



Code: UKCAL-CWF-CON-EIA-RPT-00007-7E08

Volume 7E Proposed Development (Onshore) Appendices

Appendix 3-4 Breeding Bird Survey Report Annex 3 Target Species Records

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Revision	Issued
Date	18 October 2024

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

BoCC	Birds of Conservation Concern
OnTI	Onshore Transmission Infrastructure
RLB	Red Line Boundary
WCA	Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

Annex 3 Target Species Records

SPA Species

- 1.1.1.1 No species listed as qualifying features of the Moray Firth SPA were recorded within the Onshore Transmission Infrastructure (OnTI) Red Line Boundary (RLB) during the survey period.

Schedule 1 Species

- 1.1.1.2 The following Wildlife and Country Side Act 1981 (WCA) Schedule 1 species were recorded during the breeding bird surveys:
- Barn owl;
 - Fieldfare;
 - Quail;
 - Redwing; and
 - Whooper swan.
- 1.1.1.3 **Barn owl:** this species was not recorded within the OnTI RLB as a species sighting, but by the presence of pellets in a barn within Transect 3. This field evidence was considered sufficient to assume that barn owl was holding a permanent territory at this location and likely using the surrounding area for hunting. It is possible that barn owl also nests in this location, but no definitive evidence of breeding was confirmed, therefore this species was considered to be a 'possible' breeder at the within the OnTI RLB.
- 1.1.1.4 **Fieldfare:** was recorded during the April surveys only (maximum count of 58 in Transect 7). Fieldfare is a winter visitor to the UK, with numbers varying each year dependent on berry crops closer to their breeding grounds. In years when crops are poor, they move in large numbers in search of berries elsewhere and it is under these conditions that the largest numbers occur in Britain & Ireland. By the end of April, most fieldfares have migrated back to their breeding grounds in Scandinavia, and no further records of this species were noted after this time.
- 1.1.1.5 **Quail:** a single male was recorded calling during the August survey in Transect 5. These migratory birds are often difficult to detect during surveys and are likely under-recorded in the UK. They are generally heard rather than seen. Quail was considered to be a 'possible' breeder within the OnTI RLB, as this bird was heard calling within suitable nesting habitat in the breeding season.
- 1.1.1.6 **Redwing:** similarly to fieldfare, this species is a winter visitor to the UK which feeds mainly on berries and fallen fruit. Redwing was only recorded during the April surveys, with two birds noted in Transect 5, and two seen in Transect 7. By April, most redwing have migrated back to their breeding grounds, and no further occurrences of this species were noted after this time.

1.1.1.7 **Whooper swan:** this species is largely a winter visitor to the UK and was recorded in Transect 1 in May and June only, with two birds noted on both occasions. These individuals were considered to be 'non-breeding' and were likely to be either immature or injured birds not capable of migrating back to breeding grounds in Iceland. No further records were obtained after the June survey.

BoCC5 Red Listed Species

1.1.1.8 The following Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC) Red-listed species were recorded during the breeding bird surveys:

- Grey partridge;
- Lapwing;
- Curlew;
- Herring gull;
- Cuckoo;
- Swift;
- Skylark;
- House martin;
- Fieldfare;
- Mistle thrush;
- Starling;
- House sparrow;
- Tree sparrow;
- Linnet;
- Greenfinch;
- Lesser redpoll;
- Yellowhammer; and
- Corn bunting.

1.1.1.9 **Grey partridge:** this species was recorded in low numbers in Transects 1, 5 and 9 (maximum count of four in Transect 9). One bird was heard alarm-calling, and others were recorded in suitable habitat in the breeding season, therefore grey partridge was considered to be a 'probable' breeding species within the OnTI RLB.

1.1.1.10 **Lapwing:** was recorded twice in Transect 9 during the surveys. During the April survey, a bird was displaying courtship behaviour in suitable nesting habitat in Transect 9. Therefore, this species was assigned 'probable' breeding status within the OnTI RLB.

