding success, plus it was difficult to access some of denser woodland. Therefore the following phrases are used in this report for breeding species:

- **pairs bred** = an exact count of confirmed pairs.
- **territories** = an exact count of territories, likely to contain breeding pairs, but unconfirmed.
- a + sign after either 'pairs' or 'territories' indicates that number of pairs or territories were confirmed, but there may have been a few more, particularly those overlapping with private gardens which border the Reserve.

The sites were walked at times when birds were most likely to be heard (early mornings and evenings). In late March an evening visit was made to survey crepuscular and nocturnal species. In order to complete the picture, four dawn visits were made, one in early April, one in mid-April, one in late April and one in mid-May. Bird ringing helped to confirm the presence of some species and was also useful for making other detailed observations.

The author is a British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) licensed bird ringer and trainer. Birds were caught by using mist nets and visiting nests. Mist netting was carried out at several different locations, but mainly in two distinct parts; the western end of Studland Common and the Orchard in Studland Meadow. As well as giving a good idea as to the species present, the bird ringing enabled the confirmation of which species were breeding and their breeding success.

LIST OF OTHER OBSERVERS

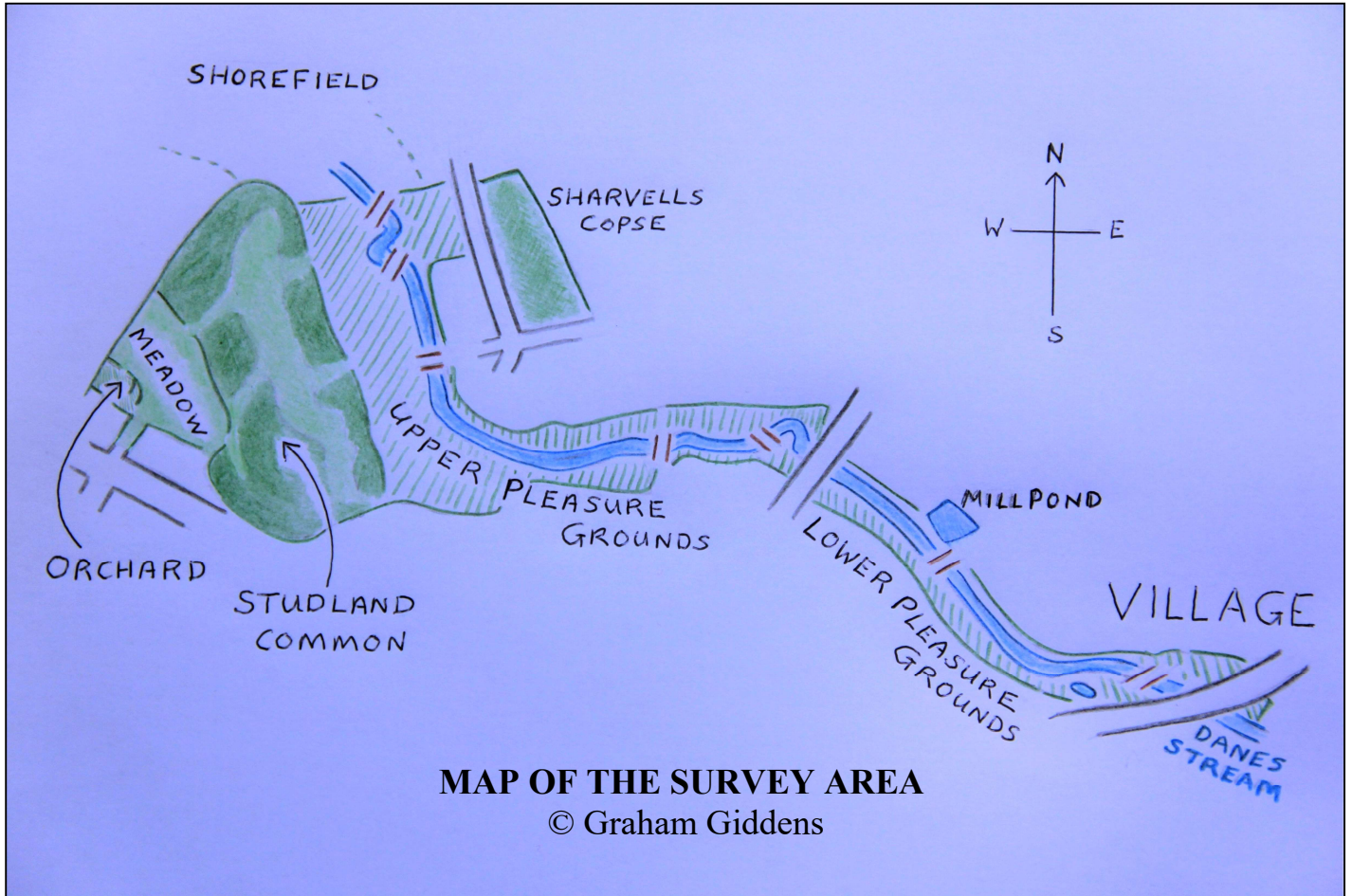
CBn – Chris Bown (local resident)

