

Fairfield Winter Bird Survey 2020-2021

Four visits were carried out this season (December 1st, January 6th, February 21st and March 2nd). Each walkover took place in the morning and was quite thorough—lasting about four hours.

In a change to 2019-2020 the wet, rushy northern parts of the site were walked, and although Common Snipe numbers were modest by Fairfield's high standards, Jack Snipe were present on each visit including an unexpectedly high count of twelve during the January visit.

Teal were in increased numbers (14 compared with 19/ 20's two) and this winter was a good one for Redshank, with birds present on three out of four visits with ten on site on the second visit. This was due in part to a season with periods of high rainfall resulting in the centre of West Field being quite flooded several times. If drainage were somehow to be decreased in this field so as to retain water for longer, I'm sure it would result in greatly increased usage by wildfowl, waders, gulls and passerines in all seasons.

Waterbirds aside, numbers were for most part quite static, with counts of tits, House Sparrows and other perching birds being respectable- and in most cases remarkably similar at Fairfield from winter to winter (please see spreadsheet). The site distribution is also near identical from year to year.

However, Greenfinches had a slightly disappointing winter (maximum 5) after a decent winter 19/20 (max 11) and a reasonable breeding season. The supplementary feeding provided by Lancaster & District Birdwatching Society (in the SW corner of Flora Field) fully expected to benefit this species, but it was a 'no-show'. Another target species for this scheme was Tree Sparrow but despite much observer coverage at said feeding station the only record throughout the period was of two in the opposite corner of the field!

By contrast this winter-feeding scheme attracted unprecedented numbers of Reed Bunting, with up to 14 noted during survey days (4 last year) and up to 28 at other times over the period. Similarly Chaffinches, which seem to be in something of a local decline were frequently feeding here and the survey's maximum count of 51 almost doubled '19/'20's peak numbers.

As in recent winters, Linnets were once again a familiar sight (see below) in the stubble and wildflower margins—with the southern half of Fairfield now being one of the best sites in North Lancashire for seeing this red-listed finch outside of the breeding season. *Dan Haywood, Mar '21.*