- 1.1.1.11 **Curlew:** was noted in Transects 1, 8, and 9 in low numbers (maximum count of four in Transect 1). During the April survey, a bird was displaying courtship behaviour in suitable nesting habitat within Transect 9. Therefore, this species was thought likely to be a 'probable' breeding species within the OnTI RLB.
- 1.1.1.12 **Herring gull:** this species was mostly recorded either feeding or roosting at various locations within the OnTI RLB, but the majority of records related to Transect 1. No behaviour indicative of breeding was recorded during the surveys, and therefore this species was considered to be 'non-breeding' within the OnTI RLB and was likely using the area for feeding and roosting purposes.
- 1.1.1.13 **Cuckoo:** a single male cuckoo was heard singing within Transect 2 during the May survey visit. No further records were obtained for cuckoo within the OnTI RLB, but as this male was noted singing in suitable breeding habitat during the breeding season it was considered to be a 'possible' breeder within the OnTI RLB.
- 1.1.1.14 **Swift:** was observed as a flyover species only and was recorded during the July visit only. This record related to four birds which were flying and foraging above Transect 3. The OnTI RLB is likely to provide a valuable foraging resource for this species, with the habitats present providing suitable habitat for its invertebrate prey. This species is considered 'non-breeding' within the OnTI RLB itself and likely nests in buildings close to the OnTI RLB.
- 1.1.1.15 **Skylark:** this species was recorded frequently in all Transects. Breeding was confirmed in Transects 3 (an adult observed leaving a nest site), and 6 and 7 (adults seen carrying food to nests). A total of 38 territories were estimated to be present across all the Transects, with at least one territory being present in each, and a maximum of eight being present in Transect 5. Open rough grassland areas and arable habitats are key for this species in the breeding season.
- 1.1.1.16 **House martin:** this species was recorded in low numbers in Transects 1, 4, 5, 8 and 9 (maximum count of six in Transect 5). One bird was observed carrying nesting material in Transect 5, and others were in suitable habitat in the breeding season, therefore house martin was considered to be a 'probable' breeding species within the OnTI RLB.
- 1.1.1.17 Fieldfare:** this species is also a WCA Schedule 1 species and is detailed in that section, above.
- 1.1.1.18 **Mistle thrush:** a single bird was recorded feeding in Transect 9 during the June survey. No further records were obtained for this species, and it was considered to be a 'possible' breeder within the OnTI RLB, as it was observed in the breeding season in suitable nesting habitat.

- 1.1.1.19 **Starling:** most starlings were recorded in flight, perching, or feeding. Observations of starlings were noted in Transects 1-5, with a maximum count of 300 in Transect 1 during the August survey. This high number of birds is common late in the breeding season, when large flocks of adults and juveniles form to feed together. Breeding was confirmed in Transect 9 with an adult seen carrying food to a nest site.
- 1.1.1.20 **House sparrow:** was predominantly associated with buildings in Transects 1, 2, 3, 6 and 9. The maximum count was 8 in Transects 1 and 2. Breeding was confirmed by the presence of a female with a recently-fledged juvenile in Transect 3. This species is semi-colonial which means it does not necessarily have clearly defined territories, but at least two territories were thought to be present within the OnTI RLB.
- 1.1.1.21 **Tree sparrow:** tree sparrow was largely associated with farm buildings and was most frequently recorded in Transects 6 and 9. The maximum count was 10 in Transect 6. Breeding was confirmed in Transect 6 by the presence of recently fledged young. As with house sparrow, this species is semi-colonial and does not necessarily have clearly defined territories, but an estimated two territories were noted within the OnTI RLB.
- 1.1.1.22 **Linnet:** was recorded in every Transect during the surveys, with a maximum count of 19 noted in Transect 4. Breeding was confirmed in Transects 5 and 7 by birds seen carrying food to nests, and in Transect 2 by the presence of recently fledged young. An estimated four territories were considered likely to be present across the OnTI RLB.
- 1.1.1.23 **Greenfinch:** records of this species all related to single birds, which were recorded in Transects 4, 5 and 9. One territory was estimated to be present within the OnTI RLB - in Transect 4. Greenfinch was considered to be a 'probable' breeder within the OnTI RLB due to the presence of a permanent territory.
- 1.1.1.24 **Lesser redpoll:** this species was only recorded in Transects 1 and 5 with a maximum of four birds seen in Transect 5. No evidence of breeding was recorded, and no territories were confirmed within the OnTI RLB. This species was considered to be a 'possible' breeder due to being present in suitable breeding habitat during the breeding season.
- 1.1.1.25 **Yellowhammer:** was the most frequently recorded species during surveys and was recorded in low numbers in every Transect, with a maximum count of three in Transect 4. The majority of sightings related to one or two birds. Most territories were located in Transects 6 and 9, with an estimated six in Transect 6 and seven in Transect 9. Breeding was confirmed in Transect 9 by a sighting of an adult carrying food to a nest. An estimated 23 territories were considered to be present across the whole OnTI RLB.

1.1.1.26 **Corn bunting:** was recorded in every Transect apart from 7 and 8, with a maximum count of three in Transect 1, and the rest being of one or two birds. Most territories were noted in Transects 1 and 2, with an estimated five in Transect 1 and three in Transect 2. Breeding was confirmed in Transect 1 by a sighting of an adult carrying food to a nest. An estimated 12 territories were considered likely to be located across the whole OnTI RLB.

BoCC5 Amber Listed Species

1.1.1.27 The following BoCC Amber-listed species were recorded during the breeding bird surveys:

- Whooper swan;
- Pink-footed goose;
- Greylag goose;
- Mallard;
- Quail;
- Sparrowhawk;
- Oystercatcher;
- Common sandpiper;
- Common gull;
- Great black-backed gull;
- Woodpigeon;
- Short-eared owl;
- Meadow pipit;
- Grey wagtail;
- Dipper;
- Wren;
- Dunnock;
- Wheatear;
- Song thrush;
- Redwing;
- Sedge warbler;
- Common whitethroat;
- Willow warbler;
- Rook;
- Bullfinch; and
- Reed bunting.

