

# Rowborough and Idlecombe Down

## Ornithological Survey 2005

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### Introduction and Methodology

A total of 13 visits were made to the 180 acres of woodland and downland that comprises the Idlecombe and Rowborough Down site. Two eight hour visits were made in every month between April and October 2005 except for June when only one visit was made. During each visit as much of the site as possible was covered using the various tracks. The emphasis during April to July was placed on recording the breeding species in the area. This was done by concentrating on counting the number of singing males of each species within the recording boundary. Encountering a singing male on several visits in the same area is a good indicator that breeding is taking place as after the initial use of song as a means of attracting a mate, it becomes important in defending a territory that is likely to contain a nesting female. With some species it was possible to confirm breeding by observing fledged young or activity such as adults carrying food to the nest. However this is difficult to achieve as birds become elusive during these later stages of the breeding cycle. The methodology for recording the breeding species is based on that used by the Isle of Wight Ornithological Group to carry out breeding surveys in a variety of one kilometre squares across the Island.

From August to October attention turned to migrant species utilising the area. Full details of these follow later in this report.

### Table One: Breeding Species.

**Category A:** Species present and possibly breeding.

**B:** Birds holding territory, courtship or nest building.

**C:** Nest with eggs or young, adult carrying food to the nest, adult feeding very recently fledged young.

SM= Singing male. Most records in category B refer to singing males or in some cases actual pairs of birds observed and considered on territory. Counting the number of birds holding territory on the site is the most straightforward way of assessing the local breeding population.

The figures in Category A refer to counts of individual birds unless otherwise stated.

“Present” is entered in Category A where a species has been recorded on site but their numbers have not been accurately assessed.

Species	A: Possibly Breeding	B: Probably Breeding	C: Confirmed Breeding
Red-legged Partridge	Present		
Pheasant	Present		
Sparrowhawk	1		Two Juveniles 31/7/05
Common Buzzard	1 pair		Nest with three downy young. First observed on 29/5/05. All three young fledged.
Kestrel	1		

Stock Dove	1		
Woodpigeon		28 SM	
Cuckoo		1 SM	
Long-eared Owl	3		A pr of Adults observed with a Juvenile on 19/6/05
Nightjar		3 SM	
Green Woodpecker		1 SM	One Juvenile 14/8/05
Great Spotted Woodpecker	1 pr present		Pr of adults observed feeding young at entrance to nest hole. First observed on 29/5/05.
Wren		34 SM	
Dunnock		17 SM	
Robin		25 SM	
Nightingale*		1 SM just outside study area	
Blackbird		14 SM	Young noted.
Song Thrush		5 SM	
Mistle Thrush		3 SM	One pr with 5 fledged young on 29/5/05
Blackcap		9 SM	One pr with 2 fledged young 29/5/05
Garden Warbler		3 SM	
Lesser Whitethroat		2 SM	Adult collecting food 3/7/05
Whitethroat		7 SM	
Chiffchaff		15 SM	One pr carrying food on 29/5/05. Four fledged young observed on 19/6/05
Willow Warbler		2 SM	
Goldcrest		12 SM	Two fledged young observed on 19/6/05
Long-tailed Tit	Six pairs present.	1 pr carrying nest material	One Pr carrying food
Coal Tit		4 SM	
Blue Tit		6 SM	Several fledged young 19/6/05
Great Tit		7 SM	Two pr carrying food. Several fledged young 19/6/05
Treecreeper		2 SM	
Jay	present		
Magpie	present		
Jackdaw	present		
Carrion Crow	present		
Chaffinch		21 SM	One Pr carrying food
Goldfinch	Present-flock of 20		
Linnet		14 SM, including one pr carrying nest material.	
Bullfinch	Present-3 Pairs		One Juvenile 31/7/05, 21/8/05
Yellowhammer		15 SM	Five Juveniles 31/7/05

## **Systematic list of all species recorded**

The systematic list has details of all species recorded. This includes non-breeding species, migrants, flyovers and casual visitors.

