

Witney U3A Nature Group

Witney Country Park: 4th and 19th November 2025

Both of our meetings in November concentrated on improving our bird identification skills in the Country Park. The full list of identified species is at the end of this report.

Early November was un-seasonally warm with a temperature of about 14°C when we made our first visit to WCP.

We were very lucky to have local bird enthusiast and photographer Nic Hallam with us who demonstrated his amazing ear for bird call. Nic has agreed to assist us as an unofficial 'expert' from time to time.

The group used the Merlin app to help identify which birds were about. It was noticeable that not everyone recorded the same birds and it proved almost impossible (with our limited time and equipment) to spot all the birds that were being identified by the Merlin.

Nic identified a number of birds both visually and by sound that we would not have recorded using Merlin alone. This included the Stone Chat, Cettis Warbler, Mistle Thrush and Cormorant.

Our walk took us along the western side of Mill Meadow where our bird list included Dunnock, Robin, Wren, Magpie, Siskin, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Blue Tit, Goldcrest, Wren, Chaffinch, Song Thrush, Chaffinch, Great Tit, Eurasian Tree Creeper, Long Tailed Tit and Blackcap.

There was more bird activity as we crossed the old railway line and followed the eastern boundary of the small southern field to the A40 underpass. Wren, Blackbird, Robin, Great Tit, Long Tailed Tit and Goldcrest and Common Crow were recorded by Merlin. At least 8 Long Tailed Tits and a Chiffchaff were spotted in the trees (Nic).

Just south of the A40 Nic identified the call of three Dunnock and we caught a glimpse of a female Bullfinch.



We walked along the northern corner of Snipe Meadow and down the eastern side of the lake where Merlin (and Nic) picked up Dunnock, Great Tit, Blue Tit, Wren, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Goldfinch and Carrion Crow. Nic identified the call of the Cetti's Warbler from across the lake. A group of Siskin flying overhead and two distant Stone Chat were pointed out by Nic.

Continuing the walk around the southern and western side of the lake we spotted five male and female Mallards and a single Moorhen on the lake, the flash of a passing Cormorant and a small flock of goldfinches. Tantalisingly Merlin picked up the call of a Kingfisher.



Nic and Graham gave a short lesson in Gull identification. The electricity lines provided the perfect perch for a group of approximately 16 black headed gulls which confusingly do not show the black head plumage at this time of year but rather a black spot on the head. One Common Gull and a group of the larger Lesser Black Backed Gulls occupied the same wires.

This was also our last sighting of the three nearly full-grown cygnets which sadly died of bird flu during the following two weeks.

The group left site via the underpass at the northwest corner of the lake after a surprisingly fruitful walk and a list of 33 bird species on the site.

Our second November meeting at Witney Country Park (WCP) coincided with a change to freezing temperatures, rain and northerly winds. Seven members of the group who braved the wintery conditions were joined again by local bird expert and photographer Nic Hallam to complete the circuit of the site begin on the 3rd November. It was great to welcome three new members Chris, Mandy and Errol and returning member Melanie.

We met at the Mill entrance as usual under gloomy skies and a spatter of rain – not very promising for bird spotting it seemed. We walked quickly across Mill Meadow and the old railway embankment. Recent rain had raised the river level and we were lucky that the footpath under the A40 was dry – just! .

The sun came out and the south facing trees and shrubs along the northeast boundary were bathed in sunshine and warmth. We spent some time watching the lovely robin-sized Stone Chat with its nearly black head, distinctive white collar and rusty coloured chest. Nic pointed out Chiffchaff (x2), Goldcrest (multiple), Longtail tit (multiple), blue tit (x1), at least 8 Siskin. Merlin picked up the call of Kingfisher and Goldfinch. Further along a group of Goldfinch – perhaps 5 to 6 were busy on the thistle heads in the Meadow.

Taking the path across the bridge and through to the lake we stopped at at the first viewpoint and watched a group of 5 Cormorant perched on shrubs and trees at the edge of the lake, occasionally darting into the water. The Grey Heron was also spotted by the water edge and numerous black headed gulls on the opposite side of the lake. Nic identified a Kingfisher in flight – perhaps confirming an earlier Merlin identification - and Siskin.

Time was short and the sun had disappeared so we walked fairly rapidly back to the Mill entrance. Nic identified a Meadow Pipit flying overhead which made another new addition to our species list which after our two visits reached 40.



Bird Species Recorded at Witney Country Park 4th and 19th November 2026

Common name	Scientific name	5.11.2025		19.11.2025	
		All Areas		All Areas	
		U3A Type of observation	No. *	U3A Type of observation	No. *
Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	V		M	
Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	V	16	V	20+
Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>	V		V	
Carion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	V			
Common Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	V	1		
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	S		V	2
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	M		V	1
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	V			
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	V	50+		
Eurasian Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	V	2		
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>	V	gp	V	gp
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	V	gp	V	5-6
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	V	gp	V	gp
Great Cormorant (Cormorant)	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	V	1	V	5
Great White Egret	<i>Ardea Alba</i>			V	2
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	S		V	1
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	V	5		
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	V	8+	V	gp
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	V	7		
Mew Gull (Common Gull)	<i>Larus canus</i>	V	1		
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	V	5		
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>			V	1
Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>			V	5
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>			V	3
Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	V	2	V	3
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	S			
Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	S			
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	S			
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	S		M	
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	S			
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	S			
Dunnoek	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	S	3		
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>			S	
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	S			
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	S			
Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	M			
Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>	M			
Grey Wagtail (Pied Wagtail?)	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	M		M	
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	M			
Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>			M	

V = visually confirmed, s = call confirmed (NH), M = Merlin only