KM – Keith Metcalf (MCV Conservation Officer)

E&TR – Eric and Tani Read (MCV members and local residents)

DS – Daisy Scott (MCV member and trainee ringer)

VS – Vicky Scott (MCV member)



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

55 species of wild bird were found (not including feral pigeon), 34 of these were either confirmed or thought likely to have bred at the site. Among the species found were 7 species of warbler, firecrest and 7 species of finch, including the first record for the site of crossbill. 107 birds of 20 species were ringed (see the Ringing Report on page 15).

Below are listed the species thought to be of most significance, because of their national or local scarcity, or because of their impressive local numbers.

KEY SPECIES FOUND DURING THE BREEDING SURVEY

- MALLARD – Bred (a female with 9 ducklings).
- STOCK DOVE – 3 pairs.
- TAWNY OWL – 3 pairs.
- GREEN WOODPECKER – probable breeding (2 pairs).
- GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER – 5 pairs.
- TREE PIPIT – 3 on passage in August.
- CETTI'S WARBLER – 1 pair may have bred.
- SEDGE WARBLER – 1 on spring passage (*a scarce species at the site*).
- LESSER WHITETHROAT – 1 pair may have bred.
- WHITETHROAT – 1 pair bred.
- BLACKCAP – 12 pairs.
- CHIFFCHAFF – 8 pairs.
- WILLOW WARBLER – a few on passage in August.
- FIRECREST – 1 pair probably bred.
- HOUSE SPARROW – Large colonies around the Meadow.
- GREENFINCH – 3+ pairs.
- GOLDFINCH – 3+ pairs, 50+ present in August.
- BULLFINCH – 3 pairs.
- CROSSBILL – 2 flying over in June (*a first record for the site*).

FULL LIST OF BIRDS FOUND DURING THE SURVEY

Species are listed in Voous Order (i.e. Grebes to Buntings or, for the purpose of this report, Mallard to Bullfinch), using the vernacular English names alongside the *scientific names in italics*.

The description in [blue ink](#) alongside each species name describes the status of the bird at the Pleasure Grounds and Studland Common. Certain species may be more common or rarer within Hampshire or the UK, but here they are assessed by how often or how seldom they occurred at the Pleasure Grounds and Studland Common.

MALLARD *Anas platyrhynchos*

[A common resident and visitor in small numbers. 1 bred.](#)

Small numbers were regularly recorded on the Danes Stream. The maximum count was made on 24.03.20, when a pair and 2 drakes were present. On 22.06.20 a female was seen in the Lower Pleasure Grounds with 9 ducklings, which were about a week old.

BUZZARD *Buteo buteo*

[A daily visitor in small numbers. May have bred nearby.](#)

Single buzzards were seen sitting in trees and floating over the site, almost always around Studland Common, but occasionally elsewhere along the site.

SPARROWHAWK *Accipiter nisus*

[A regular visitor. May have bred nearby.](#)

Single sparrowhawks were seen hunting and flying over, mainly around Studland Common and the Upper Pleasure Grounds. This species has bred at the site in the recent past, but no evidence of nesting could be found this summer.

KESTREL *Falco tinnunculus*

[An occasional visitor.](#)

Single kestrels were observed in trees and flying over Studland Common and Sharvell's Copse on 2 dates in early April.

