Survey 2019: Reed Warbler and Sedge Warbler Territories in the Lower Salwarpe Valley

Counts of singing Reed Warblers (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*) and Sedge Warblers (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*) were conducted on various dates during May and June 2019.

Territories Along the Droitwich Barge Canal

	Peak Counts	
Section	**Reed Warbler**	**Sedge Warbler**
River Severn to A449 Bridge	6	0
A449 Bridge to Bridge 3 (Linacre)	6	1
Bridge 3 to Bridge 4 (Mildenham)	13	7
Bridge 4 to Bridge 5 (Porter's Mill)	26	10
Bridge 5 to Ladywood Lock (Bridge 6)	15	0
Ladywood Lock to Salwarpe (Bridge 7)	8	0
Salwarpe to A38 Bridge (excluding Coney Meadow)	5	3
A38 Bridge to Ombersley way Bridge	2	0
Ombersley Way to Footbridge	3	0
Footbridge to road bridge 11	4	0
Bridge 11 to footbridge 12	7	0
Footbridge12 to road bridge 13	3	0
Bridge 13 to railway bridge	0	0
Vines park / marina	0	1

Totals (for Droitwich Barge Canal)	98	22

Territories in Adjacent Areas

Coney Meadow Reedbed (estimate)	10	4
Tapenhall Pool (SO857605)	2	2
Woodhouse Farm Pool (SO852610)	1	0
Hawford Fishing Pools (SO847606 – SO850601)	1+	0

Notes:

1. Sedge Warbler counts include those in sizeable scrubby areas adjacent to the canal towpaths.
2. Coney Meadow reedbed is much more difficult to to survey than the canals and, therefore, only an estimated number of territories can be made.
3. Hawford Fishing Pools – It was only possible to survey the small fraction of the pools – *i.e.* those which are accessible *via* public footpaths.

Comparison of Reed Warbler Surveys from Previous Years (Upper Canal Sections Only)

Section No.	2003	2007	2009	2019
5	22	27	12	6
6	24	13	3	3
7	11	5	13	10
8	11	16	8	14
9	7	1	11	
Totals	75	62	47	33

Note: It is not clear from the maps in the 2009 report how sections 8 and 9 are defined. There appears to be only maps of sections 5, 6, 7 and 9 in the report. Therefore, the counts for sections 8 and 9 have been combined.

Discussion

The number of Reed Warbler territories along the Droitwich Barge Canal between Ladywood Lock and Vines Park (Sections 5 to 9, inclusive) appears to have shown a significant overall decrease since 2009 – from 47 to 33 territories (30% decrease). This decrease has been mostly offset, however, by the maturation of the reedbed habitat at Coney Meadow. If an estimated 10 pairs of Reed warbler territories in Coney reedbed is accurate, then the overall decrease in this region of the Salwarpe valley is only slight (9% decrease). This number represents a significant decrease of 43% since the 2003 survey, however – *i.e*. before the canal was made navigable.

Section 5 of the canal is notable for a having the largest decrease - 50% since the 2009 survey - due to a commensurate loss of significant fringing reed cover in this area. Smaller decreases have occurred in sections 6 (0%), 7 (23%) and 8/9 (26% combined). Sections 5 and 6 have shown even greater decreases since the 2003 and 2007 surveys (73 -88%). The number of Reed Warbler territories in sections 7 to 9 have held up much better since these earlier surveys (<25% decrease).

It must be noted that there will be a certain amount of inter-annual variation in Reed Warbler territory selection due to variation in the quality of the habitat and other stochastic factors.

The highest concentations of both Reed and Sedge Warbler territories are currently found further down the canal system between Ladywood (Bridge 6) and Linacre Bridge (Bridge 3, near Hawford). No comparative data for these sections was available from previous survey, however.

It must also be noted that the offset reedbed at Coney Meadow is extremely vulnerable to adverse events, such as the April 2015 fire (arson?), which destroyed circa 70% of the available habitat.

It may be possible to increase the breeding density of Reed Warblers in Coney Meadow reedbed by increasing the amount of ecologically-rich edge habitat and demarkation of territories *via* cutting ‘rides’ or open areas within the, currently, solid block of reeds.

D. R. E Walker, June 2019