

BTO HERONRIES CENSUS 2019 SUMMARY

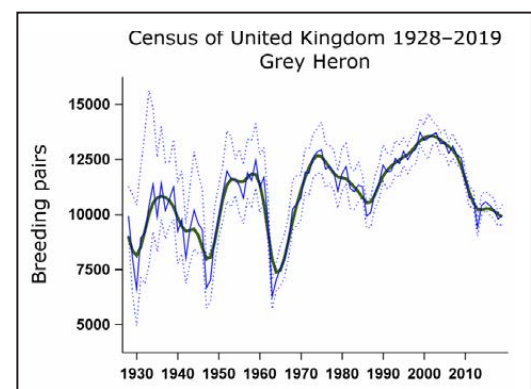
MOSS TAYLOR / BTO

HERONRIES CENSUS COVERAGE IN 2019

By the end of November 2019, records had been submitted from 783 heronries sites in 2019. This is a decrease from the 1,311 sites visited during the 90th anniversary of the survey in 2018, when many BTO regions made a special effort to re-visit all their historical sites. However, it compares favourably with other recent years when we have received counts from around 700 to 800 sites annually. As we normally receive a number of late counts from secondary sources such as bird reports, we expect the final 2019 total to be higher than the 2017 total of 807 visits. Whilst late counts are welcome and are taken into account in future population estimates, we would encourage all observers to submit records directly to the Heronries Census to ensure that the annual population estimates are as complete as possible.

GREY HERON RESULTS

The highest nest count and the only three figure count received in 2019 came from a site in Cheshire, where 102 apparently occupied nests were counted. The next highest count of 90 nests was made in Somerset, and counts of more than fifty nests were received from a further five sites. The vast majority of colonies are much smaller, however, and 579 of the 783 sites visited (74%) were occupied by ten or fewer nests, including 137 sites (17%) where no active nests were found.



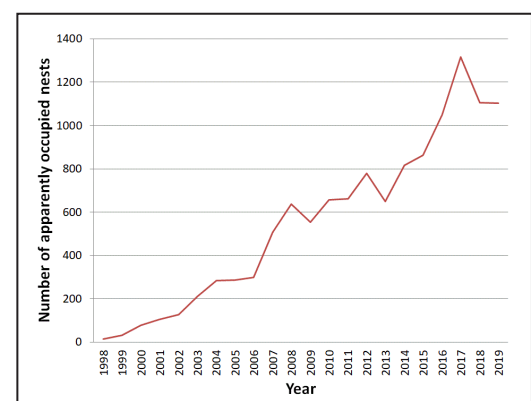
GREY HERON 2019 POPULATION ESTIMATES

	Estimated number of apparently occupied nests
United Kingdom	9,940 (9,546–10,435)
England	5,936 (5,719–6,219)
Northern Ireland	868 (799–967)
Scotland	2,829 (2,363–3,526)
Wales	797 (694–951)

NOTE: The population estimates are run separately for the UK and for the four constituent countries of the UK and hence the summed totals for the four countries do not sum up to the UK total. The calculated UK total is considered to be a more reliable estimate than the summed total.

LITTLE EGRET COUNTS

Nesting was recorded at 111 sites in the UK (121 in 2018), with the total count of 1,103 apparently occupied nests being similar to the 2018 total of 1,107 nests suggesting stability or perhaps a slight increase, given that coverage was more comprehensive in 2018 and that the figures represent actual counts rather than estimates. The numbers of nests reported peaked at 1,316 in 2017, with the subsequent drop in 2018 probably caused by the "Beast from the East". Nests were recorded at 12 sites in Wales, four sites in Northern Ireland and three sites on Jersey. We have not yet received any breeding records from Scotland, but the species breeds in Cumbria so the first confirmed Scottish record is expected soon! The biggest egret colony in 2019 was in Kent (138 nests) followed by sites in Cheshire (86 nests) and Lincolnshire (65 nests).



CORMORANT

Nest counts were received from 35 sites (including one each from Scotland, Wales and the Channel Islands), with active nests present at a further six sites which were not counted. The total count of 455 apparently occupied nests includes 139 at a site in Cheshire. Submissions of Cormorant nests to the Heronries Census have increased in recent years, but this is still likely to represent a relatively small proportion of the inland nesting Cormorant population, which was estimated to be at least 2,100 pairs in 2005. We would encourage observers to count and report nesting Cormorants to the Census, including sites which are not within a heronry, to ensure that the inland nesting Cormorant population can be monitored in the future.

