



Woodcock annual monitoring Survey Instructions



Survey aims

The 2025 annual monitoring Woodcock breeding Survey assesses annual changes in numbers of breeding Woodcock, which has been carried out since 2003. Bird Atlas 2007-11 showed that the breeding range decreased by over 50% since 1970. Using a survey method tailored to the crepuscular habits of this species, we can gain more robust measures of abundance and distribution than were possible from Bird Atlas 2007-11. Changes in abundance and distribution will be correlated with woodland habitat characteristics as well as land use in habitats adjoining the woodland.

Background

Woodcock breed in both deciduous and coniferous woodland. Chosen woods often contain glades or rides and have areas of damp soil and at least some undergrowth. The birds commence their unique roding behaviour soon after sunset and shortly before dawn. Roding flights of individual birds can last 5-45 minutes and the bird flies in circuits 3-30m above the woodland canopy. The roding areas of several males may overlap. Roding males call repeatedly, giving 3-4 low pitched croaks or grunted notes and a louder shrill whistle. Such calls can carry up to 300m. The survey will be based on counts of roding males made during the spring and early summer, at fixed pre-selected points within woodland. Counts of roding males provide an index of the number of individual male Woodcock within an area.

Study sites

In 2025 we are aiming to cover between 200-250 survey sites (1-km squares), which have been randomly selected using CEH Countryside Survey data to pinpoint woodland blocks of varying sizes across Britain and Northern Ireland. These will consist of a number of High Priority sites which have been previously surveyed (re-visiting will provide a direct measure of change). It is vital for the rigour of the survey to cover as many of these sites as possible.

Some sites may not hold Woodcock, but please do not get disheartened as this information is vital for assessing change, so please ensure visit details are submitted even if ZERO Woodcock are recorded.

Methodology

We have randomly selected 1-km squares that contain woodland. Therefore, you will select a square rather than a particular wood. For both new and existing Woodcock survey participants, please establish the most suitable count point (if you have surveyed in previous years and the existing point remains the best then continue to use it). Select the largest woodland block containing some mature woodland (even if most of the block is outside the 1-km square boundary). The actual survey point (ideally defined during the recce visit) can be located up to 400m outside a given square, if no suitable survey point can be found within the square. The point should be positioned within woodland, ideally at least 100m from the woodland edge. The survey should ideally be undertaken from a junction of two rides or paths. If suitable rides are unavailable, it may be within a glade or felled area. It is important that you do not stand beneath closed canopy but can see the sky, so roding Woodcock may be seen and heard more easily. It is also important to remain at the same point for the duration of the counts.

Your **first visit** to the site should be **for reconnaissance (ideally in April)** – a walk through the wood in the evening, staying until dusk, should indicate the best position from which to conduct the survey in terms of visibility and where Woodcock may be observed. **Three main survey visits** should be made **at least one week apart during 1st May to 30th June 2025**. Please use a new survey form for each survey visit. Avoid surveys on evenings that are wet or windy. The survey should **start 15 minutes before sunset** and last for a **total duration of 75 minutes** (approximate sunset times for your region are available to download but also check your local paper or a weather website*). It is essential that the start and finish times are recorded for each visit.

Methodology continued

If your survey site does not have public access, it will be necessary to seek permission from the landowner. A letter of introduction from the BTO & GWCT, written on your behalf is available from the Woodcock survey pages (www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/woodcock-survey/resources); this should help to explain the project when asking permission for access. If you encounter any problems when contacting the landowner or if access is denied, please get in touch with your local Regional Organiser or David Norfolk at BTO HQ and, if necessary, select another survey square.

NOTE: If **zero** Woodcock are seen on the April reconnaissance visit and the first of the three main survey visits, you do not need to make the last two visits but please submit your visit dates and complete the Habitat information.

Recording woodcock

Please record all Woodcock seen or heard during the 75 minute count using the Visit Recording Form. During the survey, it is important that each flypast is recorded as a separate event on the form (to the nearest minute), even if they occur in quick succession. Sometimes more than one Woodcock may fly by together; the number of individuals in the flypast should be recorded on the form. If you are not familiar with the call of a woodcock, it is strongly recommended that you listen to the recorded Woodcock calls on the BTO website sound (www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/woodcock-survey/resources), or visit bird call websites such as www.xeno-canto.org. It is important that you become familiar with the call before taking on the survey, as some people have difficulty with its frequency.

Habitat recording

Habitat is likely to have a strong influence upon whether or not a site is occupied by Woodcock in the breeding season, and may also help explain why any changes in distribution or abundance may have occurred. Therefore, we need to undertake some specific **habitat recording** (*between 15th May and 15th June*) to help characterise the surrounding woodland (within 200m of the count point) and assess its suitability; including woodland type, understorey structure and density. Also, we would like to know whether the composition of adjoining woodland areas is representative (or not) to that within the 200m radius sample area.

Once you have established and entered your count point location, go to **Data Home**, where you can print a map showing the 200m buffer for habitat recording – zoom in to the buffer and select the Satellite map option. This will help you estimate the percentage area covered by woodland/habitat type. Please refer to the woodland type and structure codes on the on the Habitat Recording Form.

Deer and livestock recording

Deer and livestock grazing can influence ground vegetation considerably, which may have implications for breeding habitat suitability. As it can be difficult to meaningfully count deer and livestock numbers, a combination of physical signs (droppings, hoof prints, recent browsing damage, etc.), can be used to record the presence of deer, if they are not physically observed.

Please record (counts/presence) of each deer and livestock species on the Visit Recording Form (use a separate form for each visit).

Health and Safety

It is strongly recommended to take a torch and mobile phone with you and wear suitable clothing and footwear. Biting insects can be abundant at this time of year, so it is advisable to carry some insect repellent. Volunteer surveyors contribute to BTO surveys on an independent, self-directed basis. You must, therefore, take responsibility for your own health and safety. You are advised to assess any risks arising out of your chosen survey before undertaking it. The BTO Fieldwork Health & Safety leaflet (see www.bto.org/woodcock-survey/resources) provides information and advice on how you may do this. BTO carries insurance for liabilities to third parties for loss, damage or injury, and can provide written confirmation for any landowner requesting it. This does not, however, cover loss, damage or injury to survey participants, who should make their own arrangements.

*e.g. www.bbc.co.uk/weather OR www.metoffice.gov.uk

Please note that the survey is being organised on-line (www.bto.org/woodcock-survey). However, if you do not have on-line access and require paper forms, please contact your local BTO Regional Organiser (RO)

<https://app.bto.org/woodcock/rr/contact-rr.jsp>

Or David Norfolk, BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk. IP24 2PU.

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