

**St Mary's Lands  
Warwick Racecourse  
Warwick  
CV34 6HW**

**Monitoring of Ground Nesting Birds  
During April and June 2021**

**September 2021**

**FINAL**

**Produced by**  
*ASW Ecology Ltd. and*  
*Ecology and Land*  
*Management For Plincke*  
**Landscape Ltd.** on behalf of  
**Warwick Council**



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# MONITORING OF GROUND NESTING BIRDS

ST MARY'S LANDS,  
WARWICK, WARWICKSHIRE



Commissioned by: Ecology & Land Management for Plincke Landscape Ltd. on behalf of **Warwick Council**.

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**ASW Ecology Ltd**

Office/Mobile: 07710 150590

London Euston Woburn Place, 16 Upper Woburn Place, London WC1H 0BS

E-mail: [andrew@aswecology.co.uk](mailto:andrew@aswecology.co.uk) Website: [www.aswecology.co.uk](http://www.aswecology.co.uk)

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Overall, a total of 11 occupied skylark territories were proven to be present during the 2021 breeding season at St Mary's Lands, along with 2 meadow pipit breeding territories.
2. 6 of the 11 skylark breeding territories were within the fenced off ground nesting bird protection enclosure whilst both meadow pipit breeding territories were within the enclosure.
3. During this survey, it was clear that ground nesting birds at Lammas Field, were still being disturbed by dog walkers, where present outside of the fenced off breeding bird enclosure.
4. The fenced off enclosure is considered to be a success, based on these updated nesting bird results, and should be expanded for 2022 onwards.
5. The reason why more skylark territories were not within the enclosure is that the fenced off area is likely to be due to it not being large enough in size. If the enclosure can be expanded strategically to some degree, then this is likely to encapsulate further skylark territories.
6. Bird monitoring is recommended for future years since it will still need to be investigated if the above measures work or not, in protecting the ground nesting birds present.
7. Long term population trends in ground nesting birds would be invaluable at St Mary's Lands, given the very significant historic decline in skylark number over the decades at this site.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- Monitoring of ground nesting birds was undertaken at Lammas Field, St Mary's Lands, Warwick, Warwickshire, during Spring and Summer 2021, for the client: Plincke Landscape Ltd for Warwick Council.
- This updated bird survey was required due to the need to formally assess the new fenced off enclosure to protect ground nesting birds, mainly the skylark population, at Lammas Field.
- The main method used for this updated bird survey, as well as the full results and the recommendations can be found within this report.
- Both this bird survey and the report were undertaken and compiled by Mr Andrew S. Waller, Consultant Ecologist, ASW Ecology Ltd.
- Mr Andrew S. Waller MSc BSc (Hons) MCIEEM, Director of ASW Ecology Ltd - has been a Consultant Ecologist since 1997 and has very extensive experience of wildlife and knowledge of protected wildlife species. He has been studying wildlife in general for 40 years and is a Full Member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) and meets the requirements of being a Suitably Qualified Ecologist.

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## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Monitoring of Ground Nesting Birds Method**

- During April and June 2021, a total of two morning-based bird survey visits were undertaken at Lammas Field at St Mary's Lands, with all bird species identified by sight or sound, by an experienced consultant ornithologist.
- The bird survey visits were undertaken on the following dates (with the weather conditions stated): 20/4/2021 (dry, mild, calm and clear) and 9/6/2021 (dry, warm, light breeze, sunny, clear).
- A slow standard walk of the stated site was undertaken, with all fenced boundaries and adjacent land walked, so that the total number of ground nesting birds could be detected on each survey visit.
- The presence of singing male skylarks and meadow pipits plus where they were located in their occupied territories were noted carefully, and follows the method outlined for territory mapping in Bibby et al, 2005.
- Where any bird nests or breeding pairs for those species were recorded, these would also be plotted on the maps for each visit, as well as the above stated bird contacts and singing males.

### **2.2 Constraints**

- The main constraint to the monitoring survey is that this follow-up investigation
- was not be undertaken over the total Spring/Summer period. However, visits were conducted to ensure the most suitable time of year for breeding ground nesting birds were observed.

