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SKYLARK COMPENSATION FIELD MANAGEMENT PLAN

PLANNING APPLICATION NUMBER: 232653

SPENCER'S WOOD SOLAR FARM

Prepared for: Greentech

Date: May 2026

Report Reference: JN00833/D02

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1. INTRODUCTION

Background

- 1.1 This Management Plan has been prepared to discharge the requirements of the third schedule within the s106 agreement attached to planning permission 232653, which permits the construction of Spencer's Wood Solar Farm (the 'site') on Land North of Sheepbridge Court Farm, Basingstoke Road, Swallowfield, RG7 1PT.
- 1.2 According to the Section 106 agreement, the skylark *Alauda arvensis* and lapwing *Vanellus Vanellus* compensation plan is defined as:

"a detailed plan showing the proposed location of the Compensation Fields, providing a baseline survey and detailing measures to be implemented on an annual basis to provide compensation for the loss of Skylark territory and Lapwing territory as a result of the Development and including such other details and information as the Council may reasonably specify".

Purpose of this Document

- 1.3 This Management Plan has been prepared to support the provision of compensatory habitat for breeding skylark (a separate Management Plan has been prepared for lapwing Ref: JN00833/D03). The purpose of this document is to demonstrate how the designated compensation field will be managed, enhanced, and monitored to provide appropriate compensation for the loss of skylark breeding territories as a result of the proposed solar farm.
- 1.4 The plan has been prepared in accordance with relevant best practice conservation advice, including Skylark Conservation: Advice for Farmers.

Skylark Ecology

- 1.5 Skylarks are birds of open, unwooded countryside found across moorland, grassland and cropland habitats. Nesting density varies depending on habitat and crop type, although is typically between 0.05 and 0.1 territories per ha within grassland and arable habitats, increasing to 0.3 territories per ha within set-aside land (Donald, P.F. and Vickery, J.A, 2000).
- 1.6 The UK population declined sharply during the late 20th century, dropping by 75% between 1972 and 1996, with concurrent declines seen across north-western Europe. The primary driver of this decline is believed to have been the widespread switch from spring to autumn sown cereal crops. Autumn-sown crops have grown too tall by the breeding season (March to

August) for skylarks to be able to successfully raise the three broods necessary to sustain their populations.

- 1.7 Population decline is also potentially linked to the substantial decrease in invertebrate numbers, shown by the 2023 State of Nature Report among other publications. Research by Mancini *et al.* (2023) indicates invertebrate decline is greatest in regions with high cropland cover. As skylark chicks feed almost exclusively on invertebrates during the spring and summer, a reduction in invertebrate numbers will significantly impact their breeding success. In the winter, adult skylarks rely on the leaves and seeds of crops and grasses/herbs.

Project Description

- 1.8 The project comprises the installation of a ground mounted solar photovoltaic (PV) farm along with ancillary infrastructure, substation, security fencing, landscaping provision, ecological enhancements and associated works.
- 1.9 A field has been designated for skylark compensation and denoted by the green boundary on Figure 1, below.