- 1.1.1.28 Of the 26 Amber-Listed species recorded, those considered to be either 'confirmed' or 'probable' breeders within the OnTI RLB, or directly adjacent, and are detailed further below. The remaining Amber-listed species were thought to be either 'possible' or 'non-breeders' within the OnTI RLB and are not considered further as they are unlikely to be significantly impacted by the proposals.
- 1.1.1.29 **Mallard:** this species was recorded in low numbers in all Transects apart from 6 and 7. A maximum count of six was noted in Transect 9 at least one pair was recorded in Transect 8 on two survey visits. One territory was thought to be present in Transect 9, with the breeding status considered to be 'probable' (pair observed in suitable nesting habitat in breeding season).
- 1.1.1.30 **Woodpigeon:** this species was recorded frequently within the OnTI RLB, with several small flocks present and a maximum count of 20 in Transect 2. Most records related to birds flying out of habitats within the OnTI RLB or were of birds seen feeding, with fewer records relating to singing males. Seven territories were noted within the OnTI RLB and the breeding status was considered to be 'probable.'
- 1.1.1.31 **Meadow pipit:** generally recorded as one or two birds across the OnTI RLB (maximum count of three), with most records of meadow pipit relating to Transect 9. Breeding was confirmed in Transect 9 by an observation of an adult bird carrying food to a nest. An estimated five territories were thought to be present throughout the whole OnTI RLB, with four of these located within Transect 9.
- 1.1.1.32 **Wren:** was recorded in every Transect, and during every survey visit, with nearly all records relating to singing males or wrens alarm-calling. Whilst no definitive breeding evidence was observed, this species was considered to be a 'probable' breeder within the OnTI RLB, as no direct evidence of breeding was obtained, but it was estimated to hold at least 20 permanent territories within the OnTI RLB.
- 1.1.1.33 **Dunnock:** this species was recorded in every Transect except 8. An observation of dunnock eggshells in suitable nesting habitat within Transect 4 and a record of an adult carrying food to a nest in Transect 5, qualifies this species as a 'confirmed' breeder within the OnTI RLB. An estimated five territories were thought to be present across the OnTI RLB.
- 1.1.1.34 Song thrush:** was recorded in every Transect except 8. A single territory was located in Transect 7. Whilst no definitive breeding evidence was observed, this species was considered to be a 'probable' breeder within the OnTI RLB, as it held a permanent territory in suitable breeding habitat within the OnTI RLB.
- 1.1.1.35 Sedge warbler:** this species was recorded in low numbers within every Transect except 6 and 7. A single territory was located in both Transect 8 and Transect 9. Whilst no definitive breeding evidence was observed, this species was considered to be a 'probable' breeder due to it holding at least two permanent territories within the OnTI RLB in suitable breeding habitat.

- 1.1.1.36 **Common whitethroat:** was recorded in low numbers in every Transect, with most records relating to Transects 1, 5 and 9. Whilst no definitive breeding evidence was observed for common whitethroat, this species was considered to be a 'probable' breeder within the OnTI RLB due to it holding at least five permanent territories.
- 1.1.1.37 **Willow warbler:** this species was recorded in low numbers in every Transect, except 8, with most willow warblers present in Transects 2, 5 and 9. Whilst no definitive breeding evidence was observed, this species was considered to be a 'probable' breeder within the OnTI RLB due to it holding at least five permanent territories in suitable breeding habitat.
- 1.1.1.38 **Rook:** observations of this species predominantly related to rooks which were feeding within the OnTI RLB. However, breeding was confirmed by the presence of juvenile birds and adults commuting to and from nests at a rookery, located within Transect 9. A maximum count of 275 rooks were noted in this location. Rooks are semi-colonial and therefore it is difficult to estimate territory numbers, and this rookery is likely to hold many individual nest sites. The rookery itself was deemed to be a permanent territory, which relates to the single location rather than number of territories present, due to the semi-colonial nature of the species.
- 1.1.1.39 **Bullfinch:** this species is unobtrusive and is often under-recorded. Bullfinch was only recorded in Transects 1 and 3 and was deemed to hold permanent territories in both of these Transects. Whilst no definitive breeding evidence was observed for this species, it was considered to be a 'probable' breeder within the OnTI RLB, due to it holding at least two permanent territories in suitable breeding habitat.
- 1.1.1.40** **Reed bunting:** was recorded in low numbers in every Transect, except 3, 4 and 6, with a maximum count of three in Transect 9. Reed bunting was recorded most frequently in Transects 1, and 9. Observations of an adult reed bunting carrying food to nest sites in Transects 1 and 5, and the presence of recently fledged young in Transect 2, identified this species as a 'confirmed' breeder within the OnTI RLB.

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