

HOS Marsh Tit survey 2023 – instructions

Background

The survey will be based on a random selection of monads (1 km squares) distributed over the whole of Hampshire. The monads will be selected based on the extent of broadleaved or mixed woodland or scrub within them. The basic survey method is to walk a route through the square taking in the areas of suitable habitat, playing Marsh Tit calls and song every 200m in suitable habitat and listening and watching for a response from the birds. This method has been found to work well in national and regional surveys of both Marsh and Willow Tits. Sadly, you are unlikely to come across a Willow Tit in most of Hampshire nowadays but this is an excellent and proven way of detecting Marsh Tits.

Preparing for the survey

Once you have decided which monad to take on, you can confirm your interest on the website and print a 1:25000 OS map and a recording form from the links on the website. Before your first survey visit, it is a good idea to plan your route by identifying areas of potential habitat (woodland and scrub) using your local knowledge of the square and the habitats, Google earth or OS maps. You should aim to get to within 100m of all the suitable habitat in the square. Mark your planned route 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 get to. If you can obtain permission to enter private land that would be ideal. But if there are areas of suitable habitat where you are unable to get access permission please mark them your map with cross hatching and make a note in the comments box on the recording form.

For the playback you will need to download from the website the mp3 file provided onto a phone or portable mp3 player with a speaker. Your playback should be just audible from 100m. The idea is that it will stimulate local Marsh Tits to respond rather than drawing birds in from a distance. On a mobile phone, playing the calls at full volume works well but you may need to limit the volume if you are using a portable mp3 player.

Survey visits

Marsh Tits are most detectable early in the breeding season. Please undertake two surveys per square between 15th February and 14th April. March is the key month. The surveys should be at least a week apart and should be undertaken on 'fine' days (relatively warmer days with no wind and rain). Mornings are best but there is no need for early starts - Marsh Tits will respond to playback right through to the afternoon.

Walk your route stopping either every 200m or where there is suitable habitat. The route should ensure that, as far as possible, all suitable habitat is within 100m of a survey stop. Mark each stop on the map (locations 1, 2, 3 etc) and/or record the GPS co-ordinates or what3words on the recording form. At each stop play the recording of Marsh Tit call and song for two minutes. The birds don't always appear immediately so after the playback wait at the point for a further two minutes listening for a

response and looking for birds. Marsh Tits will respond from up to 100m away in good conditions.

The number of birds at the point should be recorded, often 1 or 2 birds, but occasionally 2 pairs will respond and start interacting with each other (neighbouring pairs). One bird in a pair will often be more vocal and obvious than the other so remember to check for a second bird. Also record the zeros for the playback locations with no responding Marsh Tits. Once a bird responds during the two minute playback, stop the recording but wait for the two minute post playback period to record all the birds before moving to the next stop.

If you come across a Marsh Tit between playback points mark the location on your map and enter the details on the recording form using a letter A, B, C etc.

For each visit, record the date, visit number and start/finish times on the survey form. Also enter the total numbers of Marsh Tits detected and your best estimate of the numbers of territories.

After the survey

Please return your completed forms and maps, if possible by June 2023, to Ken Smith either by e-mail, (ken.smith.lsw@gmail.com) or by post (15 Roman Fields, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 5AB).

Thank you.