



Organising Counts and Counters

2.1 Coverage and coordination

The previous WinGS identified 49 sites that held over 1% of the UK wintering gull population, including 20 sites that exceeded the international importance threshold for one or more gull species. The current survey is targeting over 300 key sites which are known to support substantial gull roosts in the winter months. The objective of WinGS is to collect updated information on these key sites and in order to fulfil this, we are reliant on the network of Organisers across WinGS Regions. Another vital aspect to WinGS is the coverage of sample sites. Random sample sites will enable us to construct a UK wide population estimate of gulls with confidence intervals, as opposed to a minimum population estimate constructed through key site targeting.

The priority survey dates are January **21st, 2024**, and January **19th, 2025**. Visits should be made as close to these dates as possible. We aim to have coordinated coverage to prevent over or under counting of gulls that may be likely to change their roosting locations. This is particularly important for complex sites such as estuaries, which are subdivided into more manageable count sections (subsites) to facilitate monitoring by groups of counters. At such sites it will often be essential that counts are coordinated and carried out on the same date to ensure the overall counts for the site are robust. However, we recognise that the suggested priority survey dates may not be suitable for regions with highly tidal estuaries. In the case that these dates are unsuitable for any key sites within your region you may select a more appropriate date. Please notify the WinGS Office if you do so. The survey period throughout autumn 2024 will run from August to October when the data input form will be open. We encourage repeat visits throughout the autumn at key sites where possible.

Due to the random nature of the sampling regime across inland and coastal sites, some sites may be impractical or unsafe to access. If this is the case, please notify the WinGS Office to flag for access issues. There are also many inland sample sites that contain very little or no surface water where it may be unlikely for gulls to be roosting. For the purposes of compiling an accurate population estimate, true counts of sample sites where you feel it is unlikely for gulls to be present are vital for lowering confidence intervals around the estimate and we encourage you to organise coverage for these sites. However, we will accept assumed zeros in cases where that is not possible. Please contact the WinGS Office to flag any sites where you feel a zero count can be assumed based on habitat.

Team sites can be designated where the site requires a team of people to visit the site and count in a coordinated manner. Team leaders can be designated by the WO and may be the WO or someone else. It is the Team Leaders responsibility to ensure that all counters are present at the same time and count in a coordinated manner ensuring no sections are missed or double counted. Team sites may require any number of volunteers to count robustly. It is the responsibility of the team leader to consider the team site and determine the number of volunteers required to adequately cover the area.

2.2 Counters

Please direct any new counters to the WinGS webpage when they sign up to the survey <https://www.bto.org/wings>. This should give answers to many questions that may arise and provide good background information for new or potential counters. The Counter Handbook can be downloaded from the website under Taking Part. Should your counters require paper copies of any survey information, we are happy to send them out.

Counters who are new to the BTO or online surveys will need to visit <https://www.bto.org/my-bto> to register for WinGS Online and create an Online Username. Those who have taken part in other BTO online surveys (e.g. BirdTrack, Breeding Bird Survey, Garden BirdWatch, BirdAtlas, WeBS etc.) and already have a BTO online username simply need to log in to <https://www.bto.org/my-bto> and sign up to the WinGS survey. Counters who do not have access to the internet or who prefer to not to submit data online can also be allocated an Online Username, please contact the WinGS Office with their postal address and we will set them up with a Username. Counters that do not use online forms but have previously taken part in BTO surveys should already have an Online Username.

To submit their data online, counters will need to be assigned and allocated to their site(s). WOs can do this online and will need the counter's Online Username (Section 3.1 of the WOs Handbook).

2.2.1 Under 18s

In order to participate in fieldwork activities, volunteers under the age of 18 must ask their parent/guardian to complete and sign a Parental Consent Form. Copies are available from the WinGS Office or downloadable from the website. It is assumed that the volunteer (or their parent/guardian) will inform you if they are underage, so you do not need to question applicants. However, volunteers who are known to be underage should not commence fieldwork until a form has been returned to the BTO. Please confirm with the WinGS Office that the Parental Consent form has been returned before allocating sites to underage volunteers. The site can be assigned to yourself temporarily if you wish to ensure it is shown as unavailable on the vacant site map whilst waiting for the form to be completed.

2.2.2 Unresponsive counters

It is not unusual for survey organisers to encounter volunteers that do not submit data and do not respond to attempts to contact them. This can put you in a difficult position, especially if the counter was to cover a large and substantial key roost site. Sample sites are just as vital to retrieve data from to create accurate population estimates.

If you have made every attempt to contact them, you are at liberty to find a replacement counter for the following winter survey period. If you would like us to contact a counter to request data or you would like to discuss the best course of action with the WinGS Team, please do get in touch.

2.3 WinGS Online Overview

As a WO, you will find that there are features of WinGS Online that are available specifically to you for survey organisation. Chapter 3 of this handbook provides step-by step instructions on how to use the various WO WinGS Online options such as site allocation and request management.

2.4 Recording Forms

For counters who do not have internet access, paper recording forms are available. While we encourage the use of WinGS online for data submission where possible, we are happy to supply paper recording forms to you or directly to counters. Recording forms will also be available for download on the WinGS Webpage.

2.4.1 Submitting data from forms to WinGS Online

We encourage WOs to submit data sent to you on paper forms (or via email) into WinGS Online whenever possible. You can submit data under the counter's name (or under the Team Leader's name in the case of team sites). To do this you will need the counter's or Team Leaders's BTO username. If you are entering the data online there is no need to return the forms to the WinGS Office via post.

2.4.3 Returning Forms

Counters should return their forms to their WO as soon as possible after the January count. If unable to submit data online themselves, WOs are requested to return all completed forms for their site/region to the WinGS Office by the end of each winter survey period (if you have submitted the data online there is no need to return the forms).