The order of species follows the order recommended by the British Ornithologists Union. At the start of each species account, a description of its Isle of Wight Status is given and this is followed by an indication of its UK conservation status using the following categories:

**Red:** A species of high conservation concern.

**Amber:** A species of medium conservation concern.

**Green:** A species of low conservation concern.

### **Red-legged Partridge** *Alectoris rufa*

Locally common resident, numbers maintained by release of captive birds.

Common, released for shooting.

### **Common Pheasant** *Phasianus colchicus*

Widespread common resident, numbers augmented by released birds.

Common, released for shooting.

### **Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Resident, breeding in small numbers. Amber List.

Two birds flew west over the site on October 2<sup>nd</sup>. This record probably relates to a local feeding movement e.g. moving from the East coast of the Island to the West coast or from an inland feeding location such as a Reservoir.

### **Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea*

Resident, breeding in small numbers and passage migrant. Green List.

One flew North over the site on April 17<sup>th</sup>. Presumably a local bird commuting between the North and South coast.

### **Eurasian Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter nisus*

Widespread common breeding resident and occasional passage migrant. Green List.

Breeding was confirmed. An adult was observed with two fledged Juveniles on July 31<sup>st</sup>.

### **Common Buzzard** *Buteo buteo*

Resident, breeding in increasing numbers and occasional passage migrant. Green List.

Breeding was confirmed. A nest containing three downy young was discovered on May 29<sup>th</sup>. All three young subsequently fledged.

### **Common Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus*

Widespread common breeding resident and passage migrant. Amber list.

No indication of breeding within the site boundary. However two Juveniles fledged elsewhere were frequently hunting in the area between July and October.

**Peregrine Falcon** *Falco peregrinus*

Resident, breeding in greater numbers than formerly, and passage migrant. Amber List.

Several sightings with one on April 10<sup>th</sup>, a pair on April 17<sup>th</sup>, one on May 29<sup>th</sup>, and one on June 19<sup>th</sup>. This species has been reported to be breeding at a nearby site in Shorwell and these records of a pair during the spring/summer period would suggest that breeding was taking place close at hand. They were hunting the large number of Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus* breeding within the recording area.

**Common Snipe** *Gallinago gallinago*

Locally common winter visitor; occasionally breeds. Amber List.

A single migrant flew East over the area on October 16<sup>th</sup>.

**Stock Pigeon** *Columba oenas*

Widespread common breeding resident; variable numbers on autumn passage. Amber List.

A single bird observed on April 17<sup>th</sup> was the only record. Presumably the relative lack of mature trees with suitable nest holes was the reason for this species scarcity.

**Woodpigeon** *Columba palumbus*

Widespread common breeding resident; variable numbers on autumn passage. Green List.

Very common probable breeding species with a peak of 28 singing males recorded.

**Turtle Dove** *Streptopelia turtur*

Summer visitor, breeding in decreasing numbers. Red List

One disturbed from trees on Idlecombe Down on August 14<sup>th</sup> and one flew over the area on August 21<sup>st</sup>. As there were no observations of birds on territory earlier in the year these records are likely to refer to passage migrants.

**Common Cuckoo** *Cuculus canorus*

Summer visitor, breeding in small numbers and passage migrant. Amber List.

One record of a singing male on May 8<sup>th</sup>.

**Little Owl** *Athene noctua*

Widespread common breeding resident.

The only record was of one on October 2<sup>nd</sup>. Although only one dusk visit was made this species is often vocal and active during daylight hours so it seems unlikely that a territory was established within the recording area boundary.

**Long-eared Owl** *Asio otus*

Breeding resident, mainly in larger woods and copses. Green List.

Breeding confirmed. A Juvenile was observed with two Adults on June 19<sup>th</sup>.

**European Nightjar** *Caprimulgus europaeus*

Summer visitor, breeding in suitable localities. Red List.

A dusk visit on June 19<sup>th</sup> produced three singing males.

**Common Swift** *Apus apus*

Widespread common summer visitor and passage migrant. Green List.

Migrants were observed flying over the area in spring and early autumn. In spring 24 flew North on May 8<sup>th</sup>. Return passage was observed on July 31<sup>st</sup> when 35 flew south.

