

Cirl Bunting 1982

Title

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Description and Summary of Results

The 1968-1972 Breeding Atlas had recorded the Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus* in 173 10-km squares (plus Jersey), mainly to the south and west of the Severn Estuary to Hertfordshire to Sussex, but county bird reports and others had indicated a large and widespread decline in the British population since that date. Hence a census was instigated by the BTO for the 1982 breeding season.

In the event a maximum of 167 male Cirl Buntings was located in southern England, with the majority, 130, in south Devon. A further 14 males were found on Jersey in the Channel Islands. This was an overall reduction in the population of 30-50% between 1968-72 and 1982, and the population in central southern England had almost disappeared. No Cirl Buntings could be found in several counties which had held some numbers only 20 years previously, including Sussex, Berkshire and Oxfordshire. However, in Somerset, Cornwall and, especially, Devon numbers had been maintained. Overall it was recorded in only 35 10-km squares in 1982, although the difference between this and the 1968-1972 atlas is exaggerated by the latter being the cumulative result of five seasons of field-work.

Nevertheless, clearly there was a marked contraction in range.

There was a strong tendency for territories to be on south- rather than north-facing slopes. Hedgerows were present in 117 of 123 territories whose habitat was recorded, and in the remaining six there was scrub. Trees were found in 115 territories, and in the remaining eight there was a telegraph pole in one, and relatively tall shrubs (such as hawthorn, blackthorn and elder) in the rest. Arable farmland was present in 53% of territories and grazing in 86%, but this was likely to have been a reflection of farming practice rather than a habitat preference. Also houses were present in 59% which may indicate that Cirl Buntings have no particular aversion to human presence.

Yellowhammers *E. citrinella* were found in only 15% of Cirl Bunting territories, although they were in the vicinity of another 37%. In 47% they were totally absent. Almost no other interspecific interactions were noted.

Methods of Data Capture

Observers were asked to search all sites recorded in county bird reports as occupied by Cirl Buntings in any breeding season since 1968, and reports were requested even if negative. Observers were asked also to investigate other potentially suitable habitats. Recording was in two parts: a) details of locality, 10-km square reference, dates, and breeding season (March to September) observations; b) description (principally by ticking boxes against a list) of the habitats within an arbitrary 50m radius from a singing male, pair or nesting site. Aspects covered included grid reference, altitude, description and height of song perch, general description of habitats, slope, aspect of slope, soil moisture, principal tree and shrub species, and presence or absence of Yellowhammers.

Additional records submitted direct to county bird reports were incorporated into the survey results.

Purpose of Data Capture

The primary aim was to locate all Cirl Buntings and to record evidence of breeding. A secondary aim was to obtain up-to-date habitat information, because this might help to explain the decline and because it might prove useful in relation to the conservation of the remaining birds.

Geographic Coverage

All of England and Wales but in practice almost entirely in SW England. Also Jersey.

Temporal Coverage

The breeding season of 1982.

Other Interested parties

The survey was organised and run entirely by the BTO.

Organiser(s)

Humphrey Sitters.

Current Staff Contact

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Publications

The main report of the survey is:

Sitters, H. P. 1985. Cirl Buntings in Britain in 1982. *Bird Study* 32: 1-10.

The survey was noticed in *BTO News* numbers 118, 119 and 127.

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 data and correspondence. All are scanned.

Notes on Access and Use

Other information

Notes on Survey Design

Specific Issues for Analysis