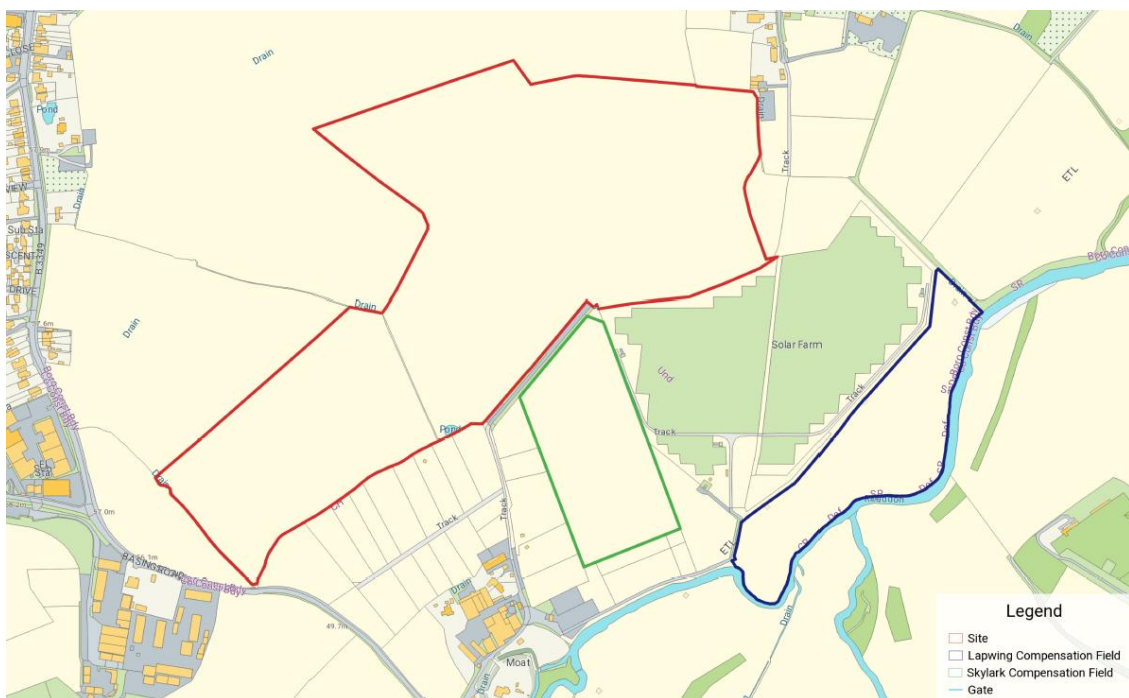


Figure 1 – Skylark Compensation Field – Green Boundary

2. ECOLOGICAL BASELINE

Habitats

- 2.1 The Skylark Compensation Field was surveyed to UKHab standard on 03/02/2026. The habitats recorded are shown on Figure 2 below.



Figure 2 – Habitats recorded within the Skylark Compensation Field

- 2.2 At the time of survey, the field comprised horse-grazed neutral grassland supporting a tussocky and uneven sward. Areas of locally rank grass growth were present, together with occasional damp patches. The grass component was dominated by cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata*,

perennial ryegrass *Lolium perenne*, Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*, and fescue species *Festuca spp.*

- 2.3 Forbs were frequent across the field and included crane's-bill *Geranium sp.* as a dominant species. Additional species recorded included oxeye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, dandelion *Taraxacum officinale.*, ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, red clover *Trifolium pratense*, vetch *Vicia sp.*, red deadnettle *Lamium purpureum*, and mouse-ear *Cerastium sp.*
- 2.4 The field is enclosed in places by electric fencing, with a newly planted hedge (H1) along the northern boundary and an established hedge (H2) along the eastern boundary adjacent to the solar farm.
- 2.5 H1 comprises a newly planted native hedgerow. Species recorded include rose *Rosa spp.*, hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, and dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*. Early successional ground flora along the hedge base includes cleavers *Galium aparine* and common nettle *Urtica dioica*. The hedgerow is currently low and in its establishment phase.
- 2.6 H2 comprises a more established species-rich hedgerow. Species recorded include hawthorn, hazel *Corylus avellana*, blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, elder *Sambucus nigra*, with occasional oak *Quercus spp.* and holly *Ilex aquifolium*
- 2.7 The photos below show the skylark compensation field.



Baseline Survey for Skylarks

- 2.8 A breeding bird survey, focused on skylark, was undertaken on 27/04/2026 of the Skylark Compensation Field. The survey commenced at sunrise and the survey methodology broadly

adhered to a combination of the guidelines outlined by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) for Common Bird Census (CBC) and Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) methodologies.

2.9 A suitable transect route was walked at a steady pace, pausing briefly at intervals to listen for song and scan for birds moving / flying overhead, observing any birds present within the survey area or the habitats immediately adjacent.

2.10 The data collected included:

- Species and corresponding BTO species code (Appendix 1 BTO Species Codes);
- Number of birds;
- Age (where possible);
- Sex (where possible); and
- Activity and corresponding BTO activity code (Appendix 2 BTO Activity Codes).