**Green Woodpecker** *Picus viridis*

Widespread fairly common breeding resident. Amber List.

One male holding territory and confirmation of breeding with a Juvenile observed on August 14<sup>th</sup>.

**Great Spotted Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos major*

Widespread fairly common breeding resident. Green List.

Breeding Confirmed. A pair of Adults feeding young in a nest hole on May 29<sup>th</sup>. Also a fledged Juvenile observed on August 21<sup>st</sup>.

**Skylark** *Alauda arvensis*

Widespread common breeding resident, passage migrant and winter visitor. Red List.

The only record refers to passage migrants flying over the area in autumn. A total of 47 were recorded flying East on October 16<sup>th</sup>.

**Sand Martin** *Riparia riparia*

Fairly common passage migrant, has not bred on the Island since 1996. Amber List.

A handful of passage migrants noted with one flying North in spring on April 17<sup>th</sup> and during return autumn migration a small number flew south amongst Swallows *Hirundo rustica*, on September 25<sup>th</sup>.

**Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica*

Widespread common breeding summer visitor and very common passage migrant. Amber List

Migrants were recorded flying over the area in spring and autumn. In spring 22 flew North on April 17<sup>th</sup> and 57 North on May 8<sup>th</sup>. In autumn 157 flew south on September 25<sup>th</sup>.

**House Martin** *Delichon urbicum*

Locally common breeding resident and very common passage migrant. Amber List.

There was an autumn movement of 200 West over the area on October 2<sup>nd</sup>.

**Tree Pipit** *Anthus trivialis*

Passage migrant, uncommon in spring, fairly numerous in autumn. Amber List.

One record during spring migration with one North on April 17<sup>th</sup>, and one record during autumn migration with three flying south over the area on August 21<sup>st</sup>.

**Meadow Pipit** *Anthus pratensis*

Local breeding resident and common passage migrant. Amber List.

Observed flying over the area on spring and autumn migration. In spring 25 flew North on April 10<sup>th</sup> and 50 flew North on April 17<sup>th</sup>. In autumn 82 flew West on September 25<sup>th</sup> and 175 flew West on October 2<sup>nd</sup>.

**Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava flavissima*

Passage migrant, more numerous in autumn.

Recorded flying over the area on spring and autumn migration. In spring one flew North on April 10<sup>th</sup> and two flew North on April 17<sup>th</sup>. In autumn one flew West on August 21<sup>st</sup>.

**Wren** *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Widespread very common breeding resident. Green List.

Very common probable breeding species with a peak of 34 singing males recorded.

**Dunnoek** *Prunella modularis*

Widespread very common breeding resident, numbers augmented in autumn. Amber List

A common probable breeding species with a peak of 17 singing males recorded.

**Robin** *Erithacus rubecula*

Widespread very common breeding resident and passage migrant. Green List.

A very common probable breeding species with a peak of 25 singing males recorded.

**Common Nightingale** *Luscinia megarhynchos*

Summer visitor breeding in small numbers and passage migrant. Amber List.

A singing male recorded just outside the site boundary on May 8<sup>th</sup>. The record is included because the bird was so close to the area that any potential nest site could have been inside the boundary. Also it is likely that the recording area would have been utilised for feeding.

**Common Redstart** *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

Fairly common passage migrant, more numerous in autumn. Amber List.

Recorded during autumn migration. A single on August 14<sup>th</sup> was followed by three on August 21<sup>st</sup>, 11 on September 11<sup>th</sup> and eight on September 25<sup>th</sup>. The combination of isolated patches of scrub surrounded by open cut/grazed areas found on the site is ideal for this species which adopts a method of dropping from a perch onto the ground for insect prey.

**Blackbird** *Turdus merula*

Widespread very common breeding resident; increased numbers during autumn passage. Green List.

A common confirmed breeding species with 14 singing males and a small number of fledged young recorded. There was also evidence of autumn passage. In common with the Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos* variable numbers of Blackbird arrive in the autumn from Northern/Central Europe. On October 16<sup>th</sup> a total of 33 flew East along Idlecombe Down.

