



Sussex ornithological Society

2022 Nightingales survey – instructions

This survey aims to establish just how important the county of Sussex is for the Nightingale (N.) and how distribution may have changed since the BTO survey in 2012/13 by allocating randomly selected 1km squares to survey for Nightingale.

Preparing for the survey

When you volunteer to take part in the survey you will have been allocated a 1km square or squares to be surveyed; you can print a large scale map and recording form from this website.

Before surveying, it is a good idea to identify areas of potential habitat (see habitat requirements below) using your local knowledge of the square and the habitats, Google earth or OS maps. Work out a good survey route(s) that gets you as close as possible to all the suitable habitat and mark the route taken on the survey map. We are assuming that most of the surveying will be done from public rights of way or access land. This might mean that there are areas that are difficult to access. If you are able to obtain permission to enter private land that would be ideal but if there are areas of suitable habitat where you can't get access please mark them on one of your maps with cross hatching and make a note in the comments box on the map.

Nightingale habitat

Nightingales have a basic requirement for dense undergrowth, >1.5m tall, but this may be met by a wide range of habitat types across the range, making Nightingale habitat varied and hard to define. Singing birds might occupy thorny scrub, bramble, young coppice and regenerating woodland, willow carr, or young conifer plantations with a rich and complex shrub layer. Thus, any landscape that holds these habitats might be occupied. Birds can sometimes be encountered on farmland, in patches of scrub or woodland and even in dense hedgerows or shelterbelts. Mature woodland is unlikely to be suitable in itself but may conceal patches of coppice or scrub or have rides or edges where Nightingales might breed. In urban areas, only the least disturbed areas of woodland and scrub (such as railway embankments) might hold the species.

If, through a recce or otherwise, it is certain the square has no habitat likely to hold singing Nightingales, formal visits are not needed to record a zero: just enter any recce as visit A and comment with 'no suitable habitat'. Where any potential habitat is present, please continue with at least the minimum of 2 formal visits. Do not use playback of Nightingale sounds to aid your survey.

Survey visits

Two daytime visits (21 April to 14 May) Squares with any suitable habitat are to be searched on a minimum of two daytime visits, ideally a week or so apart, between 21 April and 14 May. Each

search should cover all suitable Nightingale habitat within the tetrad and should be made in the early morning (from around first light to 08:30).

Recording your data

Record all visits on the recording form, whether or not any Nightingales were found. If you do find Nightingales, please plot them on the Map and enter singing males in the Recording Table, using the visit letter and a sequential number (1, 2, 3 etc) for each territory, according to your assessment of which bird is which. Any contacts with Nightingale should be marked on your survey map and noted on the recording form with six figure map references. Each 'territory' must have at least one record of a male in song. All observations of Nightingales should be mapped: extra records might help show the full extent of each territory and whether the male was paired. Only record Nightingales where you are certain you have identified them correctly: help with identification is available on the BTO website and songs can be listened to on the below xeno canto website.

<https://www.bto.org/develop-your-skills/bird-identification/videos/bto-bird-id-nightingale-and-other-night-singers> .

<https://xeno-canto.org/species/Luscinia-megarhynchos>

Habitat Data

Record habitat data from the list of codes found below and on the recording sheet. These correspond with the habitat codes from the BTO survey in 2012/13 and will allow us to compare squares between the BTO and SOS survey. Pick a * habitat code (First column) to start with to show the habitat from which a male typically sang from and then use the other codes to describe the habitat including any wetlands within 50 m. E.g A11 (*Broad-leaved woodland), F3 (Rural), G8 (Ditch with water <2m wide)

Habitat recording

Please use the following codes in the **Results Table** as a simple classification of each singing male's habitat, and add extra notes in the comments field. The ten codes starred on the list below were those used for the 1999 survey; please enter one of these in the starred habitat column to represent the habitat from which the male most frequently sang. Also enter up to six other codes from the full list (starred or unstarred), sequentially in the numbered columns, to complete a description of each bird's territory. Please be sure to include any wetlands (codes G1–G10) within 50 metres of the territory. Use the additional code T (tall trees) for coppice and scrubby habitats where trees more than 10m tall are also present. Codes can be bracketed where full details cannot be determined (e.g. at night, or site is private/inaccessible).

