



Autumn Newsletter



The BTO London Bird Project

November 2002

Welcome to the first newsletter for The BTO London Bird Project. We hope that you all enjoyed the first season's visits to your sites. Don't forget that you should be starting to think about the winter visits now and visiting your site three times over the season: once in mid-November to mid-December, once from then through to mid-January, and once from mid-January to mid-February.

Feedback from volunteers

Firstly, a big 'thank you' to all those volunteers who have given us feedback over the course of this summer's fieldwork. Almost everyone has said how much they are enjoying doing the surveys, and some have expressed surprise at the number and variety of birds they have been recording. Quite a few people have mentioned the apparently huge number of blackbirds around the city this summer, and wanted to know whether this was normal, or if it had been a particularly good year for them. Others commented on the worrying lack of Spotted Flycatchers in places where normally they would be expected. Hopefully, we will be able to give answers to these queries once we have finished analysing your records.

Some early results: Although you do not need to send your forms in until the end of the winter season we do have some early results to share with you. Forty-four 'core' sites (the more intensive sites which involved mapping methods) were covered this summer by a BTO fieldworker, Howard Vaughan, and we have been able to do some simple analysis of this data already. His sites were scattered right around the city and included parks, cemeteries, public gardens and even a wood. The smallest sites, both measuring just a quarter of a hectare, were Mayfair Gardens in Westminster, and Downe Cemetery in Bromley. The largest, by contrast, was the massive St Pancras and Islington Cemetery in Barnet which measures a whopping 53 hectares.



George Higginbotham

Many people have reported a worrying lack of Spotted Flycatchers in the city. Did you see any? Numbers seem to be down all across the country this year, so your records will be important in helping to get a clear picture of just what is happening to this species.



Mike Weston

Blue Tit, the most widespread species in a sample of 44 sites.

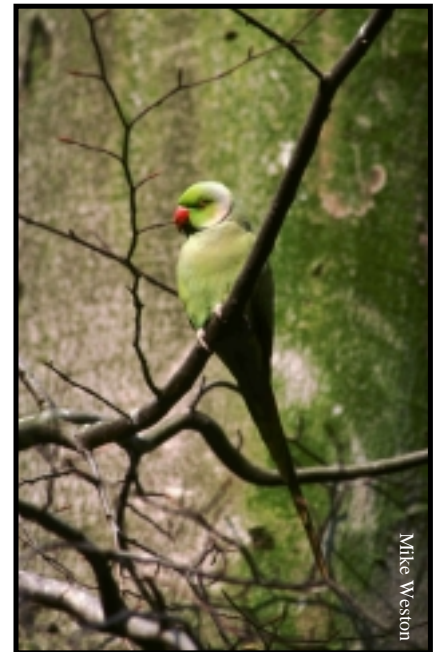
The most widespread bird, occurring in all but one of the sites, was Blue Tit, closely followed by Blackbird, Robin and Wood Pigeon, which all occurred in 41 of the 44 sites. Some interesting species were also recorded, including Lesser Whitethroat, Grey Wagtail, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Kingfisher and Willow Tit and, believe it or not, Blackcap was recorded on as many sites as Feral Pigeon (28)! However, where Feral Pigeons were recorded they were invariably in large numbers – on average nearly 15 per site. In

fact, Feral Pigeon was the most numerous species over all the sites, closely followed by Starling. The species richness (the number of species per site) varied greatly, as you would expect given the wide variety of sites, from just 4 at Mayfair Gardens, Westminster to a very respectable 29 at two sites: City of London Cemetery, Newnham and Marble Hill Park, Richmond. Perhaps not surprisingly the bigger sites, with more varied habitat, tended to have more species of birds, although the average was an encouraging 16 species per site. It will be very interesting to see how the results from the full survey fit in with this snapshot from a relatively small number of sites.

Problems. The only negative comments that have come back to us relate to the problems some people are experiencing with traffic noise. Unfortunately this is an insoluble problem, and shows one of the difficulties of undertaking bird surveys (and of birdwatching) in cities. The best advice we can give is to try your best, but note down that there is considerable noise disturbance (there is a question about this on your habitat recording form) and it will be taken into account when we come to analyse your data next year.

Several people have contacted us saying that, since completing their habitat recording form at the beginning of summer, their sites have undergone changes. In the vast majority of cases there is no need to complete another habitat recording form, unless there has been really significant changes, such as part of the area becoming a building site, or tennis courts dug up and turned into flowerbeds, for instance! If you do think that you ought to re-do your habitat recording let Su know (address at end) and she can send out a new form for you.

Winter Roost Counts. Several species of bird choose to roost (sleep at night) in large groups for safety. The wheeling flocks of Starlings coming in to roost in the evenings are a well-known sight in London, although not as common as they once were. House Sparrows also form large congregations, usually in evergreen bushes, and many an evenings Christmas shopping has been enlivened by a small urban tree festooned, not with Christmas decorations, but with Pied Wagtails, who seem to choose isolated trees in the busiest parts of our towns or cities. Ring-necked Parakeets, a 'trade-mark' London bird, spend their nights in well-known traditional roost sites, and seeing (and hearing!) over 1000 of these large and charismatic birds flying into a few Poplar trees around a London Cemetery is a sight not to be forgotten in a hurry!



Were you lucky enough to see any Ring-necked Parakeets on your site? These charismatic birds are a common sight around London, and form enormous nighttime roosts. You can record roosts of this, and other species, in our Winter Roost Count.

Would you like to take part in an optional roost count as part of your winter's fieldwork for the London Bird Project? If so, we have included the roost count form with this newsletter. It will involve just two short visits to your site during the winter, an hour before dark, to see if there are large numbers of Starlings, House Sparrows, Pied Wagtails or Ring-necked Parakeets coming in to roost.



Pied Wagtail, another species that forms spectacular winter roosts in our towns and cities.

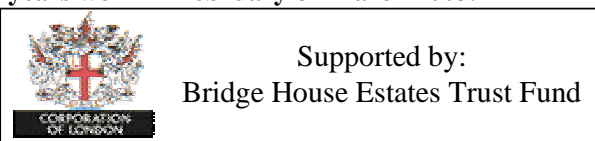
you should return all your recording forms for the whole year – the habitat recording form, and all visit forms – to Su Gough at BTO HQ. If, however, you prefer to send in your forms from this summer now, that's fine, although please do put Su's name and/or the project name somewhere on the envelope as there are a lot of us working here, on many different projects!

Anyone else out there? We would be extremely glad to hear from any new volunteers for this project, as we still have nearly 500 sites within greater London that are not being covered. Or maybe you are enjoying doing your survey and feel you could happily take on another site. Let us know!

Garden BirdWatch. As well as The BTO London Bird Project, we are also looking for more volunteers to take part in The BTO Garden Birdwatch. If you have a garden and would like to take part, then please return the enclosed postcard. If you are already a participant, then please pass the card on to a friend or neighbour who may be interested.

Returning Survey Forms. Remember, you don't have to return any forms until April 2003, at the end of this winter's field season. Then

As you know this is a 2-year project, and we will be sending out all the forms needed for the second and final years work in February or March 2003.



Thank you for taking part in this important survey, we hope that you will continue to enjoy it. Happy birdwatching!

Su Gough and Dan Chamberlain.

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