2.11 Table 1 below sets out the survey details.

Table 1 – Baseline Bird Survey Details

Date	27/04/2026
Time (Start)	05:50
Sunrise	05:48
Description	Bright sunshine, mild, light wind
Cloud Cover	1/8
Visibility	Excellent
Temp (start)	3°C
Temp (finish)	14°C
Wind speed (BF)	0-1
Wind direction	SSW
Rain	None

2.12 During the survey three singing skylark were recorded in flight within the Skylark Compensation Field. These are shown on Figure 3 below.

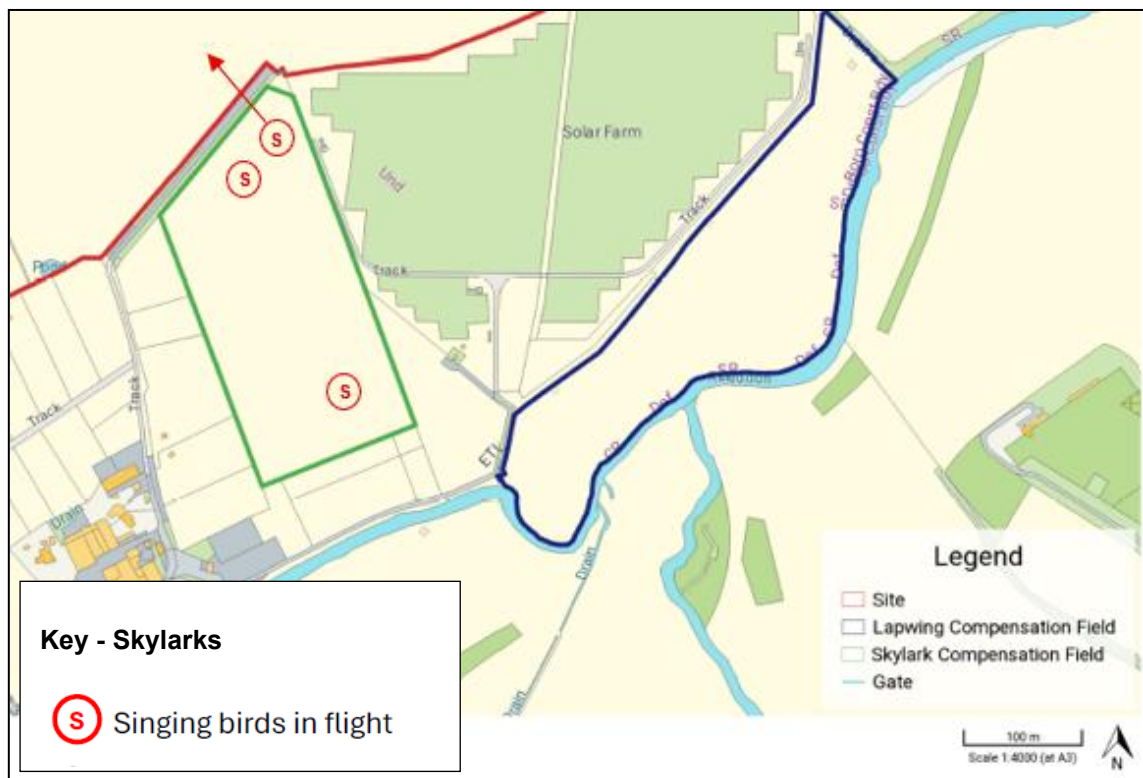


Figure 3 – Skylarks recorded during the baseline breeding bird survey undertaken in April 2020

- 2.13 The only other red or amber list species recorded using the Skylark Compensation Field during the survey was a Whitethroat *Curruca communis* singing in flight as shown on Figure 4 below.



Figure 4 – Other red and amber list species recorded during the baseline breeding bird survey undertaken in April 20206

2.14 Green list species recorded during the survey included:

- two female blackbirds *Turdus merula*, both carrying food;
- one robin *Erithacus rubecula* carrying food;
- two jackdaws, one carrying food and the other nest material;
- a goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis* nest; and
- a male and female stonechat *Saxicola rubicola* interacting.

