



Field Ornithology

At a glance...

Assessed Customised Provision

Delivery Method: Theory and Practical

Introduction

This course will give you practical skills in identifying British birds out in the field. It will provide you with a certificate of ornithological quality to show that you have practical ornithological skills that may be applied in a professional environment.

Overview in brief

One of the main complaints by modern conservation & ecological employers is that candidates have excellent lab and computer skills – but lack even the most basic understanding of field identification.

Unless you are entering into modelling or straight academia, knowing what species you are looking at is a critically important skill for field scientists & land managers.

This course covers how to identify British birds by sight and sound, how to carry out a range of field surveys safely, that are appropriate to the species and conditions

The finer details

This course aims to provide structural support and a knowledge base, along with practical field experience to students and conservationists looking to improve their ornithology and achieve the capability to get a high standard of ornithological field skills. By no means is this course easy, or a one-way ticket to mastering field ornithology – but through detailed training and by outlining how students can utilise the available resources and techniques from the instructors, getting to a high ornithological standard is possible within the one year timeframe of this course.

It is simply not possible to teach field ornithology in a classroom, nor through rote learning. Students are expected to spend time outside of the sessions outside, in nature, absorbing as much information about the birds they see as they can. Whilst doing this students can communicate with one another through a support network to encourage and build each other's knowledge base as they all adapt and become accustomed to fieldwork.





Repeated exposure to new species, habitats and environments constantly pushes students to adapt and learn to see and hear what they are surrounded by. All quarterly sessions begin with an exam on bird ID and song/calls, to determine both what the base level of understanding and to determine what has been learned from previous sessions should this not be the first. At the end of the fourth session, a written and field test is carried out to determine whether students have reached a level sufficiently good enough to pass the course. Should a student fail the final exam they can retake it in three months without charge.

We at The Habitat People believe in equal opportunities, and whilst conservation is sadly often a rich person's profession, annually we have three places available at a significantly reduced price to allow students who would otherwise be unable to take part the chance to learn.

Set over one four day and several three-day sessions, this course looks in detail through all British taxa at the time appropriate to survey them:

Spring: Day 1 – Initial test, survey techniques, breaking down how to approach identifying a bird in the field, good field practice & a beginners guide to learning bird calls & songs quickly.

Day 2: - Classroom session on species present in the spring & on migration out of Britain, and what to look for. Afternoon field session on farmland birdlife, brief field test to determine existing survey capability.

Day 3: Field day learning to identify waders & ducks, discussing coastal and freshwater surveys. Assignments for each student are given out for the next three months learning away from the classroom. These are to study a specific habitat and learn the birds and their calls associated with them.

Summer: Day 1 – Safe fieldwork procedure, and ensuring surveys are done safely for both the surveyor and the species being surveyed. We also discuss shape, the relevance of surrounding habitat and how to ID cryptic species such as warblers, gulls, terns and pipits.

Day 2: This session is spent at the Buller's of Buchan seabird colony, identifying different coastal species and ages, along with farmland/marginal habitat species. Discussions on nest monitoring & techniques. This day aims to make aging gulls accessible!

Day 3: This field day focusses on grassland and woodland species, particularly tricky groups such as warblers, pipits and birds of prey. Students receive their next assignment habitats & species to learn, as well as a one-to-one field assessment with advice on how to improve technique.

Day 4 – Brief classroom session outlining safe nest searching and monitoring procedure, and how to carry out breeding bird surveys. Afternoon is spent in deciduous woodland learning about garden and forest species & habitat preferences.



Autumn: Day 1 – Progress assessment, migratory birds, the challenge of rarities and twitching, lecture on species changes in autumn



Day 2 – Field day at wetlands & coastal farmlands learning to learn identify species present in these habitats. Short competition to ID the most species in a time period!

Day 3 – Field day learning to identify features of a habitat that increase available habitat for birds and field ID of migrant species.

Winter: Day 1 – Progress assessment, outline of winter survey techniques, winter farmland species

Day 2: Winter wetlands & coastal species field day

Day 3: Final exam & Fieldwork Games day!

Who should attend?

This course is suitable to early career conservationists, ecologists, ornithologists and anyone looking to improve their bird identification & survey skills.

This course can be a way of proving competence in British bird identification for job applications and general improvement.

Candidates of all skill levels are encouraged to apply, as this can be a way of either providing proof of existing competence or for learning a new skill.

What will be covered?

This course will encompass:

- How to identify all common breeding & overwintering British bird species (approx. 220 species) by both sight and sound.
- Basic field skills and good practice – how to approach birds and their territories causing minimal disturbance, what to look and listen for and how to build a picture of how birds are using a habitat.
- Field surveying techniques and when to implement different surveys for different conditions, habitats and species.
- How to prepare a risk assessment for an ornithological survey and what you need to prepare for long stretches of fieldwork.