SCARCER SPECIES

Historically, heronries in the UK have supported just a single species, the Grey Heron, but the recent colonisation of Little Egret is expected to be followed by additional species, and already there are sites in Norfolk and Somerset where several different species are breeding, reminiscent of mixed heronries in southern Europe. Cattle Egrets have been confirmed as breeding in several counties in recent years including Devon, Dorset, Essex, Hampshire, Cheshire & Wirral, and Northamptonshire. Scarce breeding species are monitored by the Rare Breeding Birds Panel (RBBP), and all records submitted to the Heronries Census for these species will be kept confidential and will be forwarded to the panel. Submission of records of all scarce species is therefore encouraged and will help ensure that the Heronries Census can accurately monitor future population changes if (as expected) the populations of scarcer heron species continue to increase in future years and the reporting of breeding to the RBBP begins to drop off (as is already happening with Little Egret). In 2017, up to 12 pairs of Great White Egret, 29 pairs of Spoonbill and 15 pairs of Cattle Egret bred in the UK (RBBP figures).



CATTLE EGRET, BY LIZ CUTTING / BTO



GREAT WHITE EGRET AND SPOONBILL, BY PHILIP CROFT / BTO

HERONRIES ONLINE – DATA ENTRY TIPS

In 2019 we introduced some changes to the online data entry system following feedback from users, in order to make the data entry process run more smoothly. You will now be taken directly from the visit entry screen to the YBE (Year's Best Estimate) data entry screen, which will be pre-populated with the highest nest count or estimate from your previous visits for each species. These estimates can be amended if required (e.g. if you believe that an earlier estimate was too high). Please remember that all counts and estimates you enter should relate to the number of apparently occupied nests rather than the number of individual birds, and that the 'Present' box should only be ticked if you are confident that one or more nests are present but the number of nests could not be counted. Breeding herons and Cormorants can travel long distances away from their colonies, and individual birds present at a site but which are believed to be foraging or prospecting rather than nesting should be ignored for the purposes of the Heronries Census. Further information can be found on the [BTO website](#).

Below: Tips for entering visit data Right: Map of vacant Heronries Sites: Orange squares – one or more sites requiring coverage; Blue squares – all known heronries covered.

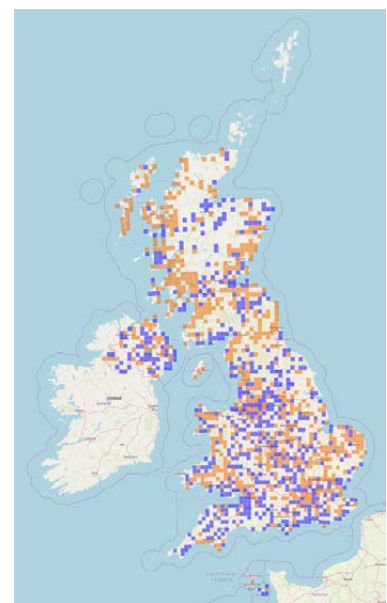
The screenshot shows a data entry form for a visit on 01/04/2019. The 'Observation' table is as follows:

Species	AON present	Today's AON count	Today's AON estimate	Year's Best Estimate
Grey Heron	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	7	
Little Egret	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
Cormorant	<input type="checkbox"/>	0	0	
Night Heron	<input type="checkbox"/>	0	0	
Great White Egret	<input type="checkbox"/>	0	0	
Spoonbill	<input type="checkbox"/>	0	0	
Cattle Egret	<input type="checkbox"/>	0	0	

Callout boxes provide the following information:

- Five Grey Heron nests were definitely occupied on the date of the visit, but seven nests in total are believed to have been occupied based on the condition of the nests or observations made during previous visits.
- Little Egrets are believed to be nesting based on their behaviour but nests are hidden from view and could not be counted.
- Although Cormorants were present at the site, there is no evidence that they are nesting. Including a comment in the Notes box is optional.

The Notes field contains: "Cormorant also present but not believed to be nesting at the site".



REVISITING HISTORICAL SITES – BE A ‘ZERO HERO’ OR ROVING RECORDER

During 2018 and 2019, we have been asking volunteers to visit historical sites so that we can ensure our online site list is accurate. As a result of your efforts we have been able to remove 440 sites from our active list after visits confirmed there was no sign of recent activity. Your visits also confirmed that some of the sites which had not been visited for more than ten years were still active. These visits are crucial to ensure that our population estimates are based on information that is as complete and up to date as possible.