3. HABITAT ENHANCEMENT – SPECIES RICH GRASSLAND ESTABLISHMENT

Skylark Compensation Field

- 3.3 It is proposed that the Skylark Compensation Field be cultivated and sown with a species rich grassland wildflower mix (Emorsgate EM3 Special General Purpose Meadow Mixture or similar).
- 3.4 The enhancement works will be undertaken when the main site works commence.
- 3.5 The field will be ploughed, in order to establish a clear bed into which the species-rich grassland mix will be sown. Seed is best sown in the autumn or spring but can be sown at other times of the year if there is sufficient warmth and moisture. The ploughing/cultivation works must be undertaken outside of the breeding bird season.
- 3.6 Most of the sown meadow species are perennial and are slow to establish. Soon after sowing there will be a flush of annual weeds, arising from the soil seed bank. These weeds offer shelter to the sown seedlings and provide habitat for invertebrates. The first cut should take place mid to late summer with arisings removed from site. Any residual perennial weeds such as docks should be hand dug out.
- 3.7 Once established, the grassland will be managed by means of a single 'hay-cut', undertaken at the end of August to a height of 50mm. The 'hay' will be left to dry and shed seed for 1-7 days then be removed from site. The grassland can then be maintained at a short sward height up to the start of March. This should ensure a sward height of between 20 and 50cm throughout the breeding season, open enough to provide easy access for the birds and lasting long enough throughout the summer to give opportunity for three skylark broods to be raised. This management will also prevent the encroachment of scrub into the area.
- 3.8 The methodology will allow a species-rich sward to develop as it provides time for grasses and herbs to set seed before the cut takes place. A species-rich sward will help to support diverse invertebrate populations in the area to support developing chicks, as well as providing a winter foraging resource for adult birds.

Foraging Resource from Adjacent Solar Farm

- 3.9 Once the main site comes into use as a solar farm it is proposed that the main site be sown with a species rich grassland mix.

- 3.10 Research has shown that skylarks incorporate solar farms into their territories, with these areas widely utilised as a foraging resource for the species. Research by Montag et al. (2016) compared solar plots with unpanelled control plots at eleven sites across the UK. Although no nesting was recorded within panel arrays, the number of territories recorded in these areas was not significantly lower, nor were the number of foraging birds observed. Indeed, at two of the plots, numbers of foraging skylark were significantly higher in the solar plot than the control. This suggests that skylark nest sites 'lost' by creating a solar farm are displaced into the surrounding habitat, with the solar site continuing to form part of the territory of displaced birds.
- 3.11 An article by Harry Fox in CIEEM In Practice (Issue 117, September 2022) states that although nesting has not been confirmed on solar sites, *"skylarks have been recorded many times foraging within solar arrays and even feeding recently fledged young. Fledglings can disperse considerable distances from their nests in just a few days and continue to be fed by parent birds for between 8 and 12 days after fledging (Donald, 2004), so this behaviour alone may not be considered evidence of nesting on site. It is possible, therefore, that development sites with suitable grassland might even provide 'nursery' habitat where nesting takes place on adjacent farmland."*
- 3.12 A bird survey conducted in 2023 focused on nest searching on a solar site where skylarks were observed (Solar Habitat 2024: Ecological trends on solar farms in the UK). No nests were identified; however, a bird was observed regularly collecting food from within the solar farm then flying to an adjacent arable field, indicating that the solar farm offered a preferred resource for foraging by skylarks. Solar farms are also infrequently visited by humans once operational; this means they offer undisturbed habitat which is at odds with the current arable management regimes.
- 3.13 Skylarks feed primarily on invertebrates during the spring and summer so can be impacted by use of insecticides, while in the winter they rely on the leaves and seeds of crops and grasses/herbs. Once the site comes into use as a solar park there will be no use of pesticides or fertilizers.
- 3.14 By converting the proposed solar farm site to species rich grassland there will be a secure, long term foraging resource available to the local skylark population, including those nesting in the adjacent Skylark Compensation Field. This is likely to result in increased carrying capacity of surrounding habitats and higher breeding success.

