BirdTrack

Title
BirdTrack

Description and Summary of Results

BirdTrack is a project to track migration, movements and distributions of birds throughout Britain and Ireland, by providing facilities for observers (of all abilities) to store and manage their own personal records. Organisations and others are also able to use these to support species conservation at local, regional, national and international scales.

The principle is that the records of birds seen (or indeed not seen) can be useful data. Thus the scheme is year-round, and ongoing, and anyone with an interest in birds can contribute. Important results not readily available from other surveys and sources include mapping migration timings (arrivals and departures), and monitoring of scarce birds. For example very little is known about the timing of arrival and departure of winter visitors and there are also many scarce birds for which much more knowledge about their populations is needed.

The project relies particularly on lists of birds seen and lists of all species of birds seen at a site on a date are preferred because the proportion of lists which have recorded a given species provides a measure of frequency of occurrence which in turn can be used for population monitoring. Incomplete lists and casual records can also be entered because they too build our understanding of populations, distributions and movements.

Local and national results are available on the website for everyone to look at. Every night the computer summarises that day's records and produces up-to-date maps and graphs showing the latest in migration, movements and distribution. These include animated maps which, when played through, show the arrival and departure of migrants and the seasonal movements of birds.

BirdTrack developed from Migration Watch, which ran in the springs of 2002 to 2004. It incorporates all of the Migration Watch data and expands it to a year round recording package. As a consequence autumn migration (a much bigger challenge) and other movements and distributions can be investigated and mapped. For example it can measure when the bulk of the population has arrived or departed (and for both summer or winter visitors) and not just when the first birds arrive or the last ones depart, the movements of passage migrants, such as inland wader movements, can be tracked, and the way birds filter through the country can be investigated -- up the centre of the country or do they disperse west or east in the spring?

Another important aspect of BirdTrack is to provide supplementary information on some of the scarcer species in Britain and Ireland. Many species are monitored well by existing annual surveys such as the BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey or by periodic surveys. Others are difficult to survey well due to the habitats they occupy, their low breeding density and/or their secretive nature, for example Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendropicus minor*, Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus* and others.

Observers can view and analyse their own records using specially designed features. The website is continually being developed to provide extra facilities for birdwatchers to maintain and analyse their own records, and for county societies to be able to do this for records within their areas. All records are automatically forwarded to the relevant county recorder if the observer permits it.

In spring 2014 the geographical scope was expanded to make it world-wide and not just Britain and Ireland and there are facilities for inputting historical records.

More details of the survey and taking part can be found at www.bto.org/birdtrack

Methods of Data Capture

Data for BirdTrack can only be input onto the website. This is done via a series of simple forms. Essentially it is a means of recording all birdwatching, and indeed all records can be used as long as they are accompanied by a place, a date, the name of the observer and preferably the number of birds recorded. The stated preference is for observers to record complete species lists for a site visit.

At the start an observer must register and get a username and password. Thereafter all that is necessary is to choose a site (and more can be added at any time) and record the dates and a list (or counts) of the birds seen. Observers can use BirdTrack to store all their birdwatching records in an easily accessible and safe form.

It is very important for the organisers to know whether the list recorded is a complete list of everything seen or heard during the visit. (Please note that it does not matter if species that were known to be present were missed -- some will be! -- but it is necessary to know if all species observed are recorded, so that the proportion of visits recording a species can be used as a measure of relative abundance.) Presence of a species can be recorded using a tick box, or as a count. Some birdwatchers like to be able to provide counts of everything whilst others will be happy just to record presence -- the choice is up to the observer.

The BirdTrack system includes the facility to enter any notes and breeding status against each individual species record. The 'Notes' box can be used to record numbers of different age and sex categories, information about unusual plumage, moult or anything else of potential interest. The facility is provided mainly for the use of individual observers but any notes that are recorded will also be passed on to local bird recorders (where permission for records to be forwarded has been granted).

In addition to species lists based on standard site visits casual records are accepted.

In addition to current records observers have been encourageed to input their past records and some organisations as well as individuals have done and are doing just that.

From 1 April 2014 the geographical scope was extended worldwide.

Purpose of Data Capture

To maintain a record of birds on birdwatching visits to sites so they can be used by organisations and others for scientific or conservation purposes.

Geographic Coverage
All of Britain and Ireland. As of 1 April 2014 records from anywhere in the world can be entered.

Temporal Coverage
August 2004 to present. Some records from previous years are also in the database.

Other Interested parties
BirdTrack is organised, run and funded by a partnership of BTO with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Birdwatch Ireland, the Scottish Ornithologists' Club and Welsh Ornithological Society.

Organiser(s)
Nick Moran as a BTO staff member.
From the start (August 2004) until autumn 2007 it was run by Dawn Balmer. Mark Grantham took over until spring 2009 when Mike Prince took over on a temporary basis for three months until Nick Moran arrived in summer 2009. Stephen McAvoy joined as Support Officer in mid 2015.

Current Staff Contact
birdtrack@bto.org

Publications
There are approximately bi-annual reports in *BTO News*. At irregular intervals there are articles in the popular birdwatching press.
However, as it is run entirely online, most of the feedback is via the website with the results pages updated every night. There are also regular updates of the BirdTrack Home Page on the website and associated pages and a monthly email newsletter is sent out to all participants.

Available from NBN?
Not at present although there are plans to do so.

Computer data -- location
Online database only.

Computer data -- outline contents

Records of numbers of birds of each species recorded on a date at a particular site, either through complete lists or casual records.

Computer data -- description of contents

Information held in BTO Archives

Nothing -- online records only.

Notes on Access and Use

Use of information from the website is subject to the usual Copyright Regulations, equivalent to referring to a printed document. Access to the data themselves is on application to the BTO.

Other information needed

Notes on Survey Design

Specific Issues for Analysis