

## Black-headed Gull 1973

### Title

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### Description and Summary Results

The first census of Black-headed Gulls *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* was in 1938. The repeat in 1958 showed there had been a 25% increase in England (coverage in Wales and Scotland was not sufficient to allow accurate figures). Then 'Operation Seafarer' in 1969 showed an increase of about another 52% had taken place at coastal colonies, so a third census of all colonies in England and Wales was attempted in the breeding season of 1973, to ascertain if the upward trend in the population was continuing.

Coverage on the whole was good, even in Wales and NE England, where in the previous surveys it had been incomplete. There was probably some under-recording of colonies in Cumbria, North Yorkshire and possibly parts of the Suffolk coast, but it is unlikely that any major colonies were overlooked, and the effect of uncounted ones on the total picture was undoubtedly marginal.

In England 185 colonies were found and 64 were found in Wales, compared with a total of 190 in 1958 and 159 (plus 21 doubtful) in 1938. This increase was undoubtedly due in part to better coverage in the moorland areas and more small colonies being found. Exact comparisons with 1958 could not be made at individual colony level as in some areas groups of colonies were formerly dealt with as one loosely knit colony. It was also clear that some colonies are in different places each year -- observers in several counties found that some localities normally occupied were too wet during 1973 to provide suitable conditions, but in others normally accessible sites were cut off by the high water and afforded just the right conditions for safe nesting.

At the 249 recorded colonies in 1973 the total number of breeding pairs was between 100175 and 110189. This represents an average increase of 111% since 1958 and 177% since 1938. The later increase was concentrated in southern England (295%), and the most significant change was in the colonies with over 1000 pairs, where the number had doubled. The two largest colonies held between them approximately 28% and the other 19 large colonies (over 1000 pairs) a further 50% of the total population. (The largest was Needs Oar Point on the Beaulieu River in Hampshire, with an estimated 17000-20000 pairs (up from c.1000 in 1958 and c.75 in 1938).)

Habitats used varied over the country, but as previously were in six broad types—three fairly natural: moorland pools, tarns and disused mining reservoirs (109); coastal saltmarsh and dunes (65); lakes, reservoirs, freshwater marsh and impeded drainage (50); and three man-made: sewage farms (3); flooded clay and gravel-pits, including power station sludge lagoons (17); sugar-beet factory sludge lagoons (5). The division between moorland and freshwater lakes was somewhat arbitrary in certain cases. Most colonies were near sea-level but two were at over 515m asl.

An appendix to the published paper documents some of the historical changes in numbers at colonies over the period 1958 to 1973.

**Methods of Data Capture**

Using a questionnaire observers were asked to record brief details of the number of birds present at colonies, and to give an accurate or estimated total of nests. A description of the habitat, together with the locality and National Grid reference, were also requested. To compare the results with those from previous censuses, observers were asked to give any known reasons for increase or decrease, and the establishment or extinction of colonies, since 1958.

Observers were asked to give an accurate count of nests wherever possible; otherwise, to indicate both minimum and maximum numbers. Accuracy was known to be difficult even at accessible, smaller colonies, with counts on different dates showing variations.

**Purpose of Data Capture**

To obtain a count of the number of breeding Black-headed Gulls to compare to earlier counts in 1958 and 1938.

**Geographic Coverage**

England and Wales.

**Temporal Coverage**

The breeding season of 1973.

**Other Interested parties**

The survey was organised and run by Frank Gribble on behalf of the BTO.

**Organiser(s)**

Frank Gribble

**Current Staff Contact**

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**Publications**

The main report of the survey is:

Gribble, F.C. 1976. A census of Black-headed Gull colonies. *Bird Study* 23: 135-145.

The survey was noticed in *BTO News* numbers 56 and 62.

**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**

1 Transfer Case containing all the record sheets sent in and some letters. All have been scanned.

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