

Black Redstart 1977

Title

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Description and Summary of Results

Black Redstarts *Phoenicurus ochruros* have bred annually in Britain since 1923, but very few pairs were involved until the outbreak of the Second World War when there was a marked increase coincident with the heavy bombing of London and some coastal towns.

The species's European breeding range had been expanding since the mid-19th century attributed by some to the contemporary climatic warming, but the increase in Britain was thought to have been caused by a combination of climate, availability of suitable sites and the microclimatic effect of the city environment. Reports in county bird reports indicated that the fortunes had fluctuated since 1940, with peaks in 1948, 1951 and 1964. However, 1973 heralded the beginning of a population plateau with a record total of 104 territory-holding males in 1975. The species had by then bred (not necessarily regularly) in most of the pre-1974 English counties, and it was decided that a formal survey was warranted into the numbers, distribution and breeding habitats of the species in 1977, to confirm the impressions gained from voluntary submissions to local bird reports.

About 60% of the 104 territory-holding males found in 1977 came from five counties: Essex, Kent, Middlesex, Suffolk and Surrey. Suffolk had the highest number, all from coastal towns, and all the other four 'top' counties overlap the London area. Coventry and Birmingham were well-represented, there were five pairs in Nottinghamshire, four in Sheffield, and the two records from Liverpool and one from Manchester were the first proved breeding in Lancashire since 1950. Norfolk was the county which suffered the largest decrease in numbers in 1977 compared with previous years.

Although this intensive survey revealed some pairs at hitherto unrecorded sites, it seemed that information given in county and other local bird reports had provided a realistic indication of the Black Redstart's status.

The habitats used ranged from the original sea-cliff sites in Sussex to a rural farmyard in Hertfordshire, but the majority were in areas 'built-up' to varying degrees with the typical site being an industrial complex in a large urban area.

Methods of Data Capture

Observers were asked to make regular visits to potential Black Redstart breeding areas and record any activity indicative of breeding: male singing, pair on territory, courtship display, alarm calls, bird carrying nesting material or food. Early morning or evening visits were recommended as the best times to listen for birds singing, owing to the high noise levels during the day at many of the urban and industrial sites favoured by the species.

Purpose of Data Capture

The primary aim was to assess as accurately as possible the breeding status, plus the range of breeding habitats and nesting sites currently occupied, partly to provide verification of the status as gleaned from annual county bird reports.

Geographic Coverage

All of Britain.

Temporal Coverage

The breeding season of 1977.

Other Interested parties

The survey was organised and run by Robert Morgan and David Glue as BTO staff members, the former occupying a post financed by the Nature Conservancy Council.

Organiser(s)

Robert Morgan and David Glue.

Current Staff Contact

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Publications

The main report of the survey is:

Morgan, R.A. & Glue, D.E. 1981. Breeding survey of Black Redstarts in Britain, 1977. *Bird Study* 28: 163-168.

The survey was noticed in *BTO News* numbers 80, 83, 84, 88, 90 and 94.

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

None from the survey specifically. The 26 new Nest Record Cards received (increasing the previous total by almost 50%) are stored with other Nest Records.

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