4. HABITAT MANAGEMENT

4.3 There will be no fertiliser or pesticide use within the skylark compensation area.

First year management. (Year 1)

4.4 The skylark compensation area will be ploughed and sown with the species rich meadow mix. Seed is best sown in the autumn or spring but can be sown at other times of the year if there is sufficient warmth and moisture. First cut should take place mid to late summer with arisings removed from site. Any residual perennial weeds such as docks will be removed. The ploughing/cultivation works must be undertaken outside of the breeding bird season.

Management of Established Grassland. Years 2 to 40.

4.5 Once established, this grassland will be managed by means of a single 'hay-cut', undertaken at the end of August to a height of 50mm. The 'hay' will be left to dry and shed seed for 1-7 days then be removed from site. This should ensure a sward height of between 20cm and 50cm throughout the breeding season, open enough to provide easy access for the birds and lasting long enough through the summer to give opportunity for three broods to be raised. This management will also prevent the encroachment of scrub into the area.

Management Schedule

4.6 The following management programme shows possible months in which activities will be undertaken.

Initial Habitat Enhancement Year 1:

Management Activity	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Grassland creation			✓						✓	✓		

Habitat Management Year 2-5:

Management Activity	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Grassland cutting where required	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Ongoing Management (Year 5 onwards):

Management Activity	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Grassland cutting where required	✓	✓						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

5. LONG-TERM MONITORING

Habitat Surveys

- 5.1 Habitat surveys will be undertaken in Years 1, 2, 3, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40.
- 5.2 Surveys to be completed in June/July.
- 5.3 The survey will assess species composition against expected (from seed mix) and sward height (should be between 20cm and 50cm) using quadrats and broad habitat type following UKHab survey methodology.
- 5.4 The habitat survey will also check for scrub encroachment. Remedial action will be recommended if scrub encroachment exceeds 5%.
- 5.5 Further remedial measures will be recommended and implemented as necessary based on the results of the monitoring surveys. If remedial measures are required, additional monitoring visits may also be implemented.

Skylark Surveys

- 5.6 It is proposed that monitoring surveys for skylarks be undertaken. The surveys will be undertaken in accordance with British Trust for Ornithology territory mapping methodology. Three survey visits will be carried out between March and July. The aim of the surveys will be to demonstrate continued skylark presence within the Skylark Compensation Field and increasing numbers as the habitat matures over the 40 years. This will become an important, safeguarded skylark habitat over the 40 years operational period of the solar farm.
- 5.7 Surveys will commence in Year 2 after habitat establishment of the grassland. Two years is considered to be sufficient time for skylarks to begin to utilise the compensation field in the expected numbers.
- 5.8 There after survey will be undertaken in Years 2, 3, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40.
- 5.9 Remedial measures will be recommended and implemented as necessary based on the results of the monitoring surveys. If remedial measures are required, additional monitoring visits may also be implemented.

