

Knepp Castle Estate Bird Ringing Report 2015.

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Introduction

During 2015 permission was obtained to carry out bird ringing at the Knepp Castle Estate. Prior to 2015, ringing on the Knepp Estate had consisted of a few special projects such as the ringing of Barn Owls and Woodcock, so this was the first time that more general ringing had been carried out on the Estate. Barn Owl ringing continued, coordinated by Dr Barrie Watson, and is not covered in this report.

Nightingale studies

The whole of the southern section of the Knepp Estate was surveyed by three experienced observers; Penny Green, Dave Green and Tony Davis. Additional records from other reliable observers were also incorporated in the survey. A total of 16 territories were located, plus an additional two territories in the southern part of the central block. Figure One shows the location of the territories.

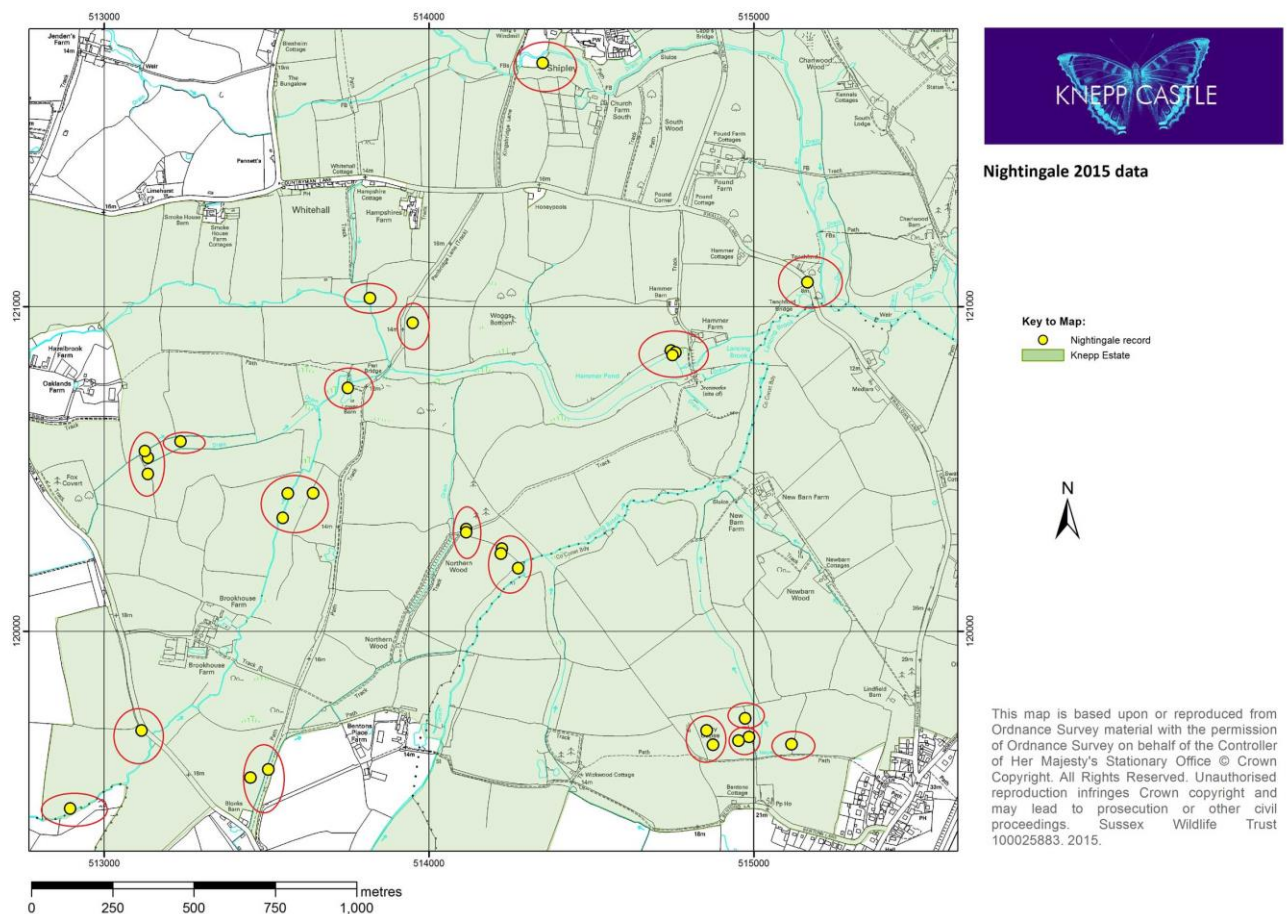


Figure One: Location of Nightingales recorded during 2015 surveys with separate territories shown within red circles.

