REPORT ON A BREEDING BIRD SURVEY AT BIRCH FARM, HOLLIN LANE, STYAL, CHESHIRE AND PROPOSALS TO INCORPORATE ROOSTING FEATURES BY BATS AND BARN OWLS

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 A breeding bird survey of a stretch of hedgerow was requested at Birch Farm, Hollin Lane, Styal, Cheshire.

1.2 A bat and barn owl survey had previously been conducted on site in November 2007. No evidence of bat usage was found during the survey but there was evidence of previous low key historical barn owl roosting. A report to this effect was issued in November 2007.

1.3 This second report covers further visits to the site in the spring of 2009 to check on the status of the buildings regarding bats and barn owls but primarily to assess the nature of bird nesting in the buildings and areas of hedgerow earmarked for removal to make way for an access road.

1.4 Background information on bats and barn owls provided in the November 2007 report is not included in this report to avoid repetition but new background information on birds in general has been provided.

Aims of the survey

1.5 To check for breeding bird activity along a stretch of hedgerow earmarked for removal to make way for an access road.

1.6 To check for breeding bird activity within the barns.

1.7 To provide recommendations on any further actions necessary as a result of the survey findings.

1.8 Additionally to comply with Planning Conditions recommendations were requested for the details of bat and barn owl roosting features to be incorporated into the developed site.

Surveyor details

1.9 The survey was conducted by Mike Freeman. He is a professional wildlife consultant specialising in bats, badgers and birds. He has been a licensed bat worker since 1984 and a licensed bat worker trainer since 1989. He has been chairman of the Cheshire Bat Group since its formation in 1986 and is a voluntary Bat Warden for Natural England. He is an Associate member of the Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (AIEEM).

2.0 LEGAL PROTECTION FOR BIRDS

2.1 All species of wild bird, their nests and eggs are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (WCA) 1981 (as amended) and, amongst other things, it is an offence to, with certain exceptions, intentionally or recklessly:

- Kill, injure or take any wild bird
- Take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built
- Take or destroy the egg of any wild bird

2.2 Additionally Schedule 1 Part 1 of the WCA lists 79 bird species that receive special attention. These birds are protected by special penalties AT ALL TIMES and it is an offence to disturb any wild bird listed on Schedule 1 whilst it is nest building, or at a nest containing eggs or young, or disturb the dependant young of such a bird.

3.0 BIRD SPECIES PRIORITIES

3.1 Using the latest population figures, "Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC), produced in 1996 by a consortium of the UK's leading non-governmental bird conservation organisations, identified the species in greatest need of help, depending on their population trends or rarity. This was reviewed and updated in 2002.

3.2 The 247 species in BoCC are prioritised into the Red List (40 species of high conservation concern), the Amber List (121 species of medium conservation concern) and the Green List (86 species). Red List species are globally threatened or in rapid decline in the UK currently or historically. Amber List species are in moderate decline, rare, localised, internationally important or of an unfavourable conservation status in Europe.

3.3 The UK Red and Amber Lists are not only influenced by the status of birds in the UK, but also by their status at continental (European) and global scales.

3.4 One further species prioritisation process is relevant – the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). In its BAP, the UK Government has included 26 species of breeding birds which are either globally threatened or which are in steep decline. All 26 BAP species are also on the Red List of BoCC.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

4.1 The site was visited on two occasions.

4.2 The affected hedgerow was watched for signs of nesting birds and the buildings were inspected internally and externally for evidence of bird nesting and any subsequent bat/barn owl activity since the visit in November 2007.

4.3 Binoculars and telescope were used for watching the hedgerow and a powerful hand lamp and fibre optic endoscope were used in the buildings as aids.

4.4 All visits were made during daylight hours.

5.0 TIMING OF THE SURVEY

5.1 Visits were made to the site on the 18th and 20th May 2009.

5.2 The weather on the 18th May was dominated by frequent heavy showers and a temperature of 14° C. The weather on the 20th May was sunny, dry but cool.

6.0 LIMITATIONS OF THE SURVEY

6.1 Due to a change in the timings for the commencement of works being put back the breeding bird survey was stopped as the exact dates for the commencement were not known. Obviously a breeding bird survey is only valid for a short period of time as nests become vacant and new ones built throughout the whole nesting period.

7.0 RESULTS

Hedge Line



7.1 A Song Thrush *(Turdus philomelos)* was sitting on eggs in a nest within the hedge line proposed for removal on 18th and 20th May.

7.2 This was the only nest found in the affected stretch of hedge line at the time.

7.3 However, Wren *(Troglodytes troglodytes)*, Blackbird *(Turdus merula)* and Robin *(Erithacus rubecula)* were all heard regularly singing close to or in the hedgerow. Alarm calls of both Blackbird and Song Thrush were heard when approached by Jays *(Garrulus glandarius)* around the hedgerow.

7.4 House Sparrows *(Passer domesticus)* were often seen on the hedge but unlikely to be nesting in the hedge as they prefer buildings.