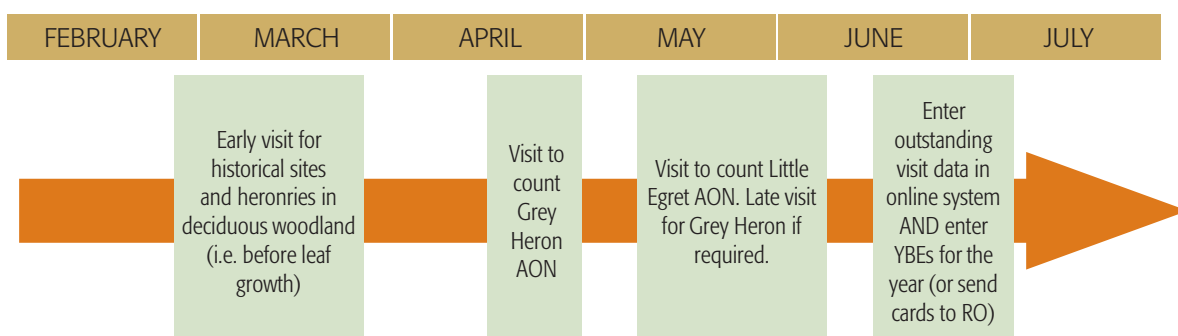
However the coverage of historical sites remains patchy and there are a large number of historical sites which have not been visited recently. We expect many of these sites to be empty but need this to be confirmed so would welcome adventurous volunteers who are willing to explore new places to see what they can find – some sites will still have nesting herons and even if not you may come across other wildlife of interest. Many of these sites are in sparsely populated areas such as the north and west of Scotland, hence we would particularly welcome observers who are touring whilst on holiday and will be able to check a small number of historical sites which are close to their route or holiday home.

Details of vacant sites can be viewed at <https://app.bto.org/colonies/public/vacant-sites.jsp>, where you can contact the Regional Organiser responsible for the survey in individual 10-km squares in your area, by clicking on the square of your choice. However, if you are going to be travelling more widely on holiday (or if you are willing to cover a wide area from your home), please contact the Heronries Census National Organiser directly if the vacant sites might be spread across two or more BTO regions (herons@bto.org).

NEW HERONRIES

If you come across a heronry and are not sure whether it is included in the Heronries Census, please count the number of apparently occupied nests and report it to your Regional Organiser or the National Organiser (herons@bto.org). This includes sites with a single Grey Heron nest and sites where Little Egrets or Cormorants are breeding on their own (although note that coastal Cormorant colonies are not currently included in the Census as they are covered by the Seabird Monitoring Programme). Similarly, if you observe herons, egrets or Cormorants carrying sticks or similar behaviour that may indicate the presence of a heronry, we would be very grateful if you could follow this up and attempt to locate and report the heronry.

SURVEY TIMETABLE AND TASKS



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

SPECIAL THANKS

We would like to thank all surveyors and Regional Organisers for their work on the 2019 Census. Space does not permit all observers to be acknowledged individually, but we would especially like to thank the ROs for their efforts.

