



## Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (LSW) Project in Gloucestershire and Avon 2026

March 2026 Update for Supporters

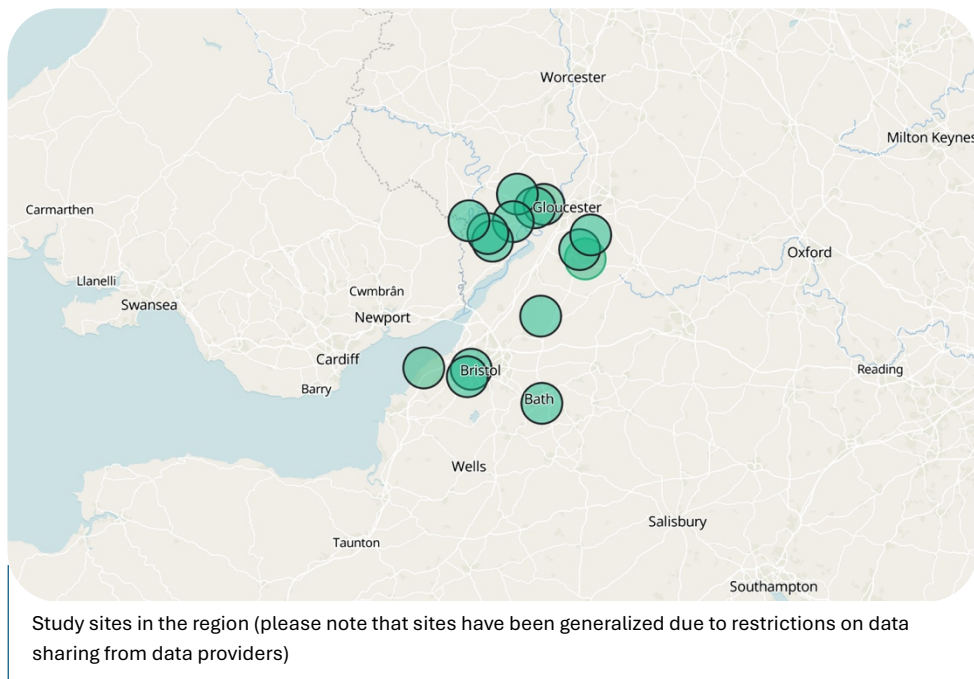
Rufus Dawson : [rufusdawson@hotmail.com](mailto:rufusdawson@hotmail.com)

### Brief Summary

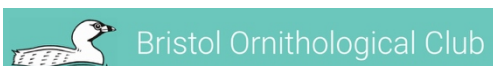
We're now quite a long way into the data collection part of the project. At this stage, a cumulative total of 72 acoustic recorders have been deployed across 24 sites in the project region. Lesser spotted woodpecker (*Dryobates minor*) have been recorded at many of these, including many unexpected ones – though their absence at some of the most promising looking sites may be a cause for concern about the future of the species in the county.

Crunching the humidity-vocalisation data, habitat measurements and verifying all the classifier detections is still to come – so I do not have a total number of LSW-positive sites yet. However, below I list a few initial thoughts and potential, unverified findings.

### A Note on Geographical Distribution



You will notice on the map above that recorders have been placed at only one site in the south Cotswolds. This is regrettable, and I should like to emphasise that there are almost certainly just as many birds in this area as in the north Cotswolds. However, a significant part of the region is private land – so there is a real shortage of observer data on which to decide where to put the recorders. It would be interesting to see the results of a survey specifically targeting this area, however, as there is a significant extent of suitable habitat – but this would require a whole project in itself.



## LSW in the Cotswolds

A few weeks ago, I visited several notable private sites around the Stroud area. Even at midday (when I was deploying the recorders) I heard a short burst of LSW drumming.

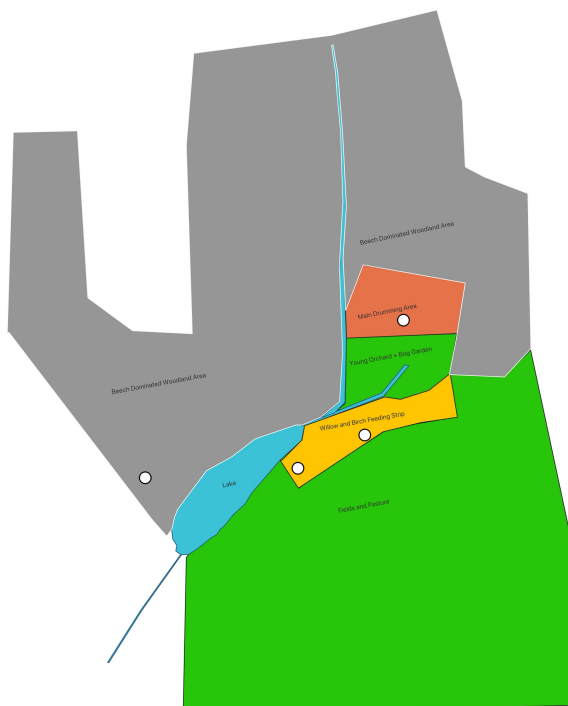
It seems increasingly likely that the mid-Cotswold area is a county hotspot for the birds – although there have been decades of significant under-recording. This is especially notable as almost all Cotswold woodlands are beech-dominated – far from the ‘traditional’ habitat for the birds in the UK.

