

Breeding Distribution 1952

Title

Breeding Distribution (of 30 species) 1952

Description and Summary of Results

This survey was an experimental investigation set up as a successor to a survey of the distribution of 100 species carried out by the West Midland Bird Club in the (pre-1974) counties of Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Staffordshire in 1950. The intention was to obtain a general but objective picture of the breeding distribution of the commoner species so that further work could be carried out with a greater certainty of what was likely to be of importance.

Previous studies of distribution in these West Midland counties had used such terms as 'common', 'a few', 'relatively not uncommon' and so on, to describe bird's status over a whole county. However, the trial 1950 survey had used, probably for the first time, a technique which relied on the opinion of selected observers with special knowledge of their local areas. Each observer had been asked, on the basis of knowledge and experience, to allocate each species to one of seven categories. The experience gained had made it clear that a survey using the same basic technique could be used for a smaller number of species on a national scale.

For the national survey 30 species were selected. In the event 801 questionnaires were returned of which 775 were used in the report – the remaining 26 were rejected on the advice of the local organisers. Coverage over the country was uneven but sufficient to give general indications. The best coverage was in central and SE England, but much poorer in W England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland. The survey report is essentially a series of maps showing the distribution of each of the 30 species as recorded and with an indication of relative numbers.

Methods of Data Capture

Questionnaires were sent out to the BTO's Regional Representatives, who were asked to pass them on to reliable observers. In some cases questionnaires were sent direct to regional societies who had undertaken to organise the work in their areas. In each case the local organiser was asked to examine and endorse the completed questionnaires before returning them. 1400 questionnaires were circulated in this way.

The questionnaire asked each observer to select a 5-km square of the National Grid and to give the 4-figure reference of the southwest corner. A modification allowed irregularly shaped coastal areas to be included. For the report each of these squares was placed into its relevant 50-km square (quarters of the 100-km squares represented by the letters in a standard grid reference). On the basis of experience of the area and of any fieldwork carried out in 1952 the observer then allocated each of the 30 species to one of five status categories, as follows:

Not Breeding: A -- Not recorded in survey area; B -- Observed but probably not breeding in survey area;

Breeding: C – Few, probably under 10 pairs breeding in survey area and certainly under 25 pairs; D – Medium, probably between 10 and 100 pairs breeding in the survey area and certainly not less than 5 nor more than 250 pairs; E – Common, probably over 100 pairs breeding in the survey area and certainly not less than 50 pairs.

(For the report the maximum category as estimated from the combined constituent 5-km squares was used.)

The list of species selected for the survey was the result of considerable preliminary discussion, aiming to avoid species where identification mistakes were possible and to include those whose distribution was known to be potentially interesting. The final list was: Corncrake, Sand Martin, Nightingale, Red-backed Shrike, Lapwing, Magpie, Chiffchaff, Goldfinch, Curlew, Dipper, Willow Warbler, Linnet, Redshank, Nuthatch, Wood Warbler, Bullfinch, Turtle Dove, Wheatear, Pied Flycatcher, Corn Bunting, Nightjar, Whinchat, Tree Pipit, Tree Sparrow, Green Woodpecker, Stonechat, Grey Wagtail, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Redstart and Yellow Wagtail.

The data were transferred to punched-hole cards and mechanically sorted, tabulated and printed by machine – the first time this method was used for a BTO survey. A system of verification was employed by which the manual work was done twice with any deviation between the first and second workings being automatically rejected by the machine – again a method often employed since.

Purpose of Data Capture

To obtain an objective view of the distribution of 30 breeding species selected to represent different patterns of distribution over the country.

Geographic Coverage

All of UK, Ireland and the Channel Islands although returns were not received from all areas.

Temporal Coverage

The breeding season of 1952.

Other Interested parties

The survey was organised and run by the BTO. It was originally based on an idea from the West Midland Bird Club. Powers Samas Ltd helped considerably with the initial sorting, collating and printing of the results in tabular form, done using their punched-hole cards.

Organiser(s)

C A (Tony) Norris

Current Staff Contact

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Publications

The main report of the survey is:

Norris, C.A. 1960. The breeding distribution of thirty bird species in 1952. *Bird Study* 7: 129-184.

The survey was noticed in the *BTO Annual Report* number 19 and in *BTO Bulletin* numbers 45 and 47.

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

5 boxes of data returns, some correspondence etc, copy of report. All have been scanned. (Note: the punched-hole cards are presumed to have been disposed of.)

Notes on Access and Use**Other information****Notes on Survey Design**

Plotting the exact position of each survey area caused some difficulties as many birdwatchers did not understand National Grid map references. The grid reference of every schedule was checked against current Ordnance Survey maps and, where the Military Grid or some other system had been used, the necessary translation was carried out, often accompanied by correspondence with the organiser or observer concerned.

More than 27900 items of information were dealt with and the sorting of these would have been almost impossible by any other means than the punched-hole cards.

Specific Issues for Analysis