- This survey was though undertaken to determine breeding bird status and the number of active territories at the application site, especially in regards to the
- skylarks and to meadow pipits. The survey was indeed conducted when birds were most active and all breeding territories would have been encountered during the appropriate visits at this peak time.

- As always though, without taking into account any further active surveying or
- monitoring, this study can only provide information on the presence of birds at this application site during the specific survey period.

### 3. MONITORING OF GROUND NESTING BIRDS RESULTS

#### 3.1 Bird survey visits 1-2

TABLE A – Codes used below are in Map A at the end of this report

BIRD SPECIES/CODE	VISIT 1 – 20/4/2021	VISIT 2 – 9/6/2021
<b>Skylark (S.)</b>	<p>Within enclosure: 5 singing males</p> <p>Outside of enclosure: 5 singing males</p> <p>Total: 10 singing males</p>	<p>Within enclosure: 6 singing males</p> <p>Outside of enclosure: 4 singing males</p> <p>Total: 10 singing males</p>
<b>Meadow pipit (MP)</b>	<p>Within enclosure: 1 pair foraging at western boundary of enclosure, adjacent to model aircraft area</p> <p>Outside of enclosure: 0 singing males</p> <p>Total: 1 pair</p>	<p>Within enclosure: 1 singing male at northern fence line of enclosure and later at same spot with food in beak</p> <p>Outside of enclosure: 0 singing males</p> <p>Total: 1 singing male</p>

TABLE B - Breeding territories during 2021 monitoring survey.

Species	Breeding territories within fenced off area	Breeding territories outside fenced off area
<i>Skylark</i>	6	5
<i>Meadow Pipit</i>	2	0

TABLE C - Breeding territories compared to previous monitoring surveys.

Species	1960s	2016*	2019	2021
<i>Skylark</i>	60-70	8+	8	11
<i>Meadow Pipit</i>	Not known	2-4	3	2

\* West Midlands Bird Club

Tables B and C - Show results of breeding territories in 2021 and historically



## 4. CONCLUSIONS

### 4.1 Significance of the ground nesting bird monitoring results

- In summary, a total of 11 occupied skylark territories were proven to be present during the 2021 breeding season at St Mary's Lands, along with 2 meadow pipit breeding territories.

- 6 of the 11 skylark breeding territories were within the fenced off ground nesting bird protection enclosure whilst both meadow pipit breeding territories were within the enclosure.

- During this survey, it was clear that ground nesting birds at Lammas Field, were still being disturbed by dog walkers, where present outside of the fenced off breeding bird enclosure.

- The reason why more skylark territories were not within the enclosure is unclear but is it possibly due to the fenced off area not being large enough in size. If the enclosure can be expanded strategically to some degree, then this is likely to encapsulate further skylark territories.

- A total of 8 occupied skylark territories were proven to be present during the 2019 breeding season at Lammas Field, along with 3 meadow pipit occupied territories. The 2021 bird breeding survey has shown that skylark numbers have been proven to be slightly higher and it is hoped that this trend will continue.

- The fact that skylark numbers have declined hugely at Lammas Field over the decades is a major concern, with 60-70 pairs known to be present in the 1960s (pers. comm, ornithologist, Phil Robbins). This fully justifies, to all user groups, the continuation of the fenced off enclosure during the breeding bird season.

- Based on the single year trial, bird nesting territories have shown a small increase after many years of decline. This should be considered a cautious success. It is therefore recommended that the temporary barriers are re-instated and, where possible, expanded for subsequent years to establish whether the population decline can be reverse on a sustainable basis. Due to the evidence of climate change potentially affecting the vegetation structure at St Mary's Lands further consideration should also be given to vegetation management to ensure the habitat remains suitable for breeding skylark throughout the breeding season.

## **4.2 Summary of the legal protection of birds in the UK (Simplified summary only of the legislation – please see other texts for full details)**

### **4.2.1 THE LEGAL PROTECTION OF BIRDS IN ENGLAND AND WALES**

All birds have the following legal protection (although there are exceptions for game birds, some waterfowl and designated pest species). This is listed below.