COMMON PHEASANT *Phasianus colchicus*

[Resident in small numbers.](#)

A few were present around the Meadow and the edges of Studland Common. No breeding was confirmed.

MOORHEN *Gallinula chloropus*

Resident in small numbers. 2 pairs bred.

Moorhens were present on the Danes Stream in the Lower Pleasure Grounds. 1 pair successfully nested at the Mill Pond and another nested on the Stream close to Milford Village. In early May small chicks were seen on the Mill Pond, then in August 5 half-grown juveniles were seen with the adult pair on the Mill Pond. In August the pair near the Village appeared with at least 2 chicks and later in August several independent fully grown juveniles were seen along the length of the Stream.

BLACK-HEADED GULL *Larus ridibundus*

A common visitor to the meadow in early spring.

Often present on the Meadow in the mornings of March and April and flying over.

HERRING GULL *Larus argentatus*

A common visitor to the meadow in early spring.

Often present on the meadow in the mornings of March and April and flying over.

FERAL PIGEON *Columba livia* (a feral species)

A common resident and visitor in small numbers.

Several feral pigeons were regularly present on the houses along Pless Road and around the Meadow. Some of these wore colour-rings, indicating that they were escaped racing pigeons.

STOCK DOVE *Columba oenas*

An uncommon resident. 3 pairs bred.

3 territories were noted, 2 in the Upper Pleasure Grounds and 1 in the Lower Pleasure Grounds. It was difficult to 100% confirm breeding success, but as all 3 territories were occupied through the summer, it seems likely that all 3 pairs nested.

WOODPIGEON *Columba palumbus*

A common resident and visitor. An estimated 20 pairs bred.

Pairs and nests were observed throughout the site. The exact numbers of nests was difficult to ascertain, due to parts of the woodland being impenetrable.

TAWNY OWL *Strix aluco*

Resident in small numbers. 3 territories.

An evening visit in March and several dawn visits in March and April helped to pin down 3 territories, 1 near the Orchard (Studland Meadow), 1 in the Upper Pleasure Grounds and 1 in the Lower Pleasure Grounds. It is not known if these territories all led to successful breeding, but it is likely that most did.

GREEN WOODPECKER *Picus viridis*

Resident in small numbers. 2 pairs present (breeding not confirmed).

2 distinct territories were identified, 1 in the Upper Pleasure Grounds and Sharvell's Copse and the other around the boundary of the Upper and Lower Pleasure Grounds. Both males and females were seen, but no nests were found. It is possible that the nests were a little way outside of the boundary of the site.

GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER *Dendrocopus major*

A reasonably common resident. 5 pairs bred.

During the spring 5 territories were identified, 1 in the Lower pleasure Grounds, 3 in the Upper pleasure Grounds and 1 in Sharvell's Copse. In May, 4 of the nests were located. Remarkably, 4 adults, (3 males and a female), were caught and ringed in the Orchard on 19.05.20. The female had a brood patch, confirming that she was nesting nearby.

TREE PIPIT *Anthus trivialis*

A scarce autumn passage migrant.

3 were found on 28.08.20, 2 were feeding on the western side of the Meadow and one flew over, heading south east.

WREN *Troglodytes troglodytes*

A common resident. 21+ pairs bred.

Wrens populate all of the woodland, scrub, hedgerows and gardens of the site.

DUNNOCK *Prunella modularis*

A common resident. 17 pairs bred.

Good habitat exists throughout most of the site for this species.

ROBIN *Erithacus rubecula*

A common resident. 20 pairs bred.

Good habitat exists throughout most of the site for this species.

BLACKBIRD *Turdus merula*

A common resident. 22 pairs bred.

The first fledged juveniles were seen at Studland Common on 24.04.20.

SONG THRUSH *Turdus philomelos*

A reasonably common resident. 14 pairs bred.

This species appeared to be thriving, especially at Studland Common and around the Meadow. Fledged juveniles were seen at Studland Common and in the Upper Pleasure Grounds on 24.04.20.

CETTI'S WARBLER *Cettia cetti*

A common resident, but only at one location. 1 pair may have bred.

A male was regularly seen and heard at the Village end of the Lower Pleasure Grounds. It is not known if he attracted a mate or if any nesting took place.

SEDGE WARBLER *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

A rare spring visitor.

