



Wintering Bird Survey 2024 - 2025

Land at King's Pond, Alton, Hampshire

The Ecology Partnership, Thorncroft Manor, Thorncroft Drive, Leatherhead, Surrey KT22 8JB

T +44 (0) 1372 364133 E info@ecologypartnership.com W ecologypartnership.com

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LIABILITIES:

Whilst every effort has been made to guarantee the accuracy of this report, it should be noted that living animals and plants are capable of migration/establishing and whilst such species may not have been located during the survey duration, their presence may be found on a site at a later date.

This report provides a snap shot of the species that were present at the time of the survey only and does not consider seasonal variation. Furthermore, where access is limited or the site supports habitats which are densely vegetated only dominant species maybe recorded.

The recommendations contained within this document are based on a reasonable timeframe between the completion of the survey and the commencement of any works. If there is any delay between the commencement of works that may conflict with timeframes laid out within this document, or have the potential to allow the ingress of protected species, a suitably qualified ecologist should be consulted.

It is the duty of care of the landowner/developer to act responsibly and comply with current environmental legislation if protected species are suspected or found prior to or during works.

1.0 Introduction

Background and planning context

- 1.1 The Ecology Partnership was commissioned by Alton Town Council to undertake a wintering bird survey for land King's Pond, Alton, Hampshire, GU34 2SZ (grid reference: SU 72272 39356), hereafter referred to as the 'site'.