HERONRIES CENSUS REGIONAL ORGANISERS IN 2019

ENGLAND

Avon	Eve Tigwell
Bedfordshire	Peter Almond (now Roger Hicks)
Berkshire	VACANT (now Sean Murphy)
Birmingham & West Midlands	Steve Davies
Buckinghamshire	Phil Tizzard
Cambridgeshire	Rob Pople (now VACANT)
Cheshire (Mid, North-East, South)	Brian Martin
Cleveland	Michael Leakey
Cornwall	Simon Taylor
Cumbria	VACANT (now Colin Gay)
Derbyshire (North, South)	Dave Budworth
Devon	Stella Beavan
Dorset	Greg Lambe
Durham	David Sowerbutts
Essex (North-East)	Rod Bleach (now Steve Hallam)
Essex (North-West)	Graham Smith
Essex (South)	VACANT
Gloucestershire	Michael Smart
Hampshire	Brian Sharkey
Herefordshire	Chris Robinson
Hertfordshire	Murray Orchard
Huntingdon & Peterborough	Derek Langslow
Isle of Wight	Jim Baldwin
Isles of Scilly	Will Wagstaff
Kent	Brian Watmough
Lancashire (East)	Tony Cooper
Lancashire (North-West)	Jean Roberts
Lancashire (South)	Stephen Dunstan
Leicestershire & Rutland	Dave Wright
Lincolnshire (East, North, South, West)	Barrie Wilkinson
London (North)	VACANT
London (South)	Richard Arnold
Manchester	Nick Hilton
Merseyside	VACANT
Norfolk (North-East)	Chris Hudson
Norfolk (North-West)	Bob Osborne (now VACANT)
Norfolk (South-East)	Rachel Warren
Norfolk (South-West)	Vince Matthews
Northamptonshire	Bob Bullock
Northumberland	Tom Cadwallender
Nottinghamshire	Lynda Milner
Oxfordshire (North)	Frances Buckel
Oxfordshire (South)	John Melling
Shropshire	Jonathan Groom
Somerset	Eve Tigwell
Staffordshire (North, South, West)	Scott Petrek
Suffolk	Mick Wright
Surrey	Penny Williams
Sussex	Helen Crabtree
The Wirral	Brian Martin
Warwickshire	Annette Jarratt-Knock
Wiltshire (North)	Bill Quantrill
Wiltshire (South)	Claire Jones
Worcestershire	Mervyn Needham
Yorkshire (Bradford)	Mike Denton
Yorkshire (Central)	Mike Brown
Yorkshire (East, Hull)	VACANT (now Brian Walker)
Yorkshire (Leeds & Wakefield)	Rachael Dixey
Yorkshire (North-East)	Graham Oliver (now Nick Gibbons)
Yorkshire (North-West)	Alex Gould
Yorkshire (Richmond)	Mike Gibson
Yorkshire (South-East)	Aidan Gill (now VACANT)
Yorkshire (South-West)	Grant Bigg
Yorkshire (York)	Rob Chapman

SCOTLAND

Aberdeen	Moray Souter
Angus	VACANT
Argyll (Mull, Coll, Tiree & Morven)	Ewan Miles
Argyll (mainland & Gigha) & Bute	Nigel Scriven
Arran	James Cassels
Ayrshire	VACANT (now Dave McGarvie)
Benbecula & The Uists	Yvonne Benting
Borders	Dave McGarvie (now Malcolm Ross)
Caithness	Donald Omand
Central	Neil Bielby
Dumfries	Andy Riches
Fife & Kinross	Norman Elkins
Inverness (East & Speyside, West)	Hugh Insley
Islay, Jura & Colonsay	David Wood
Kincardine & Deeside	Graham Cooper (now Claire Marsden)
Lanark, Renfrew & Dumbarton	Gordon Brady
Lewis & Harris	Chris Reynolds (now VACANT)
Lothian	Alan Heavisides (now Stephen Metcalfe)
Moray & Nairn	Melvin Morrison
Orkney	Colin Corse
Perthshire	Mike Bell
Rhum, Eigg, Canna & Muck	Bob Swann
Ross-shire	Simon Cohen
Shetland	Dave Okill
Skye	Stephen Bentall
Sutherland	VACANT
Wigtown	VACANT

WALES

Anglesey	Ian Hawkins
Brecknock	Andrew King
Caernarfon	Rhion Pritchard
Cardigan	Maira Convery (now Naomi Davis)
Carmarthen	Dan Rouse (now Paul Aubrey)
Clwyd (East)	Anne Brenchley
Clwyd (West)	Mel ab Owain
Glamorgan (Mid, South)	Wayne Morris
Glamorgan (West)	Lyndon Jeffrey
Gwent	Richard Clarke
Merioneth	Dave Anning
Montgomery	Jane Kelsall
Pembrokeshire	Annie & Bob Haycock
Radnorshire	Carlton Parry

NORTHERN IRELAND

All regions	Ian Enlander
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CHANNEL ISLANDS

Channel Islands (excl. Jersey)	Chris Mourant
Jersey	Tony Paintin

ISLE OF MAN

Isle of Man	Pat Cullen
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We would be grateful for help organising the Heronries Census in regions currently without a Regional Organiser (marked VACANT). If you live in one of these regions and would be interested in taking on the role, please let us know.

Many thanks are due to the ROs listed who stepped down during 2019 some of whom had been the ROs for many years, and we would also like to thank David Rogers (Devon) and Peter Hearn (Cumbria) who both stepped down in 2018 after many years as Heronries Census Organisers.

Finally, we would like to thank all the landowners who kindly allow volunteers access to their land to carry out Heronries Census visits.