APPENDIX 1

BTO SPECIES CODES

AC	Arctic Skua	GA	Gadwall	LE	Long-eared Owl	SM	Sand Martin
AE	Arctic Tern	GX	Gannet	LT	Long-tailed Tit	SS	Sanderling
AV	Avocet	GW	Garden Warbler	MG	Magpie	TE	Sandwich Tern
BO	Barn Owl	GY	Garganey	MA	Mallard	VI	Savi's Warbler
BY	Barnacle Goose	GC	Goldcrest	MN	Mandarin Duck	SQ	Scarlet Rosefinch
BA	Bar-tailed Godwit	EA	Golden Eagle	MX	Manx Shearwater	SP	Scaup
BR	Bearded Tit	OL	Golden Oriole	MR	Marsh Harrier	CY	Scottish Crossbill
BS	Berwick's Swan	GF	Golden Pheasant	MT	Marsh Tit	SW	Sedge Warbler
BI	Bittern	GP	Golden Plover	MW	Marsh Warbler	NS	Serin
BK	Black Grouse	GN	Goldeneye	MP	Meadow Pipit	SA	Shag
TY	Black Guillemot	GO	Goldfinch	MU	Mediterranean Gull	SU	Shelduck
BX	Black Redstart	GD	Goosander	ML	Merlin	SX	Shorelark
BJ	Black Tern	GI	Goshawk	M.	Mistle Thrush	SE	Short-eared Owl
B.	Blackbird	GH	Grasshopper Warbler	MO	Montagu's Harrier	SV	Shoveler
BC	Blackcap	GB	Great Black-backed Gull	MH	Moorhen	SK	Siskin
BH	Black-headed Gull	GG	Great Crested Grebe	MS	Mute Swan	S.	Skylark
BN	Black-necked Grebe	ND	Great Northern Diver	N.	Nightingale	SZ	Slavonian Grebe
BW	Black-tailed Godwit	NX	Great Skua	NJ	Nightjar	SN	Snipe
BV	Black-throated Diver	GS	Great Spotted Woodpecker	NH	Nuthatch	SB	Snow Bunting
BT	Blue Tit	GT	Great Tit	OP	Osprey	ST	Song Thrush
BU	Bluethroat	GE	Green Sandpiper	OC	Oystercatcher	SH	Sparrowhawk
BL	Brambling	G.	Green Woodpecker	PX	Peafowl/Peacock	AK	Spotted Crake
BG	Brent Goose	GR	Greenfinch	PE	Peregrine	SF	Spotted Flycatcher
BF	Bullfinch	GK	Greenshank	PH	Pheasant	DR	Spotted Redshank
BZ	Buzzard	H.	Grey Heron	PF	Pied Flycatcher	SG	Starling
CG	Canada Goose	P.	Grey Partridge	PW	Pied Wagtail	SD	Stock Dove
CP	Capercaillie	GV	Grey Plover	PG	Pink-footed Goose	SC	Stonechat
C.	Carrion Crow	GL	Grey Wagtail	PT	Pintail	TN	Stone-curlew
CW	Cetti's Warbler	GJ	Greylag Goose	PO	Pochard	TM	Storm Petrel
CH	Chaffinch	GU	Guillemot	PM	Ptarmigan	SL	Swallow
CC	Chiffchaff	FW	Guineafowl (Helmeted)	PU	Puffin	SI	Swift
CF	Chough	HF	Hawfinch	PS	Purple Sandpiper	TO	Tawny Owl
CL	Cirl Bunting	HH	Hen Harrier	Q.	Quail	T.	Teal
CT	Coal Tit	HG	Herring Gull	RN	Raven	TK	Temminck's Stint
CD	Collared Dove	HY	Hobby	RA	Razorbill	TP	Tree Pipit
CM	Common Gull	HZ	Honey Buzzard	RG	Red Grouse	TS	Tree Sparrow
CS	Common Sandpiper	HC	Hooded Crow	KT	Red Kite	TC	Treecreeper
CX	Common Scoter	HP	Hoopoe	ED	Red-backed Shrike	TU	Tufted Duck
CN	Common Tern	HM	House Martin	RM	Red-breasted Merganser	TT	Turnstone
CO	Coot	HS	House Sparrow	RQ	Red-crested Pochard	TD	Turtle Dove
CA	Cormorant	JD	Jackdaw	FV	Red-footed Falcon	TW	Twite
CB	Corn Bunting	J.	Jay	RL	Red-legged Partridge	WA	Water Rail
CE	Corncrake	K.	Kestrel	NK	Red-necked Phalarope	W.	Wheatear
CI	Crested Tit	KF	Kingfisher	LR	Redpoll (Lesser)	WM	Whimbrel
CR	Crossbill (Common)	KI	Kittiwake	RK	Redshank	WC	Whinchat
CK	Cuckoo	KN	Knot	RT	Redstart	WG	White-fronted Goose
CU	Curlew	LM	Lady Amherst's Pheasant	RH	Red-throated Diver	WH	Whitethroat
DW	Dartford Warbler	LA	Lapland Bunting	RE	Redwing	WS	Whooper Swan
DI	Dipper	L.	Lapwing	RB	Reed Bunting	WN	Wigeon
DO	Dotterel	TL	Leach's Petrel	RW	Reed Warbler	WT	Willow Tit
DN	Dunlin	LB	Lesser Black-backed Gull	RZ	Ring Ouzel	WW	Willow Warbler
D.	Duncock	LS	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	RP	Ringed Plover	OD	Wood Sandpiper
EG	Egyptian Goose	LW	Lesser Whitethroat	RI	Ring-necked Parakeet	WO	Wood Warbler
E.	Eider	LI	Linnet	R.	Robin	WK	Woodcock
FP	Feral Pigeon	ET	Little Egret	DV	Rock Dove (not feral)	WL	Woodlark
ZL	Feral/hybrid goose	LG	Little Grebe	RC	Rock Pipit	WP	Woodpigeon
ZF	Feral/hybrid mallard type	LU	Little Gull	RO	Rook	WR	Wren
FF	Fieldfare	LO	Little Owl	RS	Roseate Tern	WY	Wryneck
FC	Firecrest	LP	Little Ringed Plover	RY	Ruddy Duck	YW	Yellow Wagtail
F.	Fulmar	AF	Little Tern	RU	Ruff	Y.	Yellowhammer