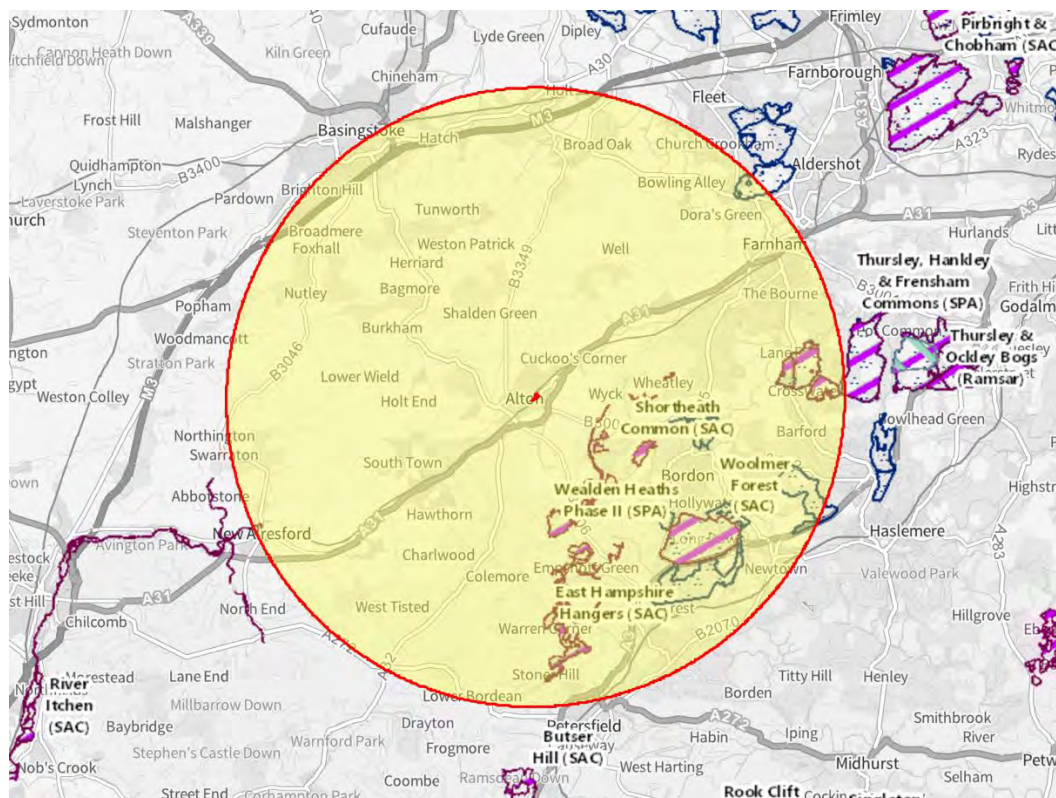


Figure 1: The site in relation to designated sites

Statutory Sites: European sites

- 1.2 The site is located approximately 6.6km from Wealden Heaths Phase II Special Protection Area (SPA), and 11.7km from Thursley, Hankley & Frensham Commons SPA.
- 1.3 The protection of European Sites of interest for birds, through the *Directive 2009/147/EC on the conservation of wild birds*, is transposed into UK legislation through the *Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019*. The qualifying features of these SPAs are:
- o **European nightjar** *Caprimulgus europaeus* (breeding);
 - o **Woodlark** *Lullula arborea* (breeding);
 - o **Dartford warbler** *Sylvia undata* (breeding).

- 1.4 Wealden Heaths Phase II and Thursley, Hankley & Frensham Commons SPA are not designated for populations of wintering birds, therefore functional linkage would need to be assessed in breeding bird surveys. It is not considered that the site supports suitable habitat to support the qualifying bird species for these designations. Dartford warbler, nightjar and woodlark are heathland specialists and are vulnerable due to disturbance from human activity as they are ground nesting species.
- 1.5 Within 15km of the site, there are a further five internationally designated sites, however, these are not designated for ornithological interest and therefore are not relevant to discuss further. These include East Hampshire Hangers Special Area of Conservation (SAC) c. 3.1km east of site, Shortheath Common SAC c. 5.4km east, Woolmer Forest SAC c. 9km south-east, Thursley, Ash, Pirbright & Chobham SAC c. 11.7km east, and River Itchen SAC c. 14.6km south-west.

Statutory Sites: National sites

- 1.6 Within 5km of the site there are four Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), none of which are designated for ornithological interest. These include: Wick Wood and Worldham Hangers SSSI c. 3.2km south-east, Binswood SSSI c. 4.2km south-east, Upper Greensand Hangers: Wyck to Wheatley SSSI c. 4.5km east, and Coombe Wood and the Lythe SSSI c. 4.8km south-east of site.

Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC)

- 1.7 There are no non-statutory designated sites within 1km of the site boundary; however, there are 11 within 2km of site. None of which are designated for wintering birds, the closest SINC is Water Lane SINC located c. 1.12km south-east of site.

Other ornithological interest

- 1.8 Of separate concern, unrelated to statutory sites and their component species, a number of bird species of the wider countryside are in steep decline in the UK. Several are classified, through inclusion on the Section 41 list of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, as of "Principal importance for the purpose of conserving biodiversity" in England. The requirement of the Secretary of State under Section 41(3) of this Act to "further the conservation...." of the listed species and "promote the taking by others of such steps" is often met through Local Plan policy and Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAP). The East Hampshire District Local Plan: Joint Core Strategy (adopted in

2014) has a number of policies which explicitly or implicitly guide habitat creation or protection for birds.

1.9 Policy CP21 - Biodiversity notes that:

"Development proposals must maintain, enhance and protect the District's biodiversity and its surrounding environment. New development will be required to:

- a) maintain, enhance and protect district wide biodiversity, in particular the nature conservation designations).

 - i. Special Protection Areas (SPA), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Ramsar (International);*
 - ii. Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and National Nature Reserves (National);*
 - iii. Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) (Hampshire) and Local Nature Reserves (LNR).**
- b) extend specific protection to, and encourage enhancement of, other sites and features which are of local value for wildlife, for example important trees, rivers, river corridors and hedgerows, but which are not included in designated sites.*
- c) contribute towards maintaining a district-wide network of local wildlife sites, wildlife corridors and stepping stones between designated sites and other areas of biodiversity value or natural green space. This will help to prevent the fragmentation of existing habitats and allow species to respond to the impacts of climate change by making provision for habitat adaptation and species migration. This is supported by Policy CP28 (Green Infrastructure) and the District's Green Infrastructure work.*
- d) ensure wildlife enhancements are incorporated into the design to achieve a net gain in biodiversity by designing in wildlife and by ensuring that any adverse impacts are avoided where possible or, if unavoidable, they are appropriately mitigated for, with compensatory measures only used as a last resort.*
- e) protect and, where appropriate, strengthen populations of protected species."*