**Song Thrush** *Turdus Philomelos*

Widespread common breeding resident, less so than formerly; numbers augmented in autumn. Red List

During the breeding season a peak of five singing males was recorded. An autumn passage movement was observed on October 16<sup>th</sup> when a total of 54 flew East along Idlecombe Down.

**Redwing** *Turdus iliacus*

Common winter visitor and passage migrant. Amber List.

One autumn passage record of eight flying East on October 16<sup>th</sup>.

**Mistle Thrush** *Turdus viscivorus*

Widespread common breeding resident. Amber List.

A peak of three singing males was followed by confirmation of breeding with a pair and five fledged young observed on May 29<sup>th</sup>.

**Blackcap** *Sylvia atricapilla*

Widespread common breeding summer visitor and passage migrant; small numbers overwinter. Green List.

A confirmed breeding species. A peak of nine singing males was followed by a pair with two fledged young observed on May 29<sup>th</sup>. There was an autumn count of 11 on September 25<sup>th</sup>.

**Garden Warbler** *Sylvia borin*  
Breeding summer visitor and passage migrant. Green List.

A probable breeding species with a peak of three singing males recorded.

**Lesser Whitethroat** *Sylvia curruca*  
Breeding summer visitor in small numbers and passage migrant. Green List.

A confirmed breeding species. There were two singing males on territory and an adult was observed collecting food.

**Common Whitethroat** *Sylvia communis*  
Widespread common breeding summer visitor and passage migrant. Green List.

A probable breeding species with seven singing males recorded.

**Common Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus collybita collybita*  
Widespread common breeding summer visitor and passage migrant; increasing numbers overwinter.

A confirmed breeding species. There was a peak of 15 singing males and four fledged young were observed on June 19<sup>th</sup>.

**Willow Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochilus*  
Very common spring and autumn passage migrant. Breeding summer visitor in decreasing numbers. Amber List.

A probable breeding species with two singing males on territory. Numbers increased during autumn migration with a peak of 43 recorded on August 21<sup>st</sup>.

**Goldcrest** *Regulus regulus*  
Common breeding resident and passage migrant, mainly in late autumn. Amber List.

A confirmed breeding species. There were 12 singing males and breeding was confirmed when two fledged young were noted on June 19<sup>th</sup>. An autumn count of 22 on October 2<sup>nd</sup> may have included passage migrants.

**Spotted Flycatcher** *Muscicapa striata*  
Scarce breeding summer visitor, but fairly common passage migrant, more numerous in autumn. Red List.

Recorded during autumn migration. Six on August 21<sup>st</sup>, four on September 11<sup>th</sup>, and three on September 25<sup>th</sup>.

**Long-tailed Tit** *Aegithalos caudatus*  
Widespread fairly common breeding resident. Green List.

A confirmed breeding species. Six pairs within the recording area and one of these pairs observed collecting food for young.

**Coal Tit** *Parus ater britannicus*  
Widespread fairly common breeding resident. Green List.

A probable breeding species with four singing males on territory.

**Blue Tit** *Parus caeruleus*  
Widespread very common breeding resident. Green List.

A confirmed breeding species. Six singing males were counted and several fledged young were observed on June 19<sup>th</sup>.

**Great Tit** *Parus major*

Widespread very common breeding resident. Green List.

A confirmed breeding species with a count of seven singing males followed by two pairs observed collecting food for young and finally several fledged young observed on June 19<sup>th</sup>.

**Eurasian Treecreeper** *Certhia familiaris*

Widespread fairly common breeding resident. Green List.

A probable breeding species with two singing males on territory.

**Eurasian Jay** *Garrulus glandarius*

Widespread common breeding resident. Green List.

Present within the recording area but no indication of breeding.

**Magpie** *Pica pica*

Widespread very common breeding resident. Green List.

Present within the recording area but no indication of breeding.

**Jackdaw** *Corvus monedula*

Widespread very common breeding resident. Green List.

Present in recording area but no indication of breeding.

**Carrion Crow** *Corvus corone*

Widespread very common breeding resident and occasional passage migrant. Green List.