Buildings

7.5 No further evidence of barn owl or bat roosting was found during the daytime search on the 18th May.

7.6 Barn Swallows *(Hirundo rustica)* were building nests in the barns.

7.7 A Pied Wagtail *(Motacilla alba)* was seen carrying nesting material on the roof of the single storey barn.

7.8 A Blackbird was singing on the barn roof on 18th May and gave alarm call.

Other areas around site

7.9 Jackdaw *(Corvus monedula)*, Jays, Woodpigeons *(Columba palumbus)*, were seen regularly around the site.

7.10 Blackbird, Robin and Wren were singling around the lime trees at the end of the open barn on 20th May.





7.11 A Great Tit *(Parus major)* was singing in the shrubs at the back of barns.



7.12 Greenfinches *(Carduelis chloris)* were heard quiet regularly.

7.13 There are a number of isolated dead trees in the field where the access road is to be made. Some of these have a number of cavities. A Great Spotted Woodpecker *(Dendrocopos major)* was seen and heard around the site.



Other items of note

7.14 A fresh badger *(Meles meles)* dung pit was found at the back of the barns.





7.15 A large mammal hole was found under a wooden shed that adjoins the back of the open barn. This shed could not be examined further as it lay in private grounds. No evidence of a badger using it was found e.g. no hair, paw prints etc. but it could be used occasionally particularly as a fresh dung pit was found.





8.0 CONCLUSIONS

8.1 At the time of the survey bird nesting was taking place both in the hedgerows and buildings.

8.2 Incubation for a Song Thrush is on average 13-14 days with another average 13 days fledging period. As it was 20th May when the bird was sitting on eggs in the hedgerow this nest should now be vacant.

8.3 However, other birds may have built nests since as we are still in the breeding season. Many common birds are double or treble brooded.

8.4 The incubation for Barn Swallows is 11-23 days. They may be double or even treble brooded.

8.5 There was no evidence found to suggest current bat or barn owl roosting in the buildings.

8.6 There may be some badger activity on site and a check needs to be made of the hole under the wooden shed of the adjacent gardens.

9.0 IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 If work is to commence on site before 31st August then the bird survey may have to be repeated as the situation will have already changed since this survey was conducted.

9.2 In view of this it is recommended that work does not commence until after that date.

9.3 The large mammal hole under the shed adjoining the rear of the large open fronted barn needs to be checked for evidence of use by badgers. Badgers are protected by law and it is illegal to disturb a badger sett without a licence. Disturbance could mean working in close proximity of the sett without physically damaging it. A licence will be required if heavy plant is used within 30 metres of a sett, or lighter plant within 20 metres or hand tools within 10 metres. Of course the hole may not be used by badgers but this needs to be confirmed.

FEATURES TO BE INCORPORATED INTO THE SCHEME SUITABLE FOR USE BY ROOSTING BATS AND BARN OWLS

Barn Owls

9.4 Barn owl boxes can be provided on or within buildings, on trees or on poles.

9.5 If there is a suitable large building where an owl can enter at least 3 metres above ground then this is the best place for a box.

9.6 Mounting a box on the outside gable end of a building is an option (albeit an inferior one).

9.7 If there are no suitable buildings then a tree box is the next best option.

9.8 Many different designs of tree boxes from upright rectangular boxes to triangular ones are commonly used.

9.9 One of the main considerations should be the position of the box entrance away from prevailing winds but facing open land. Isolated field trees, hedgerow trees or woodland edge ones are perhaps the best.

9.10 Ideally boxes should be placed in substantial trees. The tree should have at least one branch near the base of the box not too far away from the entrance hole.

9.11 Well designed triangular boxes with substantial landing ledges are perhaps the most regularly used type of box.

9.12 I would suggest that at least 2 boxes are located around the site depending how many suitable trees are available.

9.13 Pole boxes are the least preferred option. Their only advantage is that they can be provided anywhere and are not dependant on suitable buildings or trees.

9.14 Further information about the design and siting of barn owl boxes can be obtained from the Barn Owl Trust at www.barnowltrust.org.uk.

Bats

9.15 Whilst no evidence has been found to suggest bats roost in any of the buildings on site there are a number of ways in which the newly developed site could provide attractive roosting sites.

9.16 For crevice dwelling bats like pipistrelles purpose made roost sites e.g. Schwegler Bat Tubes or Ibstock bat boxes could be built into cavity walls of the developed buildings particularly at the gable ends.

9.17 Schwegler N27 bat boxes can be fitted flush into brick walls or the Schwegler 1FQ or 1FW flat boxes can be fixed onto the exterior of walls (again preferably gable ends).

9.18 Schwegler bat boxes can be hung on trees to provide additional roost site.

9.19 Example of the above bat boxes can be seen on www.alanaecology.com or visit the Bat Conservation Trust website at www.bats.org.uk .

9.20 Obviously the exact selection and positioning of barn owl and bat roosting boxes need to be discussed with the architect and developer but hopefully this gives a starting point for discussion.

9.21 During development works, where present, all ridge tiles and roof slates should be removed carefully by hand looking for bats potentially roosting underneath.

9.22 In the unlikely event that bats are found during building operations work must cease immediately in that area, the bats left alone and a bat consultant contacted for advice.

9.23 Bats should not be handled on health and safety grounds. If this is absolutely unavoidable thick leather gloves should be worn.