Site Context and Habitats

- 1.10** The site is located in the town of Alton (SU 72272 39356) and covers an area of approximately 4.8 hectares consisting of grassland, buildings, woodland, and a pond the pond lies on the course of the River Wey, the river flows into the southern end of the waterbody and then exits from an outflow to the north. The wider is surrounded by a mix

of residential and light industrial units, with a railway running along the eastern side of the site.



Figure 2: Site red line boundary.

Description of the Proposed Development

- 1.11 Final plans for site have not yet been produced, however, works are understood to be focused on hydrological/ecological restoration of the River Wey. There are currently two proposed ideas for the site. The first focuses on draining of King' Pond, realignment of the River Wey to a more natural course, and creation of ponds and wetlands adjacent to it. The alternative focuses on extensive dredging of silt, to restore a more natural hydrological state to the river through controlling nutrients.

2.0 Methodology

- 2.1 The site was initially scanned with binoculars, or a telescope if necessary, and the specific identity, number and behaviour of any birds were recorded. Behaviour categories

classified birds as feeding, searching for food or resting. Any human activities that could cause disturbance to birds and therefore have caused an atypical low count or absence were noted.

Table 1: Weather conditions during bird surveys conducted on the site

Date	Start time	Weather conditions	Visit ref
16/12/2024	11:05	20% cloud, dry, 10 C, no wind.	1
13/01/2025	14:00	100% cloud, dry, 5 C, no wind.	2
14/02/2025	07:45	100% cloud, dry, 3 C, low wind.	3

- 2.2 The most efficient method (Atkinson et al. 2006) of recording species is to walk the boundaries of site and walk one or more transects through, so that all of the site is within 20m of a transect. Otherwise, a number of target species that are more likely to use land the centre of the site risk being under-recorded. This method was used. Each bird was identified to species, its location assigned on an appropriately scaled map and the behavioural category recorded when possible, although it was generally not possible to separate feeding and other behaviours for smaller birds. Movement of birds was noted during the survey, in order to minimise double counting.

Evaluation

- 2.3 The evaluation of waterbird numbers on the site in relation to qualifying numbers for SPA uses current Wetland Bird Survey data and the counts used to qualify the SPAs¹, which are out of date. Recent NE discretionary advice (Cleve Hill Solar 2018) advises on using both data sources. The evaluation of farmland birds makes use of the current listing of birds of conservation concern in the UK (Eaton *et al.* 2015) and the Section 41 list. The evaluation of the use of the site's habitats for species of conservation concern, hence any impact and mitigation, references recent literature on habitat and resource selection and response to habitat loss or disturbance for the relevant species.

1 <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5199409650335744>

Survey constraints

- 2.4 Surveys of non-breeding birds, which can be mobile over several sites when not holding territories and can change their distribution with weather conditions, are always vulnerable to the risk of missing occasional use of a site. The survey effort, at monthly intervals, is considered reasonable as it follows national survey effort for wading birds on farmland (Gillings *et al.* 1999, 2007) and wintering farmland birds (Gillings *et al.* 2008).
- 2.5 Some of the target waterbirds do have different feeding distributions at night (Gillings *et al.* 1999, 2007). The survey attempted to detect movement of birds would not have recorded birds moving at night onto the site.

3.0 Results

- 3.1 The results of each survey are detailed in Figures 3-5 and are discussed further below.