On 02.05.20 a male sedge warbler was seen and heard at the western end of Studland Common. It was holding territory in a bramble patch, about 100 metres from the Danes Stream. The habitat was not ideal for this migrant wetland species, therefore it was not a surprise that the bird was only present for the one day.

LESSER WHITETHROAT *Sylvia curruca*

An uncommon summer visitor. 1 pair may have bred.

A male was seen and heard singing on 02.05.20 in likely breeding habitat on the western edge of the Meadow. He was still present there later in May, but it is not known if he attracted a mate.

WHITETHROAT *Sylvia communis*

An uncommon summer visitor. 1 pair bred.

A male was singing in the hedge surrounding the Orchard on 24.04.20 and throughout May. On 19.05.20 both the male and a female were caught and ringed there. The female had a clear and active brood patch, confirming that the pair was nesting.

BLACKCAP *Sylvia atricapilla*

A reasonably common summer visitor. 12 pairs bred.

The first singing males were heard on 24.03.20. By 11.04.20 there were 9 males singing. The maximum count of 12 singing males was achieved on 07.04.20 with 3 in the Lower Pleasure Grounds, 5 in the Upper Pleasure Grounds, 2 in Sharvell's Copse and 2 at Studland Common. Juveniles were seen at the end of the summer, but it is not known if these came from local nests, or if they were passage migrants that had originated from further afield.

CHIFFCHAFF *Phylloscopus collybita*

A reasonably common summer visitor. 8 pairs bred.

The first singing male was heard in the Upper Pleasure Grounds on 09.03.20. By 24.03.20, 7 males were singing and by 01.04.20 the maximum of 8 males were heard.

WILLOW WARBLER *Phylloscopus trochilus*

An uncommon autumn passage migrant.

1 was with a mixed tit flock in the Upper Pleasure Grounds on 02.09.20. 2 were feeding at Studland Common on 28.08.20.

GOLDCREST *Regulus regulus*

A surprisingly uncommon resident. 2 pairs probably bred.

Habitat seems to exist to support more goldcrests, but only 2 singing males were found, 1 in the Upper Pleasure Grounds and 1 in Sharvell's Copse. Several others were heard singing from private gardens just outside of the site.

FIRECREST *Regulus ignicapillus*

A scarce resident. 1 pair possibly bred.

From the beginning of the survey in March until mid-April a male firecrest was holding a territory in the Lower Pleasure Grounds. On March 24th this male was caught and ringed, but no female was present within the territory. It is assumed that, because the male did not attract a mate, he then moved west into Studland Common, where he was seen on 24.04.20 (new ring seen on its leg). At the same time a second male was discovered singing in Sharvell's Copse. The first male could not be relocated after April, but the male in Sharvell's Copse remained in its territory and may have bred there.

COAL TIT *Parus ater*

An uncommon resident. 3 pairs bred.

During the spring 3 territories were identified, 1 in the Upper Pleasure Grounds and 2 in Sharvell's Copse. A 4th territory was held in a private garden just outside of the site, close to the Lower Pleasure Grounds.

BLUE TIT *Cyanistis caeruleus*

A common resident. 12 pairs bred.

Some of the nest boxes were used by this species, one of which was studied closely. From 8 eggs laid, only 2 chicks survived to fledge. The weather was fine during the period that the chicks were in the nest, but observations of the adults feeding behaviour showed that they were unable to find sufficient food. Caterpillars and other medium-sized insects are required to feed a large brood and this prey is usually available in deciduous woodland in May, especially when the weather is stable. However, the adults were only able to locate tiny aphids, which take longer to gather and provide little sustenance for the chicks.

GREAT TIT *Parus major*

A reasonably common resident. 8 pairs bred.

It appears that the great tits nested slightly in advance of the blue tits and they managed better breeding success. More juvenile great tits than blue tits were seen and ringed later in the summer.

NUTHATCH *Sitta europaea*

An uncommon resident. 1 pair probably bred.

Surprisingly only 1 territory was found, in the Upper Pleasure Grounds. Breeding was not confirmed. It is likely that there were a few other pairs just outside of the survey area. In July a juvenile was ringed at the Orchard and a couple of others were seen. In

August a nuthatch was heard in the Lower Pleasure Grounds, associating with a mixed tit flock.

