

House Sparrow Destructive Habits

Title

House Sparrow Destructive Habits 1958

Description and Summary of Results

There was increasing concern being raised about some bird species, especially House Sparrows *Passer domesticus*, causing damage to plants in gardens and by such as opening milk bottles and pecking mortar. Hence the BTO organised a trial (Pilot) survey to see if a co-operative survey could give any useful information for tackling the problem.

The Pilot Survey was carried out in five counties in the Midlands of England via a questionnaire (Leicestershire, Rutland, Staffordshire, Warwickshire and Worcestershire). In the event 46 records were received of which 4 were negative. Nearly 40 responses were records from just one garden, and the remainder from several gardens, parks and one from a whole district.

The heaviest attacks recorded were on Crocus flowers especially yellow ones. The second most common was on *Polyanthus*, and then several more flowers. Other plants subjected to damage included: shrubs, eg *Forsythia*, Flowering Currant, Apple and Plum blossom; some vegetables, eg peas, brassicas and lettuce; lawn seed; and both milk bottle tops and mortar were noted.

Attacks were especially prevalent in the early morning but occurred all through the day, and the damage could be considerable especially in more isolated gardens.

Several methods were being used to try to prevent damage. These included black cotton strung across a site, and sticks as well as netting of various kinds, and all had some success. It was thought that the main reason for the birds doing this was to do with diet and the unnatural clearing of ground herbage in gardens.

The Pilot Survey specifically did not look at crop damage but it was thought that this could be important especially in autumn.

Despite these results there were evidently too many associated problems and it seems that the survey was not continued.

Methods of Data Capture

A questionnaire was sent out to those who responded to an initial request. It asked about the area covered, whether the area was urban, suburban or rural and then about what damage was noted to flowers, vegetables and other things and to note the season, time of day and weather conditions. Finally the questionnaire asked about any prevention measures and for the observer to speculate about any reasons why they thought the birds might be doing it.

Purpose of Data Capture

To investigate the extent of damage caused by House Sparrows on flowers, other plants and anything else especially around houses.

Geographic Coverage

The Pilot Survey was restricted to five counties in the Midlands of England.

Temporal Coverage

Questionnaires were sent out in early 1958 and most were returned by the end of the year.

Other Interested parties

None.

Organiser(s)

R K Smith organised the trial for the BTO.

Current Staff Contact

archives@bto.org

Publications

No formal report was published. There is an undated typescript in the archives describing the results from the 46 returns, and there is a half page report to the Trust's Scientific Advisory Committee dated 18 July 1958.

The potential enquiry was noticed in *Bird Study* issues for March, June and September 1958.

Available from NBN?

No.

Computer data -- location

None.

Computer data -- outline contents

N/A.

Computer data -- description of contents

N/A.

Information held in BTO Archives

1 folder containing a few letters, a copy of the form, and the undated typescript noted above summarising the Pilot returns.

Notes on Access and Use**Other information****Notes on Survey Design****Specific Issues for Analysis**