



BTO HERONRIES CENSUS 2018 SUMMARY

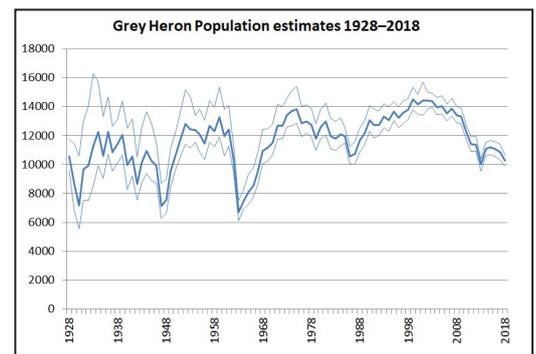
HERONRIES CENSUS COVERAGE IN 2018

The year 2018 was the 90th anniversary of the Heronries Census, which began in 1928. During this time, more than half of the known active heronries have been covered in most years, but more comprehensive surveys organised at regular intervals have attempted to increase the levels of coverage. The last time this was done was on the 75th anniversary in 2003, so the 90th anniversary was a good opportunity for another full survey.

As at the end of January 2019, records had been submitted from over 1,250 sites visited in 2018. In recent years we have received counts from around 700 to 800 sites annually and we would like to thank all those observers who have helped us to achieve such an impressive level of coverage. We expect the number of records to increase further as we receive additional counts from observers and other sources, such as those which have been submitted to local bird clubs.

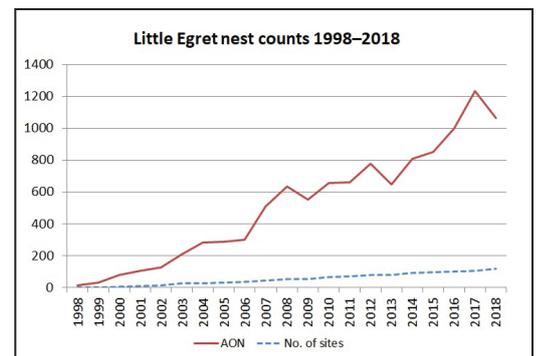
GREY HERON RESULTS

Our analysis shows that a slight decrease in Grey Heron numbers has occurred since 2017, with a provisional population estimate of 10,262 apparently occupied nests (AONs) in 2018, around 4% fewer than in the previous year. This was anticipated following the 'Beast from the East', which occurred in late February and early March. Although the weather was particularly severe at that time, the fact that it was also relatively short-lasting may have helped ensure that the dip was less pronounced than some of the historical decreases caused by more prolonged periods of wintry weather.



LITTLE EGRET COUNTS

The 2018 survey is the first comprehensive Heronries Census survey since Little Egrets have spread across most of England and Wales, and started to occur in Northern Ireland. Little Egrets were recorded nesting at a total of 118 sites in 2018, the highest number of records we have ever received for the species. Little Egrets may be more vulnerable than Grey Herons to short periods of severe weather, something that may explain the total of 1,064 apparently occupied nests reported in 2018, which is around 12% lower than the comparable figure from 2017.



The Little Egret trend presented here shows real counts and is not a population estimate derived from a structured survey; this means that it does not take survey effort into account. It is therefore very likely that the decrease that has occurred since 2017 will be greater than the 12% figure reported, as some of the sites where Little Egrets nested in 2018 were not visited in 2017. As the Little Egret population continues to increase, and the species becomes ever more widespread, we hope in the future to be able to produce population estimates similar to those calculated for Grey Heron; such estimates would account for gaps in coverage each year.

REVISITING HISTORICAL SITES

One of the important aims of the comprehensive Heronries Census carried out in 2018 was to visit historical sites on our Heronries site list, confirming whether there was any sign of current or recent activity by herons and enabling us to update our list accordingly. In some cases these sites hadn't been visited for over two decades or more. They included some heronries that were occupied at the time of the last visit; others, which received a zero count last time they were visited, could have since been reoccupied. We are grateful for the support we received from volunteers who visited these historical sites despite knowing that there was a high chance that herons would not be present – this information is extremely important, helping us to ensure that our population estimates are accurate.

Some 111 sites were visited for the first time in more than 20 years during 2018, and another 148 sites for the first time in over 10 years. Occupied heronries were found at more than 15% of these sites, including 12 sites which were empty at the time of the last visit, demonstrating the value in visiting historical sites. One heronry which was found to still be active had not been visited since 1962 and another site which was reported as extinct in 1989 held 14 occupied nests in 2018.

However, coverage of historical sites was patchy, and whilst some BTO Regions achieved complete or almost complete coverage, this was not the case everywhere. We would therefore welcome support from observers who are willing to explore historical sites in their area over the next couple of years to help us with this important review of sites, so that we can continue to update our site list. Please check our Heronries site map to see if there are any outstanding sites in your area (http://bit.ly/herons_vacant).

OUTSTANDING COUNTS AND NEW SITES

If you have any outstanding nest counts it's not too late to send these to your Regional Organiser or directly to us (herons@bto.org). Note that this includes 'zero counts', so if you visited a site last spring but found no evidence of recent activity by herons – and didn't realise at the time that we still needed to enter a record of your visit – please do let us know about it now! Likewise, if you are aware of a heronry and are unsure whether or not we know about it, please let us know so that we can double-check.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to all Heronries Census volunteers for your incredible efforts in 2018, and to all BTO Regional Heronries Census Organisers for your hard work in organising the coverage across your regions. Special thanks is due to Claire Jones (RO Wiltshire South) for redesigning the survey resources ahead of the 2018 survey.

SURVEY TIMETABLE AND TASKS



REMEMBER TO INFORM YOUR REGIONAL ORGANISER (RO) OF ANY NEW HERONRIES SITE YOU FIND.

Find out more: www.bto.org

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GREY HERON IMAGE LIZ CUTTING / BTO