Present in recording area but no indication of breeding.

**Common Raven** *Corvus corax*

Scarce local breeding resident. Green List.

There were frequent sightings of a pair flying over the recording area between April and October. These birds were probably from a nearby site at Shorwell where breeding has taken place in recent years.

**Common Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris*

Widespread very common breeding resident and passage migrant. Red List.

An autumn passage movement was observed on October 16<sup>th</sup> when 47 flew East.

**Chaffinch** *Fringilla coelebs*

Widespread very common breeding resident, passage migrant and winter visitor. Green List.

A confirmed breeding species. A total of 21 singing males were recorded and a pair were observed collecting food for young. Autumn movement was also observed with 23 flying West on September 25<sup>th</sup>, 36 flying west on October 2<sup>nd</sup> and 105 flying East on October 16<sup>th</sup>.

**Brambling** *Fringilla montifringilla*

Winter visitor and uncommon passage migrant, more numerous in autumn. Green List.

Six birds flew East over the area on October 16<sup>th</sup>.

**Greenfinch** *Carduelis chloris*

Widespread common breeding resident, passage migrant and winter visitor. Green List.

Autumn passage birds were observed flying over the area with 14 West on October 2<sup>nd</sup> and 56 East on October 16<sup>th</sup>.

**Goldfinch** *Carduelis carduelis*

Widespread common breeding resident and passage migrant, less numerous in winter.

No indication of breeding within the site boundary but this species was attracted to the area to feed on thistles particularly in autumn.

During the spring period 20 birds were observed on April 10<sup>th</sup>. Later in the year small numbers of dispersing birds were noted from July with a peak count of 80 on October 16<sup>th</sup>.

**Siskin** *Carduelis spinus*

Fairly common passage migrant and winter visitor. Bred for the first time in 2001. Green List.

Several records of birds flying over the area during autumn migration. The first were ten flying East on September 11<sup>th</sup> and this was followed by six West on September 25<sup>th</sup>, 48 West on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 25 Flying East on October 16<sup>th</sup>.

**Linnnet** *Carduelis cannabina*

Fairly common breeding resident and passage migrant, less numerous in winter. Red List.

A probable breeding species with 14 Singing males recorded. Also a pair were observed carrying nest material. A large post breeding gathering in the area peaked at 230 on August 21<sup>st</sup>.

**Lesser Redpoll** *Carduelis cabaret*

Passage migrant and winter visitor in small numbers. Amber List.

Eight birds flew west on October 2<sup>nd</sup>.

**Common Crossbill** *Loxia curvirostra*

Scarce passage migrant, mainly in late summer and autumn. Bred for the first time in 2000. Green List.

There were three records, one was heard on May 8<sup>th</sup>, six flew West on May 29<sup>th</sup> and two flew out of pine trees in Rowborough Plantation and away North on October 16<sup>th</sup>.

**Bullfinch** *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

Widespread fairly common breeding resident. Red List

A confirmed breeding species with three pairs in the recording area and single Juveniles seen on July 31<sup>st</sup> and August 21<sup>st</sup>.

**Yellowhammer** *Emberiza citrinella*

Widespread common breeding resident. Red List.

A confirmed breeding species. There were 14 singing males recorded and five Juveniles were observed on July 31<sup>st</sup>.

## **A summary of habitats and their different bird populations within the recording area.**

This section is intended as a broad overview of which species favour which areas on site.

**Habitat Type:** Gorse and cut/grazed open areas on Idlecombe Down.

**Important Breeding/Probable Breeding species:** Nightjar nesting in sparse ground cover, utilising isolated bushes as perches for song delivery and general open areas for aerial display and capture of insect prey. Yellowhammer and Linnet nesting in gorse and using general scrub for song perches. Both species feeding on ground in open areas on plant seeds. Yellowhammers also attracted to Pheasant feeders.

**Important Non-Breeding species:** Common Redstart favouring the West end of Idlecombe Down as a stop over during autumn migration. This species was using isolated bushes within grazed/cut areas as perches from which to drop onto the ground to capture insect prey.