In fact, the vast majority of LSW research in the country has focused on the New Forest and parts of the South East – where birds are generally found in extensive W10 wet woodlands. In Gloucestershire, this is not relevant, as birds do not have these extensive wet woodlands – so utilise a patchwork of different habitats. For example, this could be a beechwood for drumming and a riparian strip for feeding.

By placing song meters in different habitats, it is exciting to start to build up a picture of spatial usage by LSW at these sites.



The proposed ‘feeding area’ at a private Cotswold site. Many LSW vocalisations (mainly calls) were detected during daytime hours – ie 11am until 4pm. Note the birch strip on the bank (on the horizon), and the willow beds to the left of the image. The birch strip continues for about half a kilometer beyond this point.



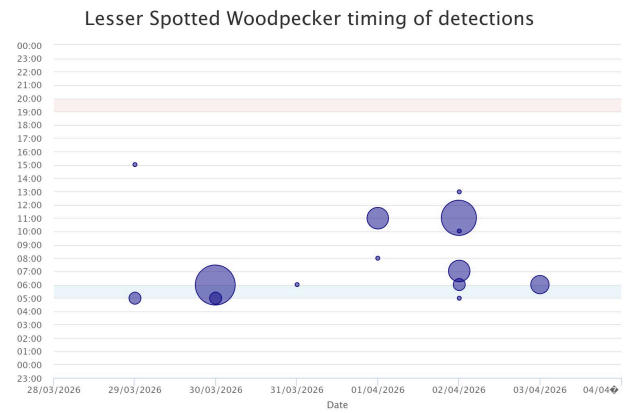
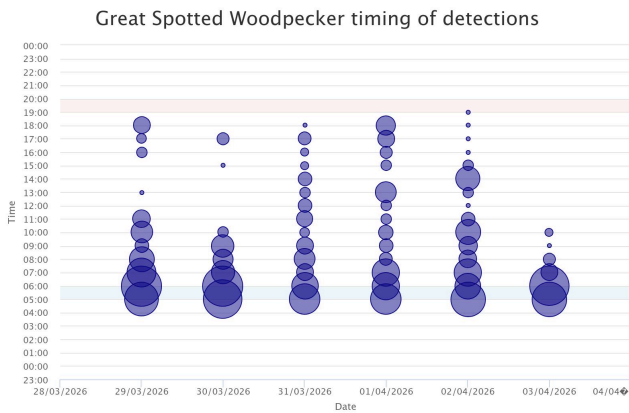
A map of the site photographed in the right margin. The white circles show locations at which LSW were detected. The labels show habitat and/or their potential significance to the birds.



The proposed ‘drumming area’ at the same site as above. Birds were detected drumming in here on 7 of the 9 days the recorders were in position.

This beechwood is unremarkable in the Cotswolds. The only reason why it differs from anywhere else within the Cotswolds Commons and Beechwoods area is its 300m proximity to the ‘feeding area’ above.

## Vocalisation Time Data



Whilst carrying out the project, it has been interesting to see the timings of LSW vocalisations. Passive acoustic monitoring (PAM) enables accurate, long-term measuring of this data, which is otherwise very hard to collect reliably in a quantitative form. Above shows the time-vocalisation data of one of the processed sites. It is interesting to see the results for both species side-by-side.

It comes as no surprise that LSW vocalised the most at dawn (represented on the graph by the blue line), and in the two hours of the day that follow. What is quite notable, however, is how little they vocalised in the evenings and around dusk. Such behavior is quite commonplace for the species – and whilst not the peak vocalisation time, a smaller peak in LSW vocalisations is generally expected during this time period.

Is this just a peculiar anomaly, or a more widespread behaviour in isolated populations of lesser spotted woodpeckers with a reduced need to show territorial behaviour? Hopefully as the data from more sites is analysed we'll get a clearer picture of how common a trend this is in the county.



A recorder in a private orchard near Gloucester



A recorder in a riparian alder woodland in Avon

Thank you for your continued support of the project. The data collection stage will wrap up in a couple of weeks' time, at which point I'll start reviewing everything - so the next update you'll receive will be the final report.