

## Breeding Bird Survey on Rombalds Moor, 1997 to 2018 - Shaun Radcliffe

One of BOG's former members, Geoff Todd, had for two years started BTO's Breeding Birds Survey covering a tetrad on the top of Rombalds Moor. The survey is organised through the BTO who provide record forms and guidance. A tetrad is a 1km square and the recorder is asked to walk two transects across the area following the same route each year. Geoff had chosen one line to be part of the path from Dick Hudson's to Ilkley, with the other line running parallel from Ashlar Chair, just above Bingley Moor. He did the survey for two years but decided to finish and announced this at a BOG monthly meeting.

I was interested in survey work so agreed to take over. Little did I think I would continue for over 20 years. You do need to be determined somewhat as BTO ask that you visit the site twice, mid-May and mid-June and ideally be on site no later than seven o'clock in the morning but definitely no later than nine.

The survey also had to be during reasonable weather which did not always fall at weekends so I undertook some surveys before going on to work. However, a real bonus is being out on the moors so early. I regularly saw Snipe sitting on walls and even Roe Deer but despite the many visits, I never saw once a fox, weasel or stoat so control of the habitat for grouse shooting, to me, is not for the good of nature. Some birds may benefit but overall mammals are not able to exist, along with certain birds of prey of course.

Before the "right to roam" law came about, I always sought permission to walk off paths to follow one of the transit lines from the local gamekeeper but later, his authority was not required. Only on Burley Moor is that still necessary but as my tetrad was elsewhere, it made life easier.

So what birds have I seen over the years? Sometimes, nothing out of the ordinary but the BTO make it clear that all data tells them something. Obviously Red Grouse was the most numerical species and I saw many young chicks amongst the heather. Meadow Pipits were numerous but I only saw a passing merlin once in all this time. Surprisingly Wrens were regular which shows how hardy they can be. Where the heather had been burnt a few years earlier, the short undergrowth encouraged more Skylarks. A few pairs of Curlew were recorded but the one species which increased over the years was Greylag Geese, and to a lesser degree, Canada Geese. Whatever your thoughts are about these geese, they are marvellous parents, just try approaching them when they are on nest or have goslings. Be ready for their head down charge!!

A bird which has expanded on Rombalds Moor in recent years is Stonechat and some years I have recorded this species but only from 2004 onwards. In 2001. No survey took place because of foot and mouth disease.

Looking back through the records, there are two visits which stand out. In 1997, with Geoff showing me the ropes, during the mid-May visit, we came across 13 Dotterel near to the Twelve Apostles. I have seen them there again some years later but not on a recording date.

My very best experience was in 1999 when walking along the first transit line. In a gap in the heather where a peaty stream had dried up, I came across a young Short-eared Owl. Another youngster called nearby but was in good cover. Ready to move away, I did not see an adult bird come behind me until its barking call startled me. It was a great moment.

This year, I have decided to stop doing this survey as the habitat is rough in parts and, for me, become physically challenging. I still enjoy surveys and continue with the Wetland Bird Survey along the River Aire.

If survey work is for you, and you would be interested in taking over this tetrad on Rombalds Moor, please let me know and I can tell you more.



Dotterel (female)

photo: Mike Bloomfield