Spotted Flycatcher favouring the Idlecombe Down area as a stop over during autumn migration, making aerial sorties from perches such as isolated bushes/dead trees to catch insect prey. Cut areas with taller regrowth of rank herbage such as Willow Herb used for feeding by Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler during late summer.

**Habitat Type:** Denser thickets of scrub, Idlecombe and Rowborough Down.

**Important Breeding/Probable Breeding Species:** Nightingale-this species nests in denser thickets but also feeds on the ground in rides/glades. Garden Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Common Whitethroat and Willow Warbler-these species use dense scrub thickets for nesting, feeding and song delivery. It should also be noted that species such as Garden Warbler and Willow Warbler favour ground level nest sites in rank herbage. Bullfinch nesting in dense thickets

**Habitat Type:** Deciduous woodland and associated ground cover Rowborough Bottom/Kingsgate Copse.

**Important Breeding/Probable Breeding Species:** Common Buzzard and Sparrowhawk nesting in tall deciduous trees. Mistle Thrush nesting in tall deciduous tree but using open areas for feeding. Blackcap and Chiffchaff nesting in ground cover under deciduous trees-nettles, brambles etc. Both these species using deciduous trees for feeding and song delivery.

**Habitat Type:** Coniferous woodland Rowborough Down.

**Important Breeding/Probable Breeding Species:** Long-eared Owl nest likely to be in old crows nest in this area but exact location not known. Goldcrest, Coal Tit and Treecreeper nesting and feeding in coniferous woodland.

**Important Non-Breeding Species:** Crossbill-this species feeds almost exclusively on pine seeds.

## **Summary**

An ornithological survey was conducted during April to October 2005 at Rowborough and Idlecombe Down during which time a total of 13 eight hour visits were made. The emphasis was placed on recording the potential breeding species by walking the area and counting the number of singing males (birds holding territory). The total number of probable/confirmed breeding species was 32. This total of 32 probable/confirmed breeding species includes five on the Red List of high UK conservation concern; **Nightjar, Song Thrush, Linnet, Bullfinch and Yellowhammer.**

In addition non-breeding/migrant species within or passing over the recording area were also noted. The total number of species recorded on site (breeding, non-breeding, migrants, flyovers) was 64.

Clearly management of the site has increased the variety of species since 1987 when the area was all forestry. Future management of the gorse on Idlecombe Down has the potential to attract two more breeding species- **Stonechat and Dartford Warbler.**

## **A summary of habitat requirements for selected species.**

### **Nightjar**

Nightjars favour recently felled woodland and forestry plantations in their early stages. This species is a ground nester, the nest site can either be in the open or amongst low scrub/tall herbage. When attracting a mate or delineating a territory the male gives an advertising call from a prominent perch such as on top of a bushy tree. The species feeds on insects, mostly taken on the wing in the manner of a Swallow at low level over clearings and rides.

A continued cycle of management on Idlecombe Down that involves open cut/grazed areas combined with patches of scrub and isolated trees will benefit the species.

### **Nightingale**

Nightingales are found in a variety of woodland and scrub type environments. The important requirement is the presence of dense undergrowth. Dense thickets of thorn scrub such as Blackthorn are favoured on downland and this habitat is relevant to the site of the single territory recorded during the study. In woodland coppice with standard woods cut on a regular 12-15 year rotation is required. As this species is a ground feeder, light and warmth reaching the woodland floor is also important.

### **Linnet**

Linnets favour areas of gorse heath, shrubby thickets and hedges for nesting. A good supply of weed seeds are needed for feeding throughout the year, the young are fed on regurgitated seed matter. Fat Hen and Chickweed are important food plants. The Gorse on Idlecombe Down provides an ideal nesting sites for the species, while the cut/grazed areas provide weed seeds as does game cover and arable land adjacent to site.

### **Bullfinch**

Bullfinches require dense thickets of scrub such as Hawthorn and Blackthorn for nesting. Availability of food sources is important. This species feeds on a variety of weed seeds and tree buds at different times of the year. Ash seeds are an important food in autumn/winter while buds are mainly eaten in the period February to April.