

# **BASF Garden Bird Survey**

## **Title**

BASF Garden Bird Survey

## **Description and Summary of Results**

The BTO's first attempt to monitor birds in gardens was the Garden Bird Feeding Survey (GBFS) which had started in the 1970/71 winter and operated from 1st October to the end of March. It was increasingly being realised though that it was not just in the winter that gardens were an important habitat.

To start to get some ideas on this the BTO/BASF Garden Bird Survey was launched in August 1987 by Bill Oddie and ran through until August 1990, when it was replaced by the BTO/IWC Garden Bird Enquiry. The BTO/BASF survey was the first attempt to monitor the occurrence of birds in gardens throughout the year, additionally collecting information on the provision of artificial food.

In excess of 5000 participants contributed to the survey although not all for the whole period. They had a wide geographic spread over the country and it became clear that the occurrence of different species was influenced by their distribution, regional variation in habitat availability and land management, and perhaps even bird behaviour. There were some unexpected results showing, for example, that Linnets concentrated in gardens in eastern England in summer. On the back of the survey too a specific request monitored the spread of Magpies.

## **Methods of Data Capture**

The survey was modeled on the Garden Bird Feeding Survey but used new technology for data capture. The bird species seen (37 were listed on the card) in observers' gardens were recorded each week and observers could optionally add the maximum count of that species seen at any one time. The recording form was designed to be read automatically (Optical Mark Reading (OMR)) with observers asked simply to place a line (using a black pen or pencil) in the relevant place on the card to record the presence. (This was the first survey run by the BTO which used this technology.) They also recorded whether each species was using food provided and whether it was breeding. A separate row was used to inform whether observations were made in that week. In addition observers recorded some information on where was their garden and some of the habitat features within it, again using an OMR form.

Each form recorded information from the 13 weeks of one quarter with the quarters: Autumn (September to November), Winter (December to February), Spring (March to May) and Summer (June to August).

For the spring and summer of 1989 observers were asked to provide extra information on Magpies for a separate survey run in conjunction with Sheffield University and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, with in August 1989 more specifically on the raiding of milk bottles by Magpies and other crows.

**Purpose of Data Capture**

The main aim was to collect information on the use of gardens by birds throughout the year. Secondary aims were to promote awareness of birds and conservation to the general public and to raise the profiles of both BTO and BASF.

**Geographic Coverage**

All of the UK.

**Temporal Coverage**

The official launch of the project was in August 1987. Fieldwork started September 1987 and lasted for 3 full years. Autumn covered September to November, Winter was December to February, Spring was March to May, and Summer was June to August.

**Other Interested parties**

The project was organised and run by the BTO. All funding came from BASF.

**Organiser(s)**

Lys Muirhead.

**Current Staff Contact**

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**Publications**

The final report from the survey is:

Muirhead, L.B. 1990. Final report on BTO/BASF Garden Bird Survey. *BTO Research Report* no. 68.

There were 6 survey newsletters published: March 1988, August 1988, February 1989, August 1989, April 1990 and September 1990.

The survey was noticed in *BTO News* numbers 151, 158, 161-167, 169 and 170.

**Available from NBN?**

No.

**Computer data -- location**

BTO Windows network central area.

## **Computer data -- outline contents**

Bird data in species files for each of the 12 quarters. Each quarter's data are in a separate directory.

## **Computer data -- description of contents**

Species files are called such as sp2dat.ff for sp=spring, 2=year2, dat is standard, and 2-letter code for species (ff being Fieldfare, with others mostly being standard BTO 2-letter codes).

Datafiles contain:

col 1 -- region (1=Scotland, 2=N England, 3=East Anglia, 4=SE England, 5=SW England, 6=Midlands, 7=Wales, 8=Northern Ireland); col 2 -- season (1=autumn, 2=winter, 3=spring, 4=summer); col 3 -- how big (1=very small, 2=small, 3=medium, 4=large); col 4 -- type (1=urban, 2=suburban, 3=rural); col 5 -- trees (contains 0-7, probably the sum of deciduous (not fruit)=1?, coniferous=2?, fruit=4?); col 6 -- land type nearby (contains 0-7 probably sum of farmland=1?, woodland=2?, wetland=4?); col 7 -- shrub or hedge (0, 1); col 8 -- berries and seeds (contains 0-3, probably sum of berries eaten (=1?), seeds eaten (=2?)); col 9 -- lawn (0, 1); col 10 -- pond (0, 1); col 11 -- food provided on ground (0=none, 1=sometimes, 2=regularly); col 12 -- food provided on table (0, 1 or 2 as col 11); col 13 -- food provided hanging (0, 1 or 2 as col 11); col 14 -- (contains 0-3 probably sum of nestbox (=1?), water (=2?)); col 15-18 -- garden number; col 19-20 -- 2-letter species code; col 21-33 -- presence (1) or absence (0) of the species in that week (13 weeks for each quarter); col 34 -- was it eating food provided (0, 1); col 35 -- was it breeding (0,1).

1 file for each of 37 main species: Blackbird, Blue Tit, Robin, House Sparrow, Starling, Dunnock, Great Tit, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Song Thrush, Coal Tit, Collared Dove, Pied Wagtail, Mistle Thrush, Black-headed Gull, Wren, Jackdaw, Magpie, Rook, Bullfinch, Redwing, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Woodpigeon, Fieldfare, Carrion Crow, Reed Bunting, Tree Sparrow, Siskin, Yellowhammer, Lesser Redpoll, Linnet, Swift, Swallow, House Martin, Blackcap, Spotted Flycatcher, Sparrowhawk.

Also SAS programs of the form br f feed hab regtyp type week .sp1 (for spring of year 1 etc) and results and log files of these

## **Information held in BTO Archives**

1 Transfer Case containing some correspondence etc. All original data sheets were disposed of after both inputting (using the OMR) and scanning.

## **Notes on Access and Use**

## **Other information**

## **Notes on Survey Design**

## **Specific Issues for Analysis**