All birds, their eggs and nests are protected by law under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). It is an offence to kill, injure or take any wild bird, or to take or destroy their eggs. It is also illegal to take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built (RSPB, 2001). No provisions can be made for the destruction of occupied bird nests, eggs, or young for development purposes, and no licences are available for this purpose.

Certain rare and/or vulnerable bird species such red kite, hobby, peregrine falcon, barn owl, kingfisher and black redstart are specially protected under Schedule 1, and have the following additional legal protection:

- It is an offence to intentionally (or recklessly, in England and Wales only) disturb any wild bird listed on Schedule 1 whilst it is nest building or is at (or near) a nest with eggs or young; or disturb the dependent young of such a bird.

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Expanded protection of ground nesting birds at Lammas Field

- It is again strongly recommended that during the entire skylark breeding season period eg March to late August, that the key part of Lammas Field, where the skylarks and meadow pipits are still nesting, is fenced off completely again with appropriate temporary fencing.

- **It is further recommended that the protected fenced off area is expanded to allow for further breeding skylark territories to be protected in the breeding season, mainly to the North, West and SW of the existing protected area (see Appendix 4 for proposed additional areas).**

- **This may mean that new public consultation is needed but this expansion will only be minor in regards to the additional area to be protected. Such expanded protection will permit further skylarks' pairs to be protected from dog walkers during the breeding season.**

- The exact date for this fencing then to be carefully removed after the end of the nesting season for skylarks will depend on when the final broods are considered to be fully fledged.

- Such fenced off protected zones will again allow ground nesting bird species such as skylark and meadow pipit to breed normally within Lammas Field, with no disturbance from dogs.

- There must be high quality signage again at regular intervals around the fencing perimeter, explaining to the general public, why such fencing is needed, which bird species are being protected and that all dog walkers must keep out of the fenced area at all times.

- It will be vital that such fences are maintained at all times by Warwick District Council, that any damage to fencing is repaired promptly and that targeted monitoring is allowed to ensure that dog walkers are keeping out of the fenced protection zone for birds.

- The stated fencing will allow skylarks to rear two to three broods at the site, which are required to maintain population levels.

- **Further bird monitoring should be permitted in future years of the protected enclosure to allow for the long term assessment of trends in the skylark and meadow pipits breeding territories and if any further modifications are required.**

## 6. REFERENCES

- (1) Bibby, C.J., Burgess, N.D., Hill, D.A., Mustoe, S.H. (2005) Bird Census Techniques. Elsevier Academic Press, UK. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.
- (2) Carter, I. (2001) The Red Kite. Arlequin Press, Essex.
- (3) RSPB (2001) Wild Birds and the Law. RSPB, Sandy. UK.
- (4) Eaton, M. et al (2015) Birds of Conservation Concern 4. British Birds 108. Pages 708-746. UK.
- (5) Ruddock, M. & Whitfield, D.P. (2007) A Review of Disturbance Distances in Selected Bird Species. Scottish Natural Heritage.
- (6) Treweek, J. (1999) Ecological Impact Assessment. Blackwell Science Ltd, UK.

## **APPENDIX 1:**

### **Photographs A-C**



#### **Photograph A**

Lammas Field – showing fenced off enclosure protecting breeding skylarks and meadow pipits from human disturbance



**Photograph B**

The fenced off bird protection area can be expanded to the south-west towards the wetland area fenceline, which will take in further skylark territories



**Photograph C**

The fenced off bird protection area can also be expanded to the West so it takes in further grassland areas, where additional skylark territories were present



