ST CLEER GENERAL CEMETERY BREEDING BIRD SURVEY

(COMMON BIRD CENSUS)

INTRODUCTION

The primary objective of the St Cleer Parish Projects Group is to restore the nonconformist miners burial chapel and cemetery and to ensure it’s future. The Group’s secondary and parallel objective is to record and maintain the cemetery’s wildlife and flora by involving the pupils of St Cleer School.

With regard to the wildlife it was decided to carry out a survey to ascertain the number and diversity of bird species breeding within the cemetery confines. To achieve this a Common Bird Census (CBC) devised by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) was carried out. The CBC was introduced by the BTO in 1962. It’s aim is to monitor bird population numbers chiefly on farmland, where the growing use of agricultural chemicals and the accelerating destruction of Hedgerows were causing concern. The CBC has also been used in woodland and other habitats and provides a solid base for answering questions concerning the status of breeding birds.

METHODOLOGY

The CBC is based on the MAPPING METHOD in which a series of visits are made to all parts of a defined plot and CONTACTS with birds (by sight and sound) are recorded on large scale maps – VISIT MAPS

At the end of the chosen number of visits, the registrations are copied across onto a separate map for each species observed during the visit period. – SPECIES MAPS. These maps summarise all the information recorded for each species observed. Then each SPECIES MAP is analysed to estimate the number of territories found for a particular species.

The special advantage of the mapping method is that the maps which are produced show the approximate location of every territory detected in the form of clusters. These maps can show the preferred territorial sites and measure the effects of habitat change caused by management and maintenance work.

FINDINGS OF THE 2006 CBC

A total of 10 recording visits were made starting on 4th April and ending on 7th June. The interval between each visit was approximately one week.

On completion of the VIST MAPS the recordings of the birds seen and heard were transferred onto SPECIES MAPS and the grouping of species records was analysed.

A total of 21 different bird species were recorded on site over the visit period, which is a good showing for such a small contained plot.

Of the 21 species recorded, analysis revealed the following:-

 9 species were found to be definitely holding territory and breeding (see list A)

5 species were recorded as holding territory, but no obvious evidence was found to confirm definite breeding (see list B)

7 species were recorded, but insufficient information was available to show territories being held (see list C)

CONCLUSIONS

A very promising record of species present on the site, which shows that the cemetery has real potential to become a wildlife haven. This survey establishes a datum against which it will be possible to measure the effect of management work carried out within the cemetery during following years. By comparing future survey results against the 2006 datum, the impact of habitat changes on bird life can readily be determined and whether such changes are beneficial or detrimental.

Indeed there could already be a detrimental impact on HOUSE SPARROWS regarding next years breeding season. This year 6 nests were located in or under the chapel roof. With the completion of the restoration work on the chapel there probably will not be the same number of nesting sites available. To counter this it may be prudent to mount nestboxes under the eaves and guttering

Forthcoming management work being programmed for autumn needs to be done in conjunction with reference to the SPECIES MAPS thus ensuring that the recorded nesting sites are not destroyed

Bob Stockhausen

28th August 2006.

LIST A – BIRDS DEFINITELY HOLDING TERRITORY AND BREEDING

Qualifying criteria : Birds carrying nesting material or food. Record of nests and/or young

BLACKBIRD, BLUE TIT, COLLARED DOVE, CHAFFINCH, HOUSE SPARROW, MAGPIE, ROBIN, ROOK AND WOODPIGEON.

LIST B – BIRDS DEFINITELY HOLDING TERRITORY, BUT NO OBVIOUS SIGNS OF BREEDING

Qualifying criteria : A grouping (cluster) comprising at least 3 registrations from 10 effective visits.

COAL TIT, GOLDCREST, GREAT TIT, SONG THRUSH AND WREN

LIST C – SPECIES WITH INSUFFICIENT RECORDINGS MADE

Qualifying criteria : Not meeting criteria detailed in lists A and B

BLACKCAP, CHIFFCHAFF, DUNNOCK,GOLDFINCH, GREENFINCH, JACKDAW AND STARLING.

NESTBOX RECORDS OF USE

NESTBOX NO 2 – Prospected by GREAT TIT

NESTBOX NO 3 – Prospected by both BLUE TIT AND COAL TIT

NESTBOX NO 4 – Initially prospected by GREAT TIT, but occupied by BLUE TIT who produced young.

NESTBOX NO 5 - Prospected by GREAT TIT

NESTBOX NO 7 – Occupied by BLUE TIT who produced young.

The above is a record based on the observations made during the visit period. Clearing and cleaning of nestboxes in the autumn may provide further information of use.

ST CLEER GENERAL CEMETERY - ADDENDUM TO BREEDING BIRD SURVEY

INTRODUCTION

At the end of the breeding season and the beginning of the onset of winter, the nestboxes located in the cemetery were cleaned out by me on the 21st October. During this task some further observations were made of the contents of some of the nestboxes.

The observations are noted in this addendum to provide more information relating to the Breding Bird Survey. The following listings will enable St Cleer School teaching staff to pass on information to the pupils as to what happened to the School House System “adopted” nestboxes.

HOLE TYPE NESTBOXES

NESTBOX STATUS

NO

1. Empty, not used
2. Empty, not used
3. Used. This box revealed a surprise. A nest had been made and two eggs were laid, which were identified as those of a COAL TIT. This nest had been abandoned, probably because the female had become a victim of a predator, possibly a SPARROWHAWK.
4. Used. This box was occupied by BLUE TITS, who successfully raised a brood, which all left the nest.
5. Empty, not used
6. Empty, not used
7. Used. This box also was occupied by BLUE TITS, who successfully raised a brood which left the nest to face the world. However, there was a sad discovery made. On removing the nest the body of a young BLUE TIT was found. This youngster was fully fledged, but was very small so didn’t it leave the nestbox with its siblings? This incident occurs quite frequently with members of the tit family, especially if a large brood was involved. In the clamour for food the smallest of the brood (the runt) misses out on a lot of the feeding by the adults. When the brood was ready to leave the nest, this small fledgling was not strong enough to leavethe box. Consequently it was abandoned by its parents who had more than enough on their plate with feeding the youngsters that had flown the nest.
8. Empty, not used
9. Empty, not used
10. Empty, not used

HALF FRONTED NESTBOXES

NESTBOX STATUS

NO

1. Empty, not used
2. Empty, not used
3. Empty, not used
4. Empty, not used

These nestboxes were probably not sited early enough in the spring to be used by suitable species such as DUNNOCK, ROBIN or BLACKBIRD. Global warming appears to trigger these species to nest earlier (Blackbirds as early as late February). Hopefully there will be some boxes occupied in the following year.

CONCLUSIONS

This was a promising start, the Cemetery certainly has good potential. It may be necessary to relocate some of the nestboxes to possibly better sites. Also it will be necessary to enlarge the diameter of some nestbox holes to ease access for GREAT TITS and HOUSE SPARROWS.

Bob Stockhausen

17th November 2006.