TREECREEPER *Certhia familiaris*

An uncommon resident or visitor. 1 pair possibly bred.

There were only 2 sightings of treecreepers; on 01.03.20 a pair was feeding in the Lower Pleasure Grounds and on 19.05.20 a single adult was feeding in Sharvell's Copse. Adults were present and suitable breeding habitat exists, but no nests were found. In August a treecreeper was heard calling in the Lower Pleasure Grounds.

LONG-TAILED TIT *Aegithalos caudatus*

A reasonably common resident. 3 pairs bred.

In April a nest was found at Studland Common and the adults were observed feeding their young in early May. 2 other pairs were present, 1 in the Upper Pleasure Grounds and 1 in the Lower Pleasure Grounds. In early June a family flock was seen at the latter site.

JAY *Garrulus glandarius*

A reasonably common resident. 3 pairs probably bred.

An adult was observed collecting nest material in the Upper Pleasure Grounds. Other pairs were regularly present and active throughout the entire site.

MAGPIE *Pica pica*

A reasonably common resident. 2 pairs probably bred.

Pairs were mobile and their exact territories were difficult to pin down, but it seems likely that there were 2 breeding pairs.

CARRION CROW *Corvus corone*

A reasonably common resident and visitor. 1 pair bred.

In March, whilst surveying tawny owls in the evening and early morning, a small roost of carrion crows was noted. They used the tall trees in the Upper Pleasure Grounds and Sharvell's Copse. These were presumably non-breeding birds. 1 pair bred on the edge of the Lower Pleasure Grounds.

ROOK *Corvus frugilegus*

A reasonably common visitor, usually only seen flying over. 13 pairs nested close by.

A small rookery, consisting of 13 nests, existed in holm oaks at the entrance to Kivernell Road, which is very close to the Village end of the Lower Pleasure Grounds.

JACKDAW *Corvus monedula*

A reasonably common visitor. 2+ pairs bred nearby.

2 pairs were observed nest building in chimneys of private houses on the edge of the site. Others were seen flying over carrying nest material to sites further away.

STARLING *Sturnus vulgaris*

A reasonably common visitor. A few pairs nested nearby.

On 01.04.20 a pair was seen investigating an old woodpecker hole in the Upper Pleasure Grounds. However, no nesting could be confirmed. Later in the spring several adults were seen taking food to nests in houses and gardens beyond the site.

HOUSE SPARROW *Passer domesticus*

A common resident and visitor, but mainly at the Meadow. Many bred nearby.

Garden feeders and good hedgerow habitat led to many sightings around the Meadow and the Orchard.

CHAFFINCH *Fringilla coelebs*

An uncommon resident, present only in one area. 1+ pairs probably bred.

Surprisingly the only area where chaffinches were found was at the western end of Studland Common and the Meadow, including the Orchard. Only 2 males were singing in the spring, both from good nesting habitat, and a female was caught and ringed in the Orchard in March. A flock of 6 chaffinches in the Orchard on 28.08.20 suggests that young did fledge locally.

GREENFINCH *Carduelis chloris*

A reasonably common resident. 3+ pairs bred.

The best concentrations of greenfinches were found around the gardens, hedges and scrubby areas of the Meadow and Studland Common. One was also heard singing from a private garden, just outside of the site, close to Milford Village. In July, 3 fully fledged juveniles were caught and ringed at the Orchard. More juveniles were seen around the Meadow and Studland Common in August.

GOLDFINCH *Carduelis carduelis*

A reasonably common resident. 3+ pairs bred.

Goldfinches occurred across the whole site, but most sightings and breeding records came from the Meadow and surrounding private gardens. The first 2 juveniles were seen with their parents, feeding from a bird feeder in a neighbouring private garden beside the Meadow on 07.05.20. Flocks of up to 8 adults were also present in that area throughout April and May. Later in May 2 juveniles were observed feeding on the seeds of fat hen in the Meadow. In August 3 juveniles were following an adult at Studland Common. Therefore it seems likely that more than one pair fledged young. In late August a flock of 50+ goldfinches, made up of adults and juveniles, was present at the Meadow.

BULLFINCH *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

An uncommon resident. 3 pairs bred.

