

# 2014 Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire Corn Bunting Survey

## Background

Corn Buntings have undergone a steep 90% decline in breeding population in Britain during the period 1970-2010, accompanied by contractions of 27% in winter range since the 1981-84 *Winter Atlas* and 56% in breeding range since the 1968-72 *Breeding Atlas*.

The species occupies the Red List of birds of the greatest conservation concern in the UK.

As a farmland specialist, the primary stronghold of Corn Buntings in England is eastern arable areas.

This novel three-county survey aims to harness the abundance of skills and enthusiasm of birders across Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire to derive a population estimate of Corn Buntings for each of three counties and establish any basic patterns. It is hoped that data from this survey may be used to identify local Corn Bunting population hotspots that could be targeted to provide agri-environment advice.

## Organisation

This survey is based upon a stratified random sample of tetrads within each county. The tetrads selected for the survey comprise 20% of those tetrads which held territorial Corn Buntings during the 2007-11 *Atlas* plus 10% of tetrads which held Corn Buntings during the 1988-91 *Breeding Atlas* but not subsequently. This sampling procedure will particularly help us to obtain adequate coverage of the more widely distributed Cambridgeshire population. Once all the selected tetrads have been allocated we welcome results from additional tetrads.

A website at <http://cornbunting.birdsurvey.org.uk> shows tetrad maps for each of the three counties and identifies those tetrads selected for the survey. Clicking on the maps provides access a printable map / recording form of that tetrad.

A local organiser for each county is co-ordinating the allocation of tetrads and birders should contact the following individuals with offers to help:

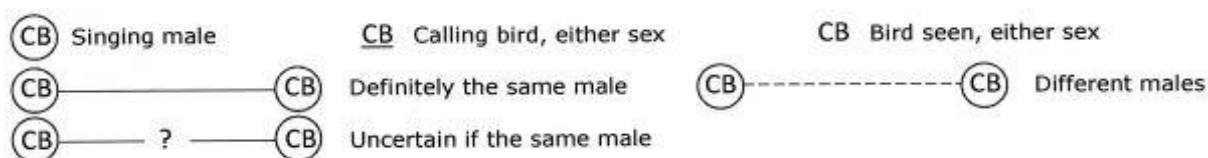
<b>Bedfordshire</b>	Graham Goodall	g.goodall052@btinternet.com 26 Courtlands Drive, Biggleswade, Bedfordshire SG18 8PQ
<b>Cambridgeshire</b>	Andrew Tongue	andrew.tongue@gmail.com c/o RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL
<b>Hertfordshire</b>	Murray Orchard	murray.orchard@live.co.uk 1 Gatesbury Way, Puckeridge, Ware, Hertfordshire SG11 1TQ

## Methodology

Each tetrad must be visited twice. The first visit must be in the first three weeks of June and the second must be in the first three weeks of July. Please print off a new tetrad map / recording form for each visit. We would strongly encourage people to undertake surveys during the early morning, if possible (6am – 11am) as this is when males are singing most actively. Otherwise, please survey at times when you are able to. If the first visit is later in the day, please try to make the second one earlier. It is likely that evening counts will underestimate true male abundance.

Please check the weather forecast before heading out. Surveys should be undertaken in dry, calm conditions. If a tetrad visit is only partially-completed (e.g., due to the onset of heavy rain and / or strong winds), try to return and complete that visit as soon as possible, ideally within a week.

We would ideally like observers to walk a fixed route through the tetrad, preferably reversing the direction walked on the second visit, and to map every singing Corn Bunting and, preferably, any other Corn Bunting activity, using basic BTO notation. Observers should note each encounter on the printable tetrad maps, as close as possible to the bird's estimated location.



It is not necessary to survey unsuitable habitat (e.g., mature woodland, expanses of open water or intensive residential or commercial land-use) and any areas not covered should be indicated on survey maps (by shading or hatching). Areas within the tetrad which you are unable to adequately cover, for example, due to land access issues or time constraints should also be marked.

Completed survey forms can either be scanned and emailed or posted to the relevant county organiser. Please return all survey forms by 31 August.

We would be grateful if observers submit their records of all species recorded during these survey visits to the Birdtrack ([www.birdtrack.net](http://www.birdtrack.net)), and we are particularly interested to receive records of other scarce and declining species; Turtle Dove, Spotted Flycatcher, Tree Sparrow, Cuckoo, Yellow Wagtail and Grey Partridge.

At all times observers must follow public rights of way only, unless with explicit agreement from the landowner. We have a responsibility to promote farmland bird conservation in a positive light and interested members of the public should be given an understanding of the purposes of this survey.

Finally, please take care and be sensible when in the field. Please read our health and safety guide, available at <http://cornbunting.birdsurvey.org.uk/hsguide.pdf>

Thank you for your help with this survey, it is greatly appreciated.

Louise Bacon, Steve Blain, Chris Dee, Graham Goodall, Vince Lea, Murray Orchard, Rosemary Setchfield and Andrew Tongue.

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