

Exciting new BirdTrack features - maps, sites, lists and more Email to BirdTrack recorders 31 March 2007

Dear BirdTrack recorder

You may or may not have already noticed, but we've made some quite big changes to the BirdTrack website earlier today. These ongoing developments will make BirdTrack easier for you to use, and also make your sightings more accessible and useful to both you and the BirdTrack partners. I'd encourage you to read through the notes below, which will help you to get the most out of the site with the least fuss.

Google maps

A major improvement is the switch to using Google maps to help you register and view your sites. This system has many advantages, and even allows you to look at satellite images of your sites! When registering a new site using the map, you can navigate around by clicking and dragging your mouse, or by moving the small window at the bottom right of the screen. Zooming in is made easy by either using the slider bar on the right of the window or double-clicking your mouse on the map. Once you are zoomed in you can then switch to a satellite or 'hybrid' view and also overlay OS grid lines for reference.

Casual records

Though we much prefer you to submit full lists of species (as these data are far more useful to us), we do also appreciate one-off casual sightings. We have now made it easier to submit these records, and 'casual' sites can now be set up on the same page as records are entered. You can then input up to six casual records for one site together, though for more records than this it would be better to complete a full species list.

Upgrading/downgrading sites

It can be time-consuming to enter a lot of casual records at sites you will only visit once, but we've made this much easier to do now. When entering these casual records, you can quickly create a site and choose how to treat it in the future. As a main site, it will appear in the drop-down menu when entering species lists and also in your main sites results pages. Downgrading it to a casual site though means that it won't clutter up your drop-down lists and will make viewing your main results much simpler and quicker. It's also easy to change the status of this site in the future under the 'Manage my Sites' page, and you can even upgrade or downgrade all of your existing sites as well.

Breeding status

As part of future developments, national and local Atlas projects can make much more use of your sightings if you include details of breeding status. This is now incorporated into the notes pop-up box against each species and will greatly help us in future Atlas work.

Top county sites

With the help of county bird recorders, we now also hold lists of the top birdwatching sites in some counties. So if you want to register a popular site, you can select the county and then double-click the site from a pop-up box of all the options. This will automatically name the site and register the grid reference for you. We are just putting the finishing touches to this feature at the moment, and it should be available in the next week or so. We will also extend this list in the coming months so that most county site lists will eventually be available.

Viewing species lists

We've now extended the ways you can view lists of your sightings. Once you've entered a list, you will then have the option to view this as a pdf file, and perhaps email it to friends or print it off to display at your local patch. You can also produce pdf files of older lists via the 'View species lists' option.

Species layout

To make it easier to view your species when viewing lists, you can now also change whether you see species in a vertical layout or horizontally. This is easily set up under 'My Details & Settings' along with the other useful user preferences.

Hopefully you'll find these new features easy to use and that they will enhance your enjoyment of the site. I must give a big thank you to the BTO's Information Systems team, particularly Teresa Miyar and Iain Downie, for their hard work on getting these new features working.

If you do have any problems or queries, then do get in touch at birdtrack@bto.org or send any technical queries direct to web.support@bto.org

With best wishes

Mark Grantham

BirdTrack Organiser on behalf of BTO, RSPB and BirdWatch Ireland