

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (LSW) Project in Gloucestershire and Avon 2026 Update for Supporters

February 2026 Update

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The Start of the Project

The project started a few weeks ago, and acoustic recorders have now been installed at many sites across Avon, with the aim of monitoring lesser spotted woodpecker (LSW). LSW are thought to be a very rare species in the county of Avon, and breeding has not been proven in the area since 2003. I am pleased to say that, so far, we have detected LSW at two sites - which is extremely exciting. In addition to the main species, goshawk have been recorded at two sites (one of which is the only known Avon breeding site, and the other one is an entirely new site), as well as crossbill at almost all of the sites. It's really exciting to see how many other notable species are being recorded as part of the project.



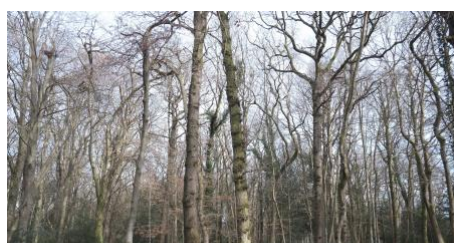
14.02.2026 - A recorder tied to a holly bush at a historical LSW site near



14.02.2026 - Installing an audio recorder at a North Somerset site with a single breeding season LSW record from 2021

The Project Ahead

Looking ahead to the next weeks of the project, I have obtained landowner permission to monitor a large number of sites across Gloucestershire and Avon. Many of these are on private/generally inaccessible land – so it is exciting to think what might be found. There are still many fragments of what would once have been extensive traditional orchard in Gloucestershire, and there is potential for discoveries at these sites in particular. The number of landowners who have replied to my requests for access with anecdotes of seeing ‘small woodpeckers’, has been very encouraging.



14.02.2026 - A grazed North Somerset site that I am currently monitoring – far from the traditional wet woodland habitat of LSW, but there has been very little change in management since the birds are said to have ‘disappeared’ in 2012

In addition to these orchards, I am also monitoring areas of riparian strips (which appear to be especially important for LSW in the beechwoods around Stroud and South Gloucestershire) and large ancient woodlands. Mapping recent records seems to suggest a substantial, and potentially interconnected, area of back-to-back territories in the west Forest of Dean – which has previously been overlooked. That area of the Forest of Dean is being covered in the very last week of the project – so there is a possibility that something interesting might become clear regarding how the birds in these territories interact.

seen continuous rain across most of the UK, especially AVON/Gloucestershire. This may have a negative effect on the LSW breeding season – late Springs

have been linked to an increased rate of LSW breeding failure (though they can bounce back the year after, like we saw in 2025 after the terrible 2024 season). It should also be noted that this can also just mean that they vocalise less often (which they have a strong preference for doing during fine, sunny weather) - it's a cause for concern.

Acoustic Pipeline

The British Trust for Ornithology has developed a tool for analysing the recordings made by bioacoustics recorders - the Acoustic Pipeline. There are currently several publicly available identification modules – the Nocturnal Birds module, Nightjar module and South Georgia Pipit module. In conjunction with Simon Gillings at the BTO, the Woodpecker Network has developed a 'Woodpecker Module' – with the main intention of supporting LSW acoustic monitoring projects like mine. It analyses days-worth of data, and exports all LSW detections to three second audio files for checking.



The lowland birch woodland in the New Forest where LSW was detected using the BTO Acoustic Pipeline in Aug 2025 (see audio file on right)

I trialed it with several days' worth of audio recordings made in the New Forest in August 2025. It accurately detected four LSW calls in an area of birch. Having tested many other ways of analysing the audio files, I am using this as the primary detection tool for the project. Other tools were found to produce too many false positives or miss too many actual LSW vocalisations (making the data unreliable). To avoid being reliant on one system, I am also doing a BirdNET single species search for LSW – which involves a much lower probability threshold, so picks up extra LSW vocalisations (as well as a lot of false positives).

CLICK TO LISTEN

An audio clip from the New Forest in August 2025 (a Dropbox link – opens in your browser)

The final version of the Woodpecker Module came out a few days ago, so it's now publicly available.

BBC Countryfile Plodcast

Next week, I'm heading out to a local Gloucestershire LSW site with the BBC Countryfile podcast – *the Plodcast*. We're going to discuss my project, LSW in general – and, of course, keep a keen ear out for the birds themselves. It should be out before April.

Thank you so much once again for your generous support of the project. I'm looking forward to updating you again soon.