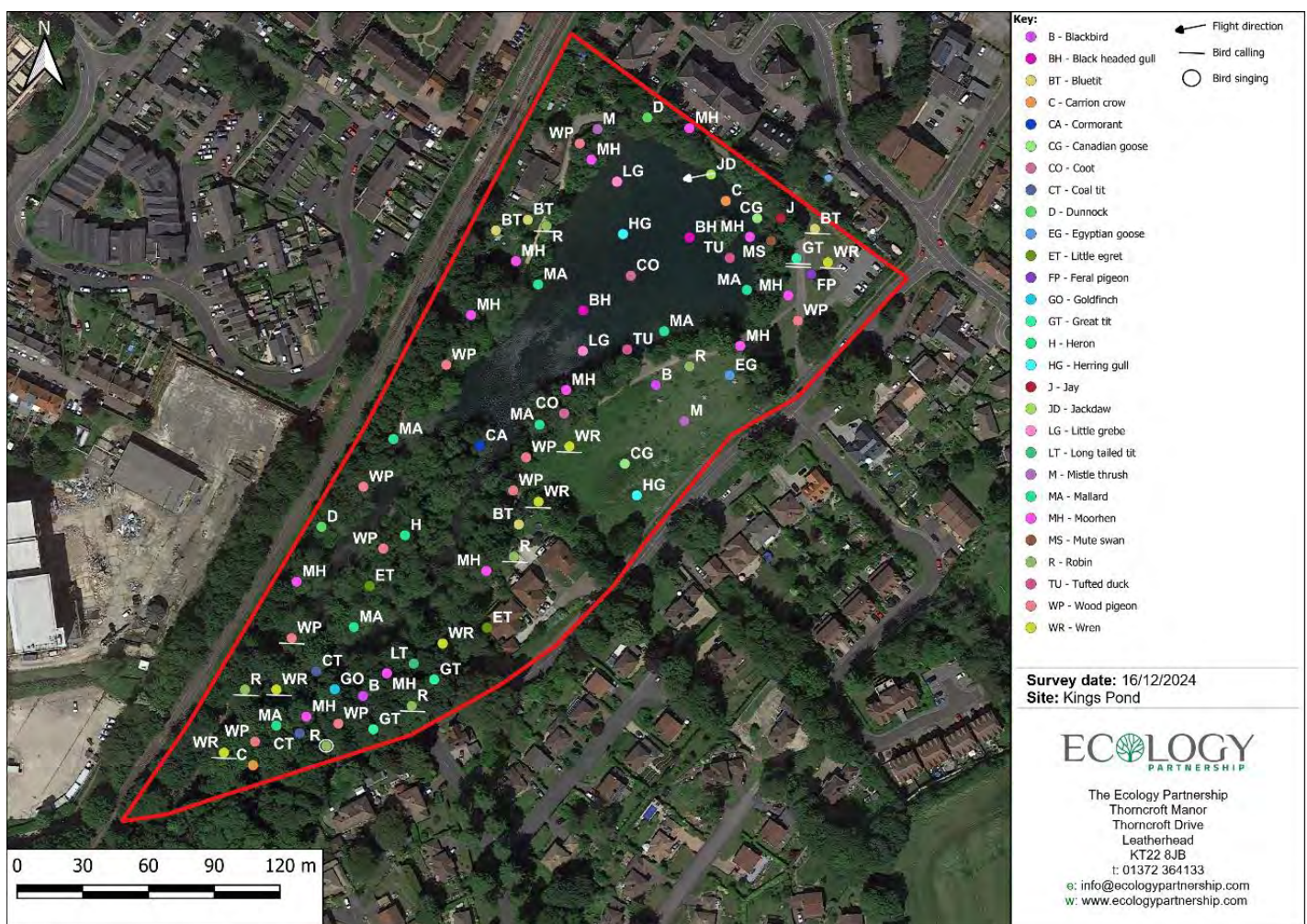


Figure 3: Survey 1 – 16th December 2024 Results

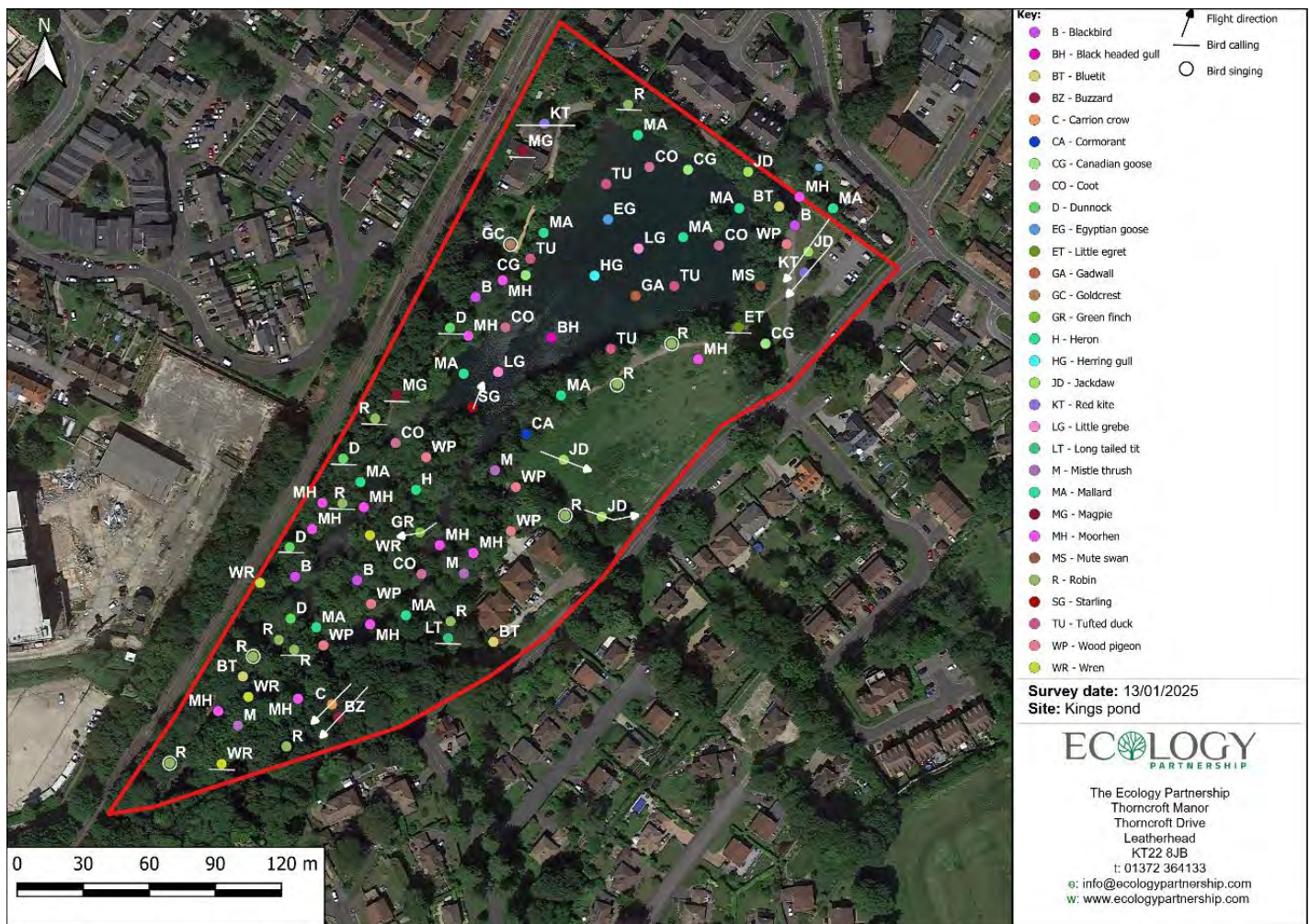


Figure 4: Survey 2 – 13th January 2025 Results

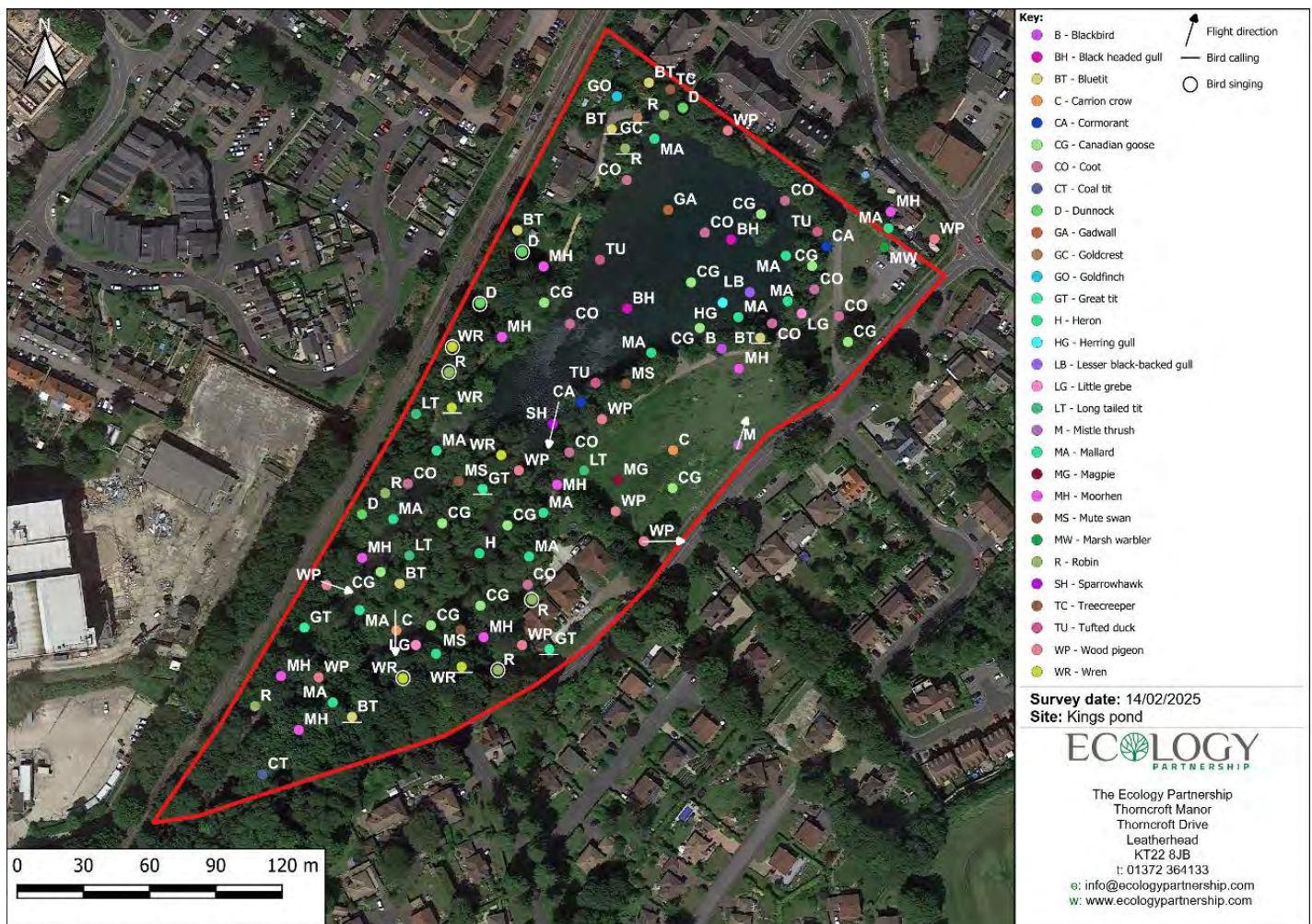


Figure 5: Survey 3 – 14th February 2025 Results

3.2 Over the three month surveying period, a total of 37 species were recorded onsite including three BoCC red list, nine BoCC amber list, and one Schedule 1 species were identified on site.

Waterbirds

3.3 The most abundant species groups recorded on site were wildfowl and gulls, considered to be attributed to the pond, associated island and high availability of food from human visitors.. Ducks of note include moderately sized flocks of mallard, small groups of tufted duck, two pairs of gadwall, and a Mandarin duck, in addition to moderate numbers of moorhen and coot using the edges of the pond, grass, picnic area and islands to forage.

3.4 Of the three gull species identified onsite, black-headed gulls were the most numerous identified on the pond, with few herring gull and lesser black-backed gull observed utilising the site.