## APPENDIX 2:

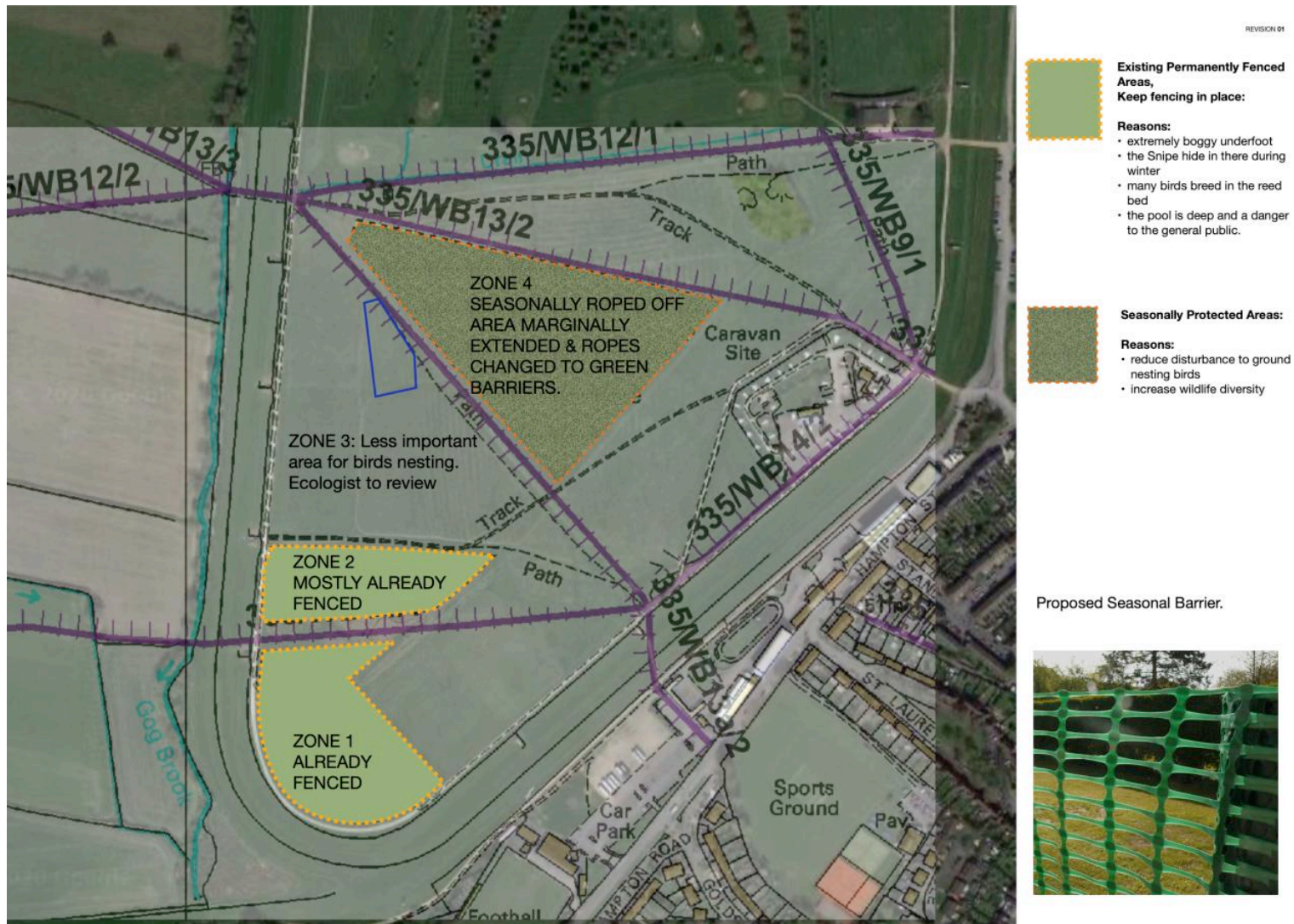
### Map A – Breeding bird territory summary map for skylarks and meadow pipits at Lammas Field

**Note** – Please find below the breeding bird survey map for the stated survey area. This shows a summary of the singing male registrations in occupied territories as well as active pairs recorded during the visits. The bird species were given a breeding status, using the Breeding Bird Survey codes by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) – codes and species names shown in Table A in Chapter 3 of this bird survey report.