If you are not submitting your data electronically using BBS-Online, please return your Field Recording Sheets to your Regional Organiser with your other BBS forms. If you would like to submit your results on BBS-Online, please inform your RO, then visit www.bto.org/bbs.

APPENDIX 2

ECN Protocols for Standard Measurements at Terrestrial Sites

BI (BB/BC/BM) Protocols

Note 3 BTO bird activity map symbols

(Sheet reproduced from BTO instructions for CBC recorders)

This standard list of conventions is designed for clear and unambiguous recording. Symbols can be combined where necessary. Additional activities of territorial significance, such as display or mating, should be noted using an appropriate clear abbreviation.

CH, CH ♂ [↗] CH ♀ [↘]	Chaffinch sight records, with age, sex or number of birds if appropriate.
3Chjuve, CH2♀ [↗] 1 ♀	Use CH ♀ [↗] to indicate one pair of Chaffinches, so that: 2CH♀ [↗] means two pairs together.
R fam	Juvenile Robins with parent(s) in attendance
<u>R</u>	A calling Robin
<u><u>R</u></u>	A Robin repeatedly giving alarm calls or other vocalisations (not song) thought to have strong territorial significance
(R)	A Robin in song
	An aggressive encounter between two Robins
*R	An occupied nest of Robins. Do not mark unoccupied nests, which are not of territorial significance by themselves
* BT	Blue tits nesting in a specially provided site. Please remember to use this special symbol for a nest in a nestbox.
*PW on	Pied Wagtail nest with adult sitting
PW mat	Pied Wagtail carrying nest material
PW food	Pied Wagtail carrying food

Movements of birds can be indicated by an arrow using the following conventions:

—— <u>GR</u> —→	A calling Greenfinch flying over (seen only in flight)
(D) —→	A singing Dunnock, perched then flying away (not seen to land)
——→ B.♂ [↗]	A male blackbird flying in and landing (first seen in flight)
WR —→ WR	A Wren moving between two perches. The solid line indicates that it was definitely the same bird .

The following conventions indicate which registrations relate to different, and which to the same individual birds. Their proper use will be essential for the accurate assessment of clusters.

(WR) - - - - - (WR)	Two Wrens in song at the same time, i.e. definitely different birds. The dotted line indicates a simultaneous registration (or contemporary contact) and is of very great value in separating territories.
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- * *
- LI LI Two Linnet nests occupied simultaneously, and thus belonging to different pairs. This is another example of the value of dotted lines. Only adjacent nests need to be marked in this way.
- (CK) ————— (CK) The solid line indicates that the registrations definitely refer to the same bird.
- (SD) — ? — (SD) This question-marked solid line indicates that the registrations relate to probably the same bird. This convention is of particular use when your census route brings you back past an area already covered - it is possible to mark new positions of (probably the same) birds recorded before, without risk of double-recording. If you record birds without using the question-marked solid line, over-estimation of territories will result.
- (WR)
- WR mat No line joining the registrations - it will be assumed that the birds are probably different, but depending on the pattern of other registrations they may be treated as if only one bird was involved. (You may if you wish use a question-marked dotted line, indicating that the registrations were almost certainly of different birds.)
- C*
- C* Where adjacent nests are marked without a line, it will often be assumed that they were in first and second broods, or a replacement nest following an earlier failure.