- 3.5 Towards the eastern end of the island to the west of the site, there is a heronry with approximately three visible nests, grey heron were seen in this location on two of the three surveys. Cormorants and a little egret were also observed within this area.

UK BAP Priority Species

- 3.6 The survey recorded two UK BAP priority species including, **dunnock**, and **herring gull**.
- 3.7 A few dunnocks were recorded in the pond treelines. Herring gulls were recorded sitting on the pond and flying over the picnic areas of site, with a peak number of 5 herring gull during the first survey.

Red List and Schedule 1 Species

- 3.8 The survey recorded one Schedule 1 species; **red kite** were observed during the second survey on 13th January 2025. These were observed flying over the site with a peak count of 2 at 14:05.
- 3.9 Red list species include **herring gull**, **mistle thrush**, and **greenfinch**. One mistle thrush was observed foraging on 14th February 2025. One greenfinch was observed flying over the site on the 13th January, and one was observed perched in a tree on the 14th February 2025.
- 3.10 Although Schedule 1 species **kingfisher** was not observed on site during the surveys, frequent visitors of King's Pond advised the surveyor during visits that the species is often frequented on site. Likely towards the western end of site, towards the island using the channel. Additionally, a kingfisher was observed during the preliminary ecological appraisal carried out by The Ecology Partnership on 16th January 2025.

Table 2: Site utilisation survey results December 2024 – February 2025

Species	Survey date			Notes
	1	2	3	
	16/12/2024	13/01/2025	14/02/2025	
Birds of Conservation Concern and BAP				
Black-headed gull (BoCC: amber)	x	x	x	Most numerous gull species recorded on site. Approximately 57 birds taking off when alarmed by dog and returning.
Dunnock (BoCC: amber)	x	x	x	A few seen and heard calling in pond treeline.
Gadwall (BoCC: amber)		x	x	Two pairs seen in centre of pond during two surveys.
Greenfinch (BoCC: red)		x	x	One bird seen during two surveys.
Herring gull (BoCC: red)	x	x	x	A few birds sitting on the pond and some flying over the picnic area.
Lesser black-backed gull (BoCC: amber)			x	One bird recorded resting in centre of pond.
Mallard (BoCC: amber)	x	x	x	Most numerous wildfowl species on site, on pond and standing around on grass near carpark for food.
Mistle thrush (BoCC: red)			x	One bird seen foraging.
Moorhen (BoCC: amber)	x	x	x	Several birds seen around pond edges and island foraging and calling.
Sparrowhawk (BoCC: amber)			x	One bird seen flying over site.
Woodpigeon (BoCC: amber)	x	x	x	Birds mainly seen in ones and twos perched in trees on pong edge and on island.
Wren (BoCC: amber)	x	x	x	Bird seen foraging and calling around the edge of the pond in woodland to the west.
Schedule 1				
Red kite		x		One bird seen flying over site.

Other Species				
Blackbird	x	x	x	A few seen foraging, calling on site, on pond edge and treelines.
Blue tit	x	x	x	Some birds heard calling, some observed roosting/perched on pond edge treelines.
Canada goose	x	x	x	Family group foraging on grass around picnic area and around the pond.
Carrion Crow	x	x	x	Some seen flying over site, some observed roosting/perched.
Coal Tit	x		x	A few birds heard in the woodland to the west.
Common Buzzard		x		One seen flying over site.
Coot	x	x	x	One of the most numerous wildfowl species in and around the pond.
Cormorant	x	x	x	A few perched high in trees on southern edge of pond.
Egyptian Goose	x	x		A pair seen foraging on grass in picnic area during survey 1.
Feral pigeon	x			One seen foraging at the edge of site.
Goldcrest		x	x	A few heard singing in northern edge of pond and fir trees.
Goldfinch			x	A few heard calling in trees on north-eastern edge of pond in survey 3.
Great Tit	x	x	x	A few birds heard calling and observed roosting/perched in pond edge treelines.
Grey Heron	x	x		One bird seen on nest and perched nearby (at least 3 nests on pond island, all inactive, small heronry).
Jackdaw	x	x		A few birds seen flying around pond trees.
Little egret	x			One bird seen perched in a tree on an island.
Little grebe	x	x	x	One individual and a pair seen foraging on pond.
Long-tailed Tit	x	x	x	Family groups foraging in pond edge treelines.
Magpie	x	x	x	Seen foraging on table in picnic area and in treelines around the pond.
Mandarin duck			x	One bird seen on the pond.
Mute swan	x	x	x	A family including 3 cygnets in and around pond.

