

COLLECTION OF INCIDENTAL RECORDS THROUGH BIRDTRACK

Background

Within the current system, up to three casual records (those records not recorded as part of a larger 'list') at a time can be recorded through a dedicated casual records page. This is a useful system that collects supplementary or single observations at sites where observers regularly visit. These casual records add value to the preferred BirdTrack listing, although one of the drawbacks of this system is that it requires the locations of these casual records to be setup prior to recording – not usually an issue if it is a regular 'haunt'. Casual records can also be entered as incomplete lists.

However, many observers spend time out in the field in a particular 'patch', and may observe interesting (incidental) sightings en route to and from these areas. These sightings are not really attached to a particular site, and the observers tend to be 'put off' from having to create a single 'site' for that record. This might be compounded by the likelihood that no further observations will be entered for this new 'site'.

Proposal

BirdTrack could develop an alternative system that requests a national grid reference, county (perhaps set once as default for sequence of incidentals) and a place text field alongside the standard record collection (species, number, comment etc.) and creates a 'pseudosite' for this species automatically. For maximum value of these incidental records, we should push to collect at 1km grid square level or finer (if finer resolution, the relationships to the existing county and regional boundaries may impose additional, but minimal, development work).

This system will, like the casual records collection, require a system to choose the species. At the moment, the technology uses a simple drop down menu containing the 600+ species available to BirdTrack. This increases the download time of the page considerably, and is the main reason why the casual records page is limited to three records at a time. This may be an opportunity to develop and test a more efficient 'find species' system, although restricting to three incidental records would not be a problem given the concept behind their collection. Other improvements could include 'copying' the information from the previous row to save inputting effort.

These pseudosites can be flagged, named and labelled as different from standard sites, so that they can be excluded or included from the normal canned queries and search facilities in BirdTrack.

It may also be possible to re-use the same pseudosites if there is a match on 1km grid square being entered subsequently through the same system.

Development notes and Design issues

The naming and wording of this new data collection system will have to be carefully chosen so as not to mask the usefulness and the meaning of the normal casual records facility (hence 'incidental').

There is a possibility that some users might use this system as the main data entry method, this point needs to be discussed in view of designing 'minimal and fast' data entry or a 'fully-fledged' data entry system. There are ways to automate data collection (e.g. we can work out the correct county/unitary authority from the grid reference, and create an individual name for the site such as 'INC-TL8486' for incidental site with grid reference TL8486) to minimise the form, but should we? Is a 'place text' field more preferable – even though it is more data to enter?

The proposed web form could include the following mandatory (*) and optional fields:

Species *, Count (inc. accuracy) *, Grid reference *, Date *
Age, Sex, Direction, Breeding status
Time, County/Unitary Authority, Place text, Comments

Options might exist to set the county (at the top of the page) for all incidentals entered in one 'batch' if this was occurring, but this precludes the user entering several incidentals from different counties on different days – although this might not be the case.

Some of the above fields could be controlled by user options for 'full' or 'simple' data collection (e.g. Age, Sex, Direction might only appear if you have 'full' set in MyDetails and Settings)

If all fields are required, then page design will need to be considered carefully. Currently Casual Records (see below) collects a subset of the above and requires two lines per record on the page. More fields would require more space and this may lead to fewer incidentals being entered per page, which has consequences for the possible setting of county for all records on the same page.

BirdTrack
Recording birds across Britain and Ireland

BirdTrack Data Home > Casual observations user: Dawn Balmer

Casual Records Form

Please use this form for up to 3 casual records only ([Help on casual records](#)). Simple repeat the process if you have seen more casual sightings. Alternatively, if you have completed a list of species, please use the [Main List Form](#).

Recording sites available: All of the sites that you have registered are included in the drop-down site menus below. If you need to add a new site (i.e. they are not in the Site list), please do so **before** you enter any records using this link - [Add new sites](#).

Where and when?	What and how many?
1. Site: <input type="text" value="The Nunnery"/> Date: <input type="text" value="02/11/2005"/> <small>date</small>	Species: <input type="text" value="Bewick's Swan"/> Count: <input type="text" value="12"/> Comment: <input type="text" value="flying south"/> Hour: <input type="text" value="09"/>
2. Site: <input type="text" value="Barnham X Common"/> Date: <input type="text" value="20/10/2005"/> <small>date</small>	Species: <input type="text" value="Hawfinch"/> Count: <input type="text" value="1"/> Comment: <input type="text" value="by pumping station"/> Hour: <input type="text" value="-"/> Special survey info!
3. Site: <input type="text" value="-"/> Date: <input type="text" value=""/> <small>date</small>	Species: <input type="text" value="-"/> Count: <input type="text" value=""/> Comment: <input type="text" value=""/> Hour: <input type="text" value="-"/>

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25 October 2005