

VMFW Farmland Bird Surveys – an introduction for farm surveyors

The Volunteer Monitoring of Farm Wildlife (VMFW) farmland bird surveys are designed to:

- give farmers an understanding of what birds are on their farm and how abundant they are.
- help farmers and volunteers understand more about wildlife within the farmed landscape.
- connect farmers with advice and case studies to assist them in their conservation action planning.

This document gives you a brief overview of the tasks and commitment needed to carry out one of our surveys. If you join our team as a farm surveyor, you will be helping farmers and wildlife in a hands-on way. Hopefully, you will also really enjoy the experience and may learn new skills.

How will I be expected to carry out the survey?

The survey season runs from **1st April to 30th June**. Within this time period, we require **two survey visits** to be carried out. In addition, you need to make an initial orientation visit to the farm to meet the farmer and agree a survey route. This can often be carried out before 1st April, and in some circumstances, done virtually.

We allocate you to a survey as close to your home as we can – we aim for this to be no further than 25 miles away. You will be expected to contact the farmer to arrange a suitable time for your initial visit. They will be expecting you to make contact, so should be very pleased to hear from you!

Step 1 - Initial farm visit

In the first visit to the farm, you will meet the farmer and discuss a suitable route for the survey. You will be given guidance on how to do this.

You will also work through a Health & Safety checklist with the farmer to identify any specific hazards. For example, areas where farm machinery is in operation, or certain fields that should be avoided because of livestock or boggy ground. Each farm is unique, so this is important for your safety and wellbeing.

It is also a good idea to walk your proposed survey route, so that you can identify any access issues, such as locked gates, and discuss these with the farmer. You can also test the length of the route and adjust it if necessary.

Step 2 - Survey visits 1 and 2

The survey method we use is based around a Timed Species Count. Your survey visits should be started before 10 am and should last no longer than 2 hours.

You will be provided with detailed instructions on the survey method, plus a recording form and map of the farm boundary for recording the birds you see or hear as you walk the survey route.

Step 3 - Submitting your data

After each survey visit in the field, you will be required to enter your data into BirdTrack, an online database system. Again, you will receive full instructions on how to do this.

We do not normally require you to submit your field maps, but we do ask you to retain them in case we need to request them from you, for record verification purposes.

If you would like us to enter your survey results into BirdTrack, we can do that for you if you send us images of your maps and recording forms by email. So don't be put off by the technology!

Commitment to the farmer and our commitment to you

Our reputation as a trusted organisation is very important to the work that we do, and we need to maintain a high level of professionalism and good communication with the farmers who engage with us. VMFW is providing a service to your farmer, and we need to do everything possible to make sure that we deliver.

If you continue with your application and sign up to undertake a survey, please make sure you are prepared to complete it and submit your data by the deadline.

Of course, we know circumstances can change, but **if you think you may not be able to do the survey, or have to withdraw during the season, please let us know at the earliest opportunity.** That way, we can ensure that we don't let the farmer down.

We will aim to make sure you:

- feel welcomed, appreciated, and respected as a volunteer.
- have a good understanding of what VMFW is and what its aims are.
- know what is expected of you, and who to speak to for support and advice.
- have the chance to learn new skills and be supported to do this.
- understand the personal safety aspects of undertaking surveys with us.
- are reimbursed for any travel expenses you wish to claim.

We ask that you:

- read all the instructions we give you carefully and endeavour to follow the survey method accurately.
- let us know at soon as possible if you have any problems relating to your availability or ability to carry out and fully complete the survey/s you undertake.
- look out for communications from us and respond to any action requests.
- undertake your volunteering with us in line with our [VMFW Code of Conduct](#).

Thank you for reading this. We look forward to getting you out on a farm soon!