A pair was present at Studland Common and 2 pairs were in the Upper Pleasure Grounds. Confirmation of breeding came on 02.08.20, when 3 juveniles were seen being fed by an adult female in the Upper Pleasure Grounds. On the same day the begging calls of juveniles were also heard at Studland Common. Further proof of breeding came when 2 juveniles were seen at Studland Common on 28.08.20.

FLY OVERS AND OCCASIONAL VISITORS

PEREGRINE FALCON *Falco peregrinus*: Occasional sightings of single adults flying over the Meadow.

MEDITERRANEAN GULL *Larus melanocephalus*: A common fly over species in small numbers, especially in spring.

GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL *Larus marinus*: A few seen flying over.

MEADOW PIPIT *Anthus pratensis*: singles occasionally heard flying high overhead in March, April and again in August.

SWALLOW *Hiundo rustica*: Small numbers reasonably regularly seen flying over.

SAND MARTIN *Riparia riparia*: Small numbers occasionally seen flying over.

HOUSE MARTIN *Delichon urbicum*: Small numbers were regularly seen and heard over the Meadow and Studland Common during the second half of summer and into the autumn. A few pairs bred or tried to breed on houses nearby.

LINNET *Linaria cannabina*: Pairs and small flocks occasionally seen flying over the Meadow.

SISKIN *Carduelis spinus*: 2 or more were heard flying over the Lower Pleasure Grounds on 02.08.20. A small flock flew over the Upper Pleasure Grounds on 28.08.20.

CROSSBILL *Loxia curvirostra*: 2 flew west over Studland Common on 10.06.20 (GG, DS and VS). **A first record for the site.**

RINGING REPORT

During 5 ringing sessions 107 birds of 20 species were ringed, including common resident species, scarce resident species and migrant warblers. Birds were caught by the use of mist nets. The 5 netting sessions were carried out in the Lower Pleasure Grounds (1), at Studland Common (1) and in the Orchard (3). One blue tit nest box was also visited.

LIST OF BIRDS RINGED DURING THE SURVEY

SPECIES	Fully Grown	Chicks	TOTAL
Gt Spotted Woodpecker	4		4
Wren	1		1
Dunnock	8		8
Robin	6		6
Blackbird	8		8
Song Thrush	2		2
Whitethroat	2		2
Blackcap	6		6
Chiffchaff	5		5
Firecrest	1		1
Blue Tit	13	2	15
Great Tit	9		9
Long-tailed Tit	8		8
Nuthatch	1		1
Carrion Crow	1		1
House Sparrow	17		17
Chaffinch	2		2
Greenfinch	5		5
Goldfinch	5		5
Bullfinch	1		1
TOTALS	105	2	107

RING RECOVERY: The remains of an adult song thrush, which had been ringed at the Orchard on 16.03.20, were found in the Meadow on 16.06.20 (CBn). It is believed that the thrush had been taken by a sparrowhawk.

OTHER WILDLIFE

The following mammals were seen: fox, roe deer, rabbit, grey squirrel, and some unidentified bats. Several brown trout were seen in the Danes Stream. However, it was worrying to notice that throughout the spring and the summer the water quality appeared milky, possibly as a result of works being carried out further upstream. The following butterflies were seen: meadow browns in good numbers and lesser numbers of gate keepers, speckled wood, common blue and holly blue.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to Graham Wells, the Milford-on-Sea Parish Council Parish Clerk, for organising permission for the survey to take place. Keith Metcalf, MCV Conservation Officer and former Parish Clerk, instigated the survey and provided valuable input. Local resident Chris Bown found and reported the ringed song thrush. Eric and Tani Read, MCV members and local residents, kindly passed on their bird and butterfly sightings. Vicky and Daisy Scott helped with several of the mist netting sessions. Daisy is formally training to be a licensed ringer and MCV is kindly sponsoring her.

REFERENCES

- **Graham Giddens** - *The Pleasure Grounds Bird Ringing Totals December 2003 to May 2004*, a short report produced for MCV in 2004.
- **Hampshire Ornithological Society** – *Bird Report 2018*, published in 2019, containing the most up to date data on the county's birds.
- **Milford Conservation Volunteers** – Information regarding local nature reserves, placed on the MCV website.

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