

Black-headed Gull 1938

Title

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Description and Summary of Results

Old records showed that the Black-headed Gull *Choriocephalus ridibundus* was probably widespread in England and Scotland in the 17th and 18th Centuries. But, during the 19th Century a great decrease occurred – by 1884 it was thought that it was on the road to extinction as a breeding species. However by 1900 some recolonization had begun. This continued in earnest early in the 20th Century, although suggestions that wholesale disturbance of colonies during the 1914-1918 war from the taking of eggs for food caused the birds to disperse widely were later discredited. By the 1930s though there was no real idea of the status and so a survey of breeding colonies was undertaken in the breeding season of 1938. It was designed to locate all colonies as well as to document any which had been deserted within the previous 25 years. Counts were welcomed although not considered essential.

About 160 observers took part with the result that all of England and Wales were covered and the list of colonies was considered fairly complete, but coverage was rather patchy in Scotland. A good number of reports came from Northern Ireland, but few from much of the rest of Ireland.

There were 124 colonies reported as occupied in England (mostly in the north), 34 in Wales, 145 in Scotland (quite evenly spread) and 39 in Ireland. In addition respectively 9, 7, 92 and 38 sites were classed as doubtful, as they had been previously occupied but were not definitely reported as either occupied or deserted in 1938. The potential total therefore was 488 colonies in the British Isles, but there were undoubtedly a considerable number of Scottish and Irish colonies not included.

Occupied colonies were found in all coastal English and Welsh counties except for some in the southwest (all bordering the Bristol Channel) and Sussex. There were only single colonies in Devon, Carmarthenshire, Flint and Suffolk but all other coastal counties contained several substantial colonies. Relatively few colonies were actually on the coast or in coastal marsh -- nearly 40% of English and Welsh colonies were 20 miles (30km) or more inland. Fully inland colonies were found in Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire, Herefordshire, Derbyshire and the West Riding of Yorkshire. The highest colony in England was on Greensett Moss (Yorkshire) at about 600m asl, and in Wales 80% of colonies were on moorland or moorland pools, averaging over 300m asl.

The estimated total number of pairs in England and Wales was around 75000-80000 with by far the largest colony at Ravenglass (Cumberland) holding around two-thirds of the total. The published report contains details of all reported colonies with numbers and brief history. (Note: following the 1958 survey the estimate of the total for England was revised to be 35000-40000 pairs.)

Methods of Data Capture

Observers were asked to provide details of all colonies which had been occupied at any time in the previous 25 years whether or not they were still occupied in 1938. If still extant they were asked to estimate the size and any information on the date of colonisation and/or desertion was welcomed. Specific notes on locality, habitat and altitude were also requested.

Purpose of Data Capture

The primary object was to collect information on the recent spread of the species by counting numbers at current breeding colonies and to provide notes on the history of these where it was known.

Geographic Coverage

All of Britain and Ireland.

Temporal Coverage

The breeding seasons of 1938 and with some extra records accepted from 1939.

Other Interested parties

The survey was organised and run by Phil Hollom as a Trust-aided Enquiry.

Organiser(s)

Phil A D Hollom

Current Staff Contact

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Publications

The main report of the survey is:

Hollom, P.A.D. 1940. Report on the 1938 survey of Black-headed Gull colonies. *British Birds* 33: 202-221; 230-244; and with additions in *British Birds* 34: 93 (1941).

The survey was noticed in *BTO Annual Report* numbers 4 and 5; and in the *BTO Bulletin* number 7.

Available from NBN?

No.

Computer data -- location

None.

Computer data -- outline contents

N/A.

Computer data -- description of contents

N/A.

Information held in BTO Archives

2 boxes contain data sheets, summaries, letters and drafts fo the report.

Notes on Access and Use

Other information

Notes on Survey Design

Specific Issues for Analysis