Robin	x	x	x	Some seen foraging, calling on site, in trees, vegetation on pond edge and wooded area to west.
Treecreeper			x	One bird foraging in an alder tree on north-eastern edge of the pond.
Tufted duck	x	x	x	Several birds resting on pond.

4.0 Discussion

- 4.1 The typical survey period to collect a full winter bird survey dataset is between October to February. The surveys for the site were undertaken from December 2024 to February 2025, with no surveys in October and November 2024. However, it is considered that the three surveys completed are sufficient to inform on wintering bird activity on site.
- 4.2 Three wintering bird surveys were conducted on the 16th December 2024, 13th January 2025, and 14th February 2025. A total of 37 bird species were recorded on site, including three red list species (greenfinch, herring gull, and mistle thrush), nine amber list species, and one Schedule 1 species, Red Kite. Schedule 1 species Kingfisher is also considered to be a resident onsite, although not identified during the survey, was previously noted during the site visit completed on 16th January 2025.
- 4.3 The island to the western end of the site was considered to be of importance, offering good resting, roosting, and nesting potential for a variety of species including grey heron, cormorants, and little egret. Additionally, within the wooded area to the west of the pond and trees surrounding the site wherein several species were identified singing, including amber list species wren and dunnock. Given the size of the pond and urban location, the assemblage and numbers of species using the site demonstrates that the site is likely of moderate importance for foraging resident birds particularly in terms of opportunities for feeding and winter roosting.
- 4.4 It was considered that all species identified onsite were likely residents of the site rather than winter migrant species utilising the site. Therefore, the site is **not considered an important resource for UK migrant wintering birds.**
- 4.5 Final plans for site have not yet been produced, however, works are understood to be focused on hydrological/ecological restoration of the River Wey. There are currently two proposed ideas for the site. The first focuses on draining King's Pond, realigning the River Wey and the creation of ponds and wetland; the second focuses on dredging of silt to restore a more natural hydrological state to the river. As such, in both scenarios it is predicted that opportunities for birds may be impacted in the short term, however breeding bird surveys would need to be completed to determine full assemblage of bird species utilising the site. Impacts to bird species and mitigation will be finalised after completion of appropriate breeding bird surveys and finalisation of proposals.

5.0 Conclusions

- 5.1 Three wintering bird surveys were conducted from December 2024 to February 2025. A total of 37 bird species were recorded on site, including three red list species, nine amber list species, and one Schedule 1 species.
- 5.2 Given the size of the pond and urban location, the assemblage and numbers of species using the site demonstrates that the site is likely of moderate importance for foraging resident birds particularly in terms of opportunities for feeding and winter roosting. All species identified onsite were considered to be resident species and therefore the site is **not considered an important resource for migrant wintering birds.**
- 5.3 Final plans have yet been finalised however two proposed plans may result in a short-term negative impact of birds onsite. To understand likely impacts to birds and mitigation necessary, breeding bird surveys are recommended. Additionally, finalisation of plans will help inform recommendations necessary to maintain the value of the site as a resource for bird species.

6.0 References

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Internet resources:

Google Maps: www.maps.google.co.uk

Magic Interactive Map: www.magic.gov.uk

The Ecology Partnership

Thorncroft Manor

Thorncroft Drive

Leatherhead

KT22 8JB

Tel: 01372 364 133

Approved: Alexia Tamblyn MA (Oxon) MSc CEcol CEnv MCIEEM FRGS

Date: 04/04/2025