



# Kent Ornithological Society

## 2023 Nightingale Survey – Instructions

This survey aims to establish just how important the county of Kent is for Nightingales, and how distribution may have changed since the BTO survey in 2012/13, by allocating 1km squares to survey for Nightingales. These squares are randomly selected from those with records from recent years, ones that held Nightingales at the time of the last BTO survey or from areas with suitable habitat that may potentially hold Nightingales.

### Preparing for the survey

When you volunteered 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 undergrowth that is dense between the ground and three or four feet, but this may be met by a wide range of habitat types, 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 that 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 (see Survey visits).

## Survey visits

Two daytime visits are required between 27 April and 14 May, ideally a week or more apart, with the first visit during the first seven days. More frequent visits will be made by a small team of experienced surveyors to cover certain Nightingale “hotspots”.

Squares with any suitable habitat should be searched from first light to 08.30, covering all suitable Nightingale habitat within the square. It is recommended that on the second visit the route followed is reversed, to enable as much of the square as possible to be searched soon after first light.

### **Do not use playback of Nightingale sounds to aid your survey.**

Depending on the weather leading up to the survey, and the pattern of bird arrivals, the start of the survey period may be brought forward by a week, or the finish extended by a week, or both. This will be communicated shortly before and/or during the survey period so please keep an eye on email or the KOS website.

If you would like to make additional visits to your square/s, that is fine, but please ensure that you record all visits in detail, as set out below. An alternative way of contributing more is to offer to cover more squares!

## Recording your data

Record all dates and times of visits as requested on the recording form, whether or not any Nightingales were found. If you do find Nightingales, please plot them on the survey map and enter the number of singing males on the recording form, using the visit letter (**A** or **B**) and a sequential number (**1, 2, 3** etc) for each territory, according to your assessment of which bird is which. Please use six figure map references e.g. TR 095595 (see [here](#)) to describe the location of **each bird**. Each subsequently assigned ‘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:-

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

Songs can be listened to on the xeno-canto website:-

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

## Habitat Data

Record habitat data from the list of codes in the table below. These are the standard BTO habitat codes; for more information, please look at the full listing on the BBS habitat form (see [here](#)) together with more detailed guidance (see [here](#)). The ten codes starred correspond with the habitat codes from the BTO survey in 2012/13 and will allow comparison of squares between the BTO and KOS surveys. Pick one \*Habitat code (first column) to show the habitat from which a male typically sang and enter that in the Habitat box on the recording form. Optionally, record additional codes (starred or unstarred) to describe the habitat in more detail, including any wetlands within 50 m, in

the Comments box. For example - A12 (\*Broad-leaved woodland – active coppice) in Habitat and F3 (Rural), G8 (Ditch with water <2m wide) in Comments.

Habitat Code	Habitat	Habitat Code	Habitat	Habitat Code	Habitat
A11	*Broad-leaved woodland	A15	Broad-leaved plantation (5-10m)	G1	Pond (<50m <sup>2</sup> )
A12	*Broad-leaved woodland – active coppice	A25	Coniferous plantation (5-10m)	G2	Small waterbody (50-450m <sup>2</sup> )
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	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 bird species seen during the survey (optional)

Although the Nightingale is the target species, the survey provides an opportunity to gather useful records of other scarce (largely woodland) species and this may provide interest for observers in squares without Nightingales. In particular, any records of Nightjar (NJ), Turtle Dove (TD), Woodcock (WK), Owls (BO, LO, LE, TO), Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (LS), Marsh Tit (MT), Grasshopper Warbler (GH), Spotted Flycatcher (SF), Tree Pipit (TP), Hawfinch (HF) and Lesser Redpoll (LR), could be marked on the survey map or in the Comments box. In squares where farmland forms a major part of the habitat it may be tempting to record scarce farmland species (such records would never be refused!) but please focus effort on covering likely Nightingale habitat only.

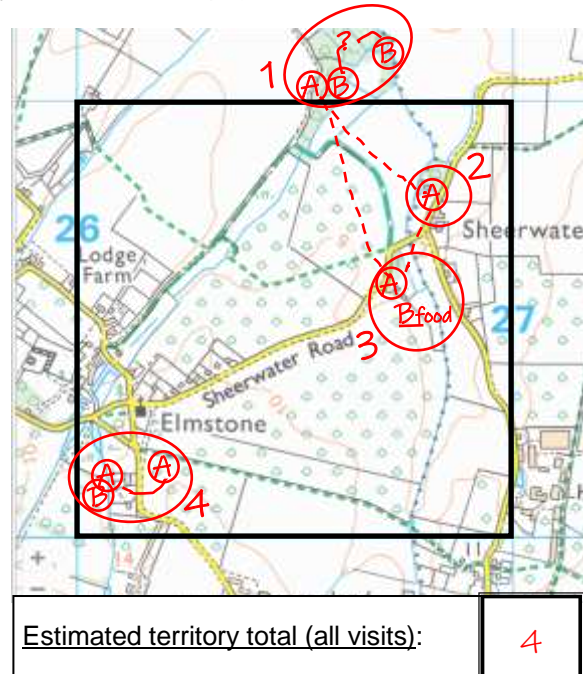
## Records of Deer / Wild Boar / Other Large Grazers

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 are not yet a major problem in Kent, with native Red and Roe Deer and introduced species, particularly Muntjac, either absent or scarce, although Fallow Deer widely occur. There are also increasing numbers of Wild Boar and large grazers introduced for conservation purposes. As the feeding habits of these large mammals could have an impact on the distribution of Nightingales, if you see any evidence of them on the survey,

please put a Y in the table with any comments and species if identified. The following 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 denote visits (A, B, and continue if more are made); and numbers (1, 2, 3 etc) denote assigned individual territories.
- For each encounter with a Nightingale, put the visit letter as close as possible to the bird's estimated position. 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 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 squares).
- Record details of each bird in the Visits section and give totals of birds and territories in the Summary of Results.
- If you find no Nightingales on any visit, enter zeros in the Visits section, and leave the Map and the Summary of Results blank.



Mapping codes			
Ⓐ	Singing male	Amat	Carrying nest material
Ⓑ	Adult calling, either sex	Bfood	Carrying food
A	Adult seen, either sex	Bfam	Family party
Ⓐ	—————	Ⓐ	Same male
Ⓐ	- - - - -	Ⓐ	Different male
Ⓐ	—— ? ——	Ⓐ	Uncertain

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: -

Nicole Khan, RSPB Swale Office, John Roberts Business Park, Pean Hill, Whitstable CT5 3BJ or scanned copies may be emailed to [nicole.khan@rspb.org.uk](mailto:nicole.khan@rspb.org.uk)