

Case study: Friends of Wardsend Cemetery

Name of project or group

Bird monitoring at Wardsend Cemetery. Case study by Sean Ashton, July 2022

What actions for nature did your group want to take and why?

I've only recently become involved with the Friends of Wardsend Cemetery, helping with a monthly survey to record bird species in the cemetery. This is a joint venture with Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust (SRWT) and Don Catchment Rivers Trust (DCRT). The aim of the survey is to produce some baseline data about the bird species using the cemetery throughout the year and also, using a basic survey technique, to introduce people to birdwatching and wildlife surveying.



Photo credit: Howard Bayley

What resources or support did you use?

The technique involved is called a point survey, where the surveyors stand at various points in the cemetery and count any birds seen or heard within a 5 minute period at each point. An attempt is also made to place the birds in distance bands from the point. A simple recording sheet is provided and people new to birdwatching are paired with more experienced recorders to help them gain expertise.

Case study: Friends of Wardsend Cemetery

How did you empower or involve others?

Binoculars are available to borrow if required and new volunteers are very welcome. At the end of each survey different volunteers are encouraged to enter the data onto Nature Counts, the SRWT database. Sally from DCRT and Jess from SRWT have been really helpful in organising the surveys and setting up the data entry.

How did it make you feel?

“From a personal point of view it is great to be able to share my enthusiasm for birds with other members of the group and to see them develop their own skills.”

What changes have there been as a result of your actions?

We encountered plenty of blue tits and great tits on our surveys and this inspired us to take the next step in recording birds in the cemetery. With the generous help of another volunteer, Malcolm, we put up 5 bird boxes in March, hoping that 1 or 2 would be used.

Imagine our delight when we checked them to find nests and eggs in all of them. The nests were monitored over the next few weeks and four of the nests hatched successfully. A total of 18 chicks were ringed with 16 of these fledging. The records will feed into the British Trust for Ornithology database, helping to keep track of breeding success and timing.



Photo credit: Howard Bayley

Case study: Friends of Wardsend Cemetery

Have you had any memorable nature encounters while doing this?

Birds are not the only wildlife apparently. On one of the visits we met a lady who had been bitten by an adder! She had been to hospital and seemed to be ok although her hand was red and swollen.

The highlight was a pair of kingfishers seen fishing from the bridge. Other star birds include dipper, sparrowhawk and a flock of redwing. On our last visit we were serenaded with the beautiful song of a blackcap recently arrived from Africa, and a supporting chorus of chiffchaff.



Photo credit: Howard Bayley

What's next?

We have recorded 28 species so far, a respectable total for a relatively small site and we hope to add more as we record through the spring and summer.



Photo credit: Howard Bayley