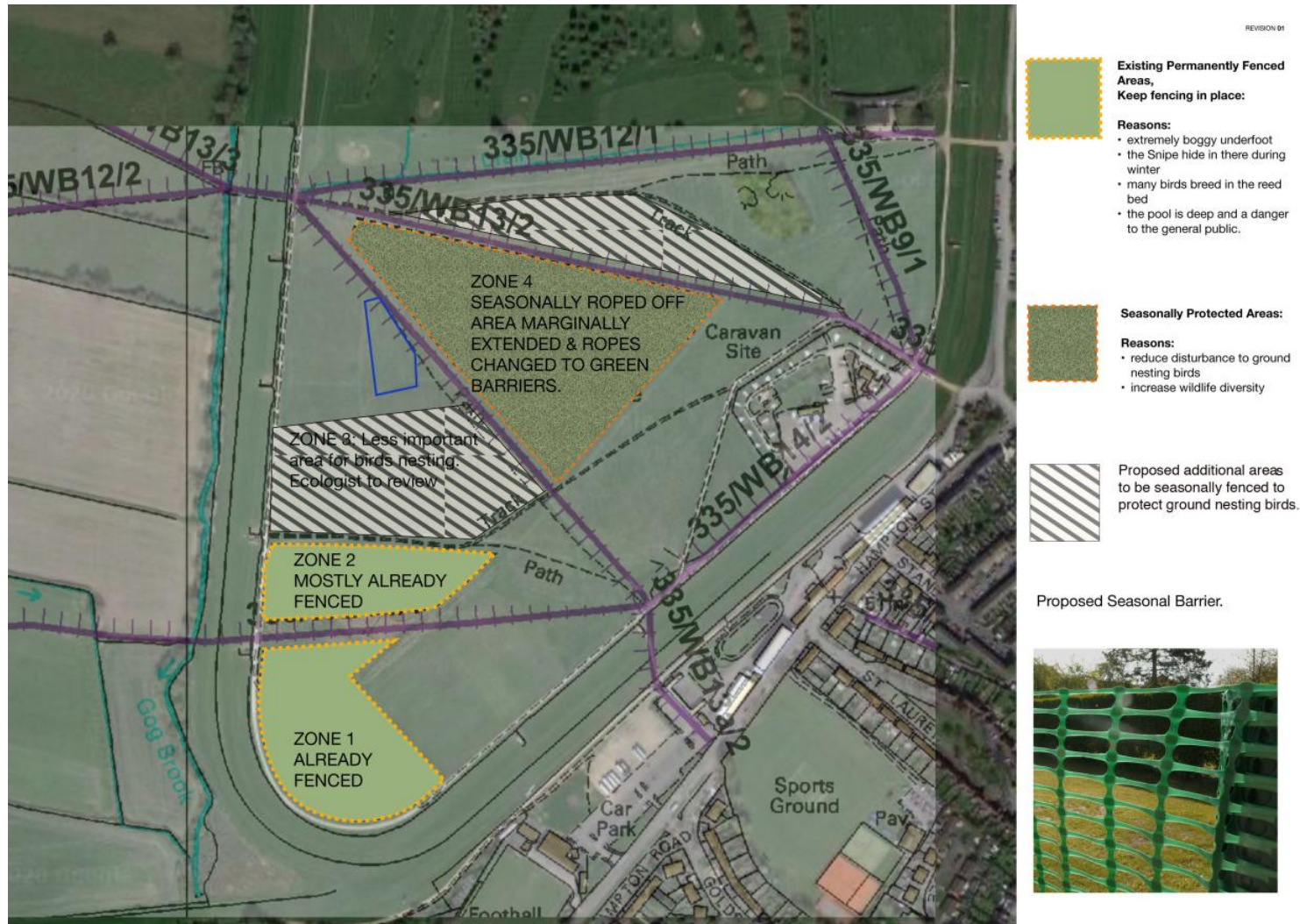




## APPENDIX 3: PLAN OF EXISTING SEASONALLY FENCED OFF AREA



## APPENDIX 4: PROPOSED ADDITIONAL SEASONALLY FENCED OFF AREAS





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Ecology and Land Management works towards the policy of 'best practice' advocated by the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM), the Chartered Landscape Institute, the Chartered Institute for the Environment as well as a number of specialist organisations working towards the conservation of protected species.

For more details please contact:

Henriette Westergaard, Ecology & Land Management,  
6 Homefield Road, Old Coulsdon, Surrey CR5 1ES Tel/Fax:  
01737 559472

M: 07785534050

e: [hw@ecologyandlandmanagement.co.uk](mailto:hw@ecologyandlandmanagement.co.uk)

[www.ecologyandlandmanagement.co.uk](http://www.ecologyandlandmanagement.co.uk)