A11 *Broad-leaved woodland	A15 Broad-l'ved plantation (5–10m tall)	G1 Pond (<50m ²)
A12 *Broad-leaved woodland: active coppice	A25 Coniferous plantation (5–10m tall)	G2 Small waterbody (50–450m ²)
A2 *Coniferous woodland	B2 Chalk downland scrub	G3 Lake/unlined reservoir
A3 *Mixed woodland (10% of each)	B3 Heathland scrub	G4 Lined reservoir
A4 *Carr (broad-leaved, waterlogged)	B4 Young coppice (scrub)	G5 Gravel pit or sand pit
B1 *Scrub (any)	C7 Reed swamp	G6 Stream (<3m wide)
B5 *New plantation (<5m tall)	D1 Dry heath	G7 River (>3m wide)
E *Farmland hedgerow	D2 Wet heath	G8 Ditch with water (<2m wide)
F *Gardens	F1 Urban	G9 Small canal (2–5m wide)
J *Other (please specify)	F2 Suburban	G10 Large canal (>5m wide)
	F3 Rural	T Tall trees present (>10m tall)

Records of other species seen during the survey are welcomed by the SOS.

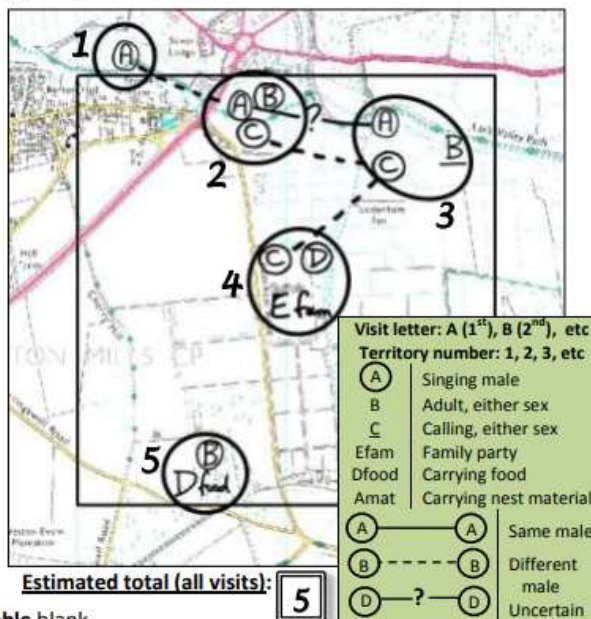
In particular any sightings of Turtle Dove (TD), Hawfinch (HF), Firecrest (FI), Goshawk (GI), Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (LE), Lesser Redpoll (LR), Woodcock (WK), Song Thrush (ST) and Mistle Thrush (M.) could be marked on the survey map or in the comments box.

Records of Deer

Deer populations are increasing in the UK, and this is having a potential significant effect on woodland biodiversity including ground flora, small mammals and bird communities. The rich and complex understorey in woodlands has been increasingly reduced by browsing, often leaving a bare woodland floor and fewer hiding/nesting places for Nightingales. Deer could have an impact on the distribution of Nightingales so if you see any evidence of deer on the survey please put a Y in the table with any comments. The below website has field sign id sheets for UK deer species <https://www.mammal.org.uk/species-hub/full-species-hub/discover-mammals/>

Example completed Map: *(please follow the pattern set by this fictional example)*

- Letters are visit letters, and numbers are reference numbers that you assign to individual territories.
- For each encounter with a Nightingale, put the visit letter as close as possible to the bird's estimated location. Use small, neat writing where space is tight.
- Circle all singing birds and use other activity codes, also dotted and solid lines, as much as possible: use dotted lines where you hear two birds at once.
- Once you have mapped your final visit, ring all the registrations you have assigned to each individual territory (as in the example on the right). Each 'territory' must include at least one record of a male in song. Assign a number to each territory.
- Include territories that cross the edge of the map unless you know they are recorded on another form (see location map for any adjacent sample tetrads).
- Summarise your records for each numbered territory in the **Results Table** overleaf, to indicate the visits (including any nocturnal ones) on which you heard the male sing, and to describe its habitat.
- If you find no Nightingales on any visit, enter zeros in the **Visits Table**, and leave the **Map** and the **Results Table** blank.



Please keep us informed by e-mail of progress especially if you find you are not able to complete your two visits.

After the Survey

Please return your results either by post or by email by June 30th. For email submission, the recording form can be sent as a file and the completed map scanned or photographed.

Please return your completed forms and maps to Matt Twydell by e-mail, (SOS.Surveyofficer@gmail.com) RSPB Wealden Office, Unit 10, Sham Farm Business Units, Eridge Green, Tunbridge Wells, TN39JA