The number of territories found was considerably less than that recorded by students during 2012 – 13 but the map of records from the student surveys shows considerable misinterpretation of territories, with large numbers being grouped implausibly close together. It is also suspected that there was some misidentification of other species that sing at night. There is no evidence to suggest that there has been a large decline in Nightingale numbers nationally between 2013 and 2015 which might indicate that a real decline has occurred at Knepp. Surveys will be repeated in 2016.

Less time was devoted to ringing Nightingales and to finding nests than was originally intended but it is hoped to increase effort during 2016. Two adult males were ringed, at Tory Copse and Brookhouse 13.



Just one nest was found, at Waterworks west, although a fledged youngster that could not have travelled more than a few metres from the nest was also found at Oaklands Lagg. Whilst it was disappointing to only find one nest, this did at least provide an opportunity to show the Estate Ecologist the habitat which is important for them and the key features that they require. Whilst a student has previously investigated this at Knepp, she unfortunately drew the wrong conclusions. This was almost inevitable as her analysis was based upon the location of singing males, rather than that of actual nests.



Nightingale nest with three chicks at circa 7 – 8 days old



Nightingale nest location. The nest was about 5cm off the ground, less than 1m in to the bramble scrub in the centre of the picture.

Nightingale nests are located on, or within a few centimetres of, the ground. It is therefore important that there is thick cover at this height. High rabbit populations can result in a browse line which means that the key height for Nightingales is rather bare and this is the case in some areas at Knepp. The height and depth of the hedge are unimportant as the nest will always be located within a metre of the edge. The required density of cover in habitats such as those at Knepp is often provided by bramble with nettles growing through it, rather than by the hedgerow shrubs.

Nightingale nests are far from easy to find, with an average of only five nest record cards submitted to the British Trust for Ornithology each year. Nevertheless, it is hoped that a few nests can be found each year so that we can start to get some measure of the productivity at Knepp.

Lapwing

Four nests were found, all in the fields from Tench Ford to Rushetts. All nests were found at the egg stage, two had four eggs and two had three eggs. The problem with wader nests is that the chicks leave the nest site very soon after hatching. The chicks can move a considerable distance from the nest site and it is therefore difficult to know whether the eggs hatched or the chicks fledged successfully. This is a particular issue at Knepp where they nest in quite small fields and could easily move to other fields.

Of the four nests, one was apparently predated at the egg stage, as evidenced by egg fragments in the nest scrape. One nest produced at least three chicks from the four eggs but these were not seen on subsequent visits and their fate is unknown. The other two nests were incubated for long periods (so they must have been close to hatching) and no shell fragments were found in the nest, but no chicks could be found and those adults in the vicinity showed no alarm when the site was next visited so the outcome of these nests is unknown.

If we are to discover how successful the Lapwings at Knepp are, it is clear that the nests will need to be much more closely monitored.

General Ringing

It took some time to get things off the ground and general ringing did not really start until the majority of migrants apart from Chiffchaff and Blackcap had departed. Nevertheless Knepp was the main ringing site for five trainees during the autumn. Activities were focussed in the area around the scrape and good numbers of birds were caught on each visit. The total number of each species caught is given in Table One.

Table One : The number of birds ringed, retrapped and recovered at Knepp during 2015.

	Full grown	Pulli	Retraps/ Recoveries	Total
Lapwing	0	3	0	3
Great Spotted Woodpecker	1	0	0	1
Wren	2	0	0	2
Dunnock	5	0	0	5
Robin	5	0	1	6
Nightingale	2	4	0	6
Blackbird	0	11	0	11
Song Thrush	0	4	0	4
Redwing	1	0	0	1
Mistle Thrush	0	1	0	1
Sedge Warbler	1	0	0	1
Reed Warbler	2	0	0	2
Whitethroat	3	0	0	3
Garden Warbler	1	0	0	1
Blackcap	25	0	0	25
Chiffchaff	78	6	2	86
Willow Warbler	33	0	1	34
Goldcrest	14	0	1	15
Long-tailed Tit	64	0	7	71
Coal Tit	2	0	0	2
Blue Tit	91	0	6	97
Great Tit	24	0	6	30
Treecreeper	1	0	0	1
Jackdaw	0	3	0	3
Lesser Redpoll	1	0	0	1
Annual Total:	356	32	24	412

The only recoveries received so far as a result of the ringing at Knepp were as follows:

DHD380 Willow Warbler ringed as a first year bird at Little Downham, nr Ely, Cambridgeshire on 14th August 2013. Retrapped at Knepp on 30th August 2015, 746 days after ringing, 171km SSW of the ringing locality.

CL67907 Mistle Thrush ringed as a fledgling that was not yet able to fly and was picked up off the road in Countryman Lane and was ringed at 8.10am on 4th May 2015. It was found on the same day at the same location and was reported to have a damaged wing. It is likely that although the bird was released on the other side of the hedge, it hopped back out onto the road and the fact that it was unable to fly was misinterpreted as it having an injury.

Acknowledgements

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