

House Martin 2008-2013

Title

House Martin

Description and Summary of Results

In spring 2008 birdwatchers contributing to Bird Track, and some others, were concerned enough to contact BTO and the media that far fewer House Martins *Delichon urbicum* had made it back from their winter quarters in Africa. In particular they wondered if the birds had been adversely affected by poor weather in southern Europe during the spring. The BBC Radio 4 'World on the Move' series team picked this up and BTO was asked to work to develop an *ad hoc* House Martin Survey as a result. A questionnaire was quickly developed. As it turned out there seemed to have been only local declines, and some at least of the apparent problem was actually not there at all and was simply that the birds were very late in arriving.

The survey was designed to monitor the arrival and nesting of House Martins. In 2008 over 1250 people provided information on over 3000 active nests across the UK. The survey was repeated in 2009 with just under 1000 participants and notes on about 2300 active nests. The survey continued until 2013, with smaller numbers taking part in the latter years of the survey. About three-quarters of people that took part in the survey had active House Martin nests on their houses; each building with nesting House Martins had an average of about 3.5 active nests; and these figures were similar in both 2008 and 2009 and in 2007 (participants were asked to compare to this year). There was no obvious decline overall and the apparent lack of birds in spring 2008 could well have been that, as many arrived later than sometimes, they were quick to move into their nesting areas and therefore not spend as much time at sites frequented by birdwatchers. In 2010 numbers of participants and nests were about half those in 2009 and the number of participants continued at a similar lower level for 2011-2013.

There was some variation between different regions of the UK in the number of nests reported, and several comments were received in 2008 about a very late start to the breeding season, which is known to affect the number of young produced over the summer. Artificial nests were present on 10-20% of houses from which information was received and constituted 9% of all the House Martin nests that were reported, and just over half of participants that had artificial nests had at least one of them used. Birds in Scotland seemed to use artificial nests less readily than those in other parts of the UK. Also a quarter of House Martins used nests that had been built in previous years. This emphasises the importance of leaving House Martin nests intact over the winter.

By the nature of the survey, with the observers self-selecting, the results will not stand up to major statistical scrutiny. However they do give some indications of what might be worth following up.

Methods of Data Capture

A questionnaire was placed on the web which asked a series of questions on such as date of first sighting, how many and what sorts of nests were on houses and how many were occupied. There was no attempt at estimating population size or to get a complete picture of its numbers or distribution.

Purpose of Data Capture

A non-systematic attempt to obtain some information on basic biology of a bird which is otherwise difficult to survey accurately.

Geographic Coverage

All of the UK and Ireland. Respondents chose themselves with no attempt at formal sampling.

Temporal Coverage

The spring arrival of the birds and the early summer breeding seasons of 2008-2010 and it continued until 2013.

Other Interested parties

BBC Radio 4 'World on the Move' series initiated the survey via a request to BTO following concerns expressed by listeners.

Organiser(s)

Paul Stancliffe

Current Staff Contact

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Publications

Newsletters covering the 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 seasons were published and sent to participants (<https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/house-martin-survey/previous-surveys>).

Available from NBN?

No.

Computer data -- location

All data are stored in the online Oracle database.

Computer data -- outline contents

The answers provided to the questionnaire.

Computer data -- description of contents**Information held in BTO Archives**

None -- the survey was online only.

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