

Coastal Gulls 1955

Title

Coastal Roosting of Gulls 1955

Description and Summary of Results

In December 1952 and January 1953 the BTO organised an enquiry into the numbers of gulls at their winter roosts inland in Britain. During this enquiry some information was also collected on coastal roosts. Numbers were found to be quite large but coverage was also known to be very incomplete. Therefore it seemed possible that a further enquiry, devoted specifically to coastal roosts, might enable a more complete picture of the extent and numbers of birds involved along the whole coastline.

Unfortunately, complete cover was obtained only for the east coast of England from Bridlington (Yorkshire) to the bulge of Norfolk, and for Somerset, Gloucestershire, and Cheshire, although it was probable that all large roosts in South Devon and Lancashire were recorded. Other counties of England, and a few Welsh counties were less well covered. Only minimal information was received from Scotland, and the data received were so fragmentary for an area which had been described as 'one vast gull roost' that no analysis was attempted. No information was received from Ireland.

From England and Wales 120 roosts were reported. Full details of these, together with any known history of them, are listed in the appendix of the published report. For 11 roosts the observers were unable to give any indication of numbers of birds. The average size of the roosts counted was 7500, and 89 roosts (82% of the 109 with counts) held less than 10000 birds. The largest reported was 35000 and there was one of 32000. The total population of the 120 roosts was estimated to be around 500000, about 400000 of which were in flocks of between 5000 and 35000.

Most roosts were on sandbanks, mudflats or the shore, and only about 40000 gulls were found roosting in other situations. Cliff roosts were all adjacent to breeding sites.

All five regular species were reported (Black-headed *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* (43% of birds at the 98 roosts where numbers of each species were separated), Herring *Larus argentatus* (14%), Common *L. canus* (40%), Great Black-backed *L. marinus* (3%) and Lesser Black-backed *L. fuscus* (very small numbers)). The high proportion of Common Gulls was surprising, and at east coast roosts the proportion was over 45%, but these were concentrated into a few with especially large numbers. At most roosts, Common Gulls did not exceed a third of the total.

Methods of Data Capture

The survey was conducted using a questionnaire which was sent to all regions around the coasts. The principal information asked for was the location, a brief description of the site, and the allocation of the numbers of gulls in the roost into one of four numerical categories (<100, <1000, <10000, or <100000). Observers were asked to add their estimates of total numbers of each species if they wished. Many did so, and greatly added to the interest and

usefulness of the results. Because of the many difficulties in counting roosting gulls at dusk, it was not claimed that the estimates were more than indications of the numbers present. Other information requested included weather and feeding movements, the age of roosts, and any monthly changes and movements. It was emphasised that counts each month through the winter would be of greatest value.

Purpose of Data Capture

To determine the numbers of each species of gull roosting in winter along the coasts of Britain and Ireland to compare to the numbers counted during the inland survey of 1952/53.

Geographic Coverage

Coastal areas of Britain and Ireland although in the event almost no information was received from Scotland (and it was not included in the analysis) and none from Ireland.

Temporal Coverage

The winter of 1955/56 with the ideal being monthly counts and with a particular emphasis on December 1955 and January 1956.

Other Interested parties

The survey was organised and run by Ron Hickling with BTO support as a Trust-aided Enquiry.

Organiser(s)

Ron A O Hickling

Current Staff Contact

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Publications

The main report for the survey is:

Hickling, R.A.O. 1960. The coastal roosting of gulls in England and Wales 1955-56. *Bird Study* 7: 32-52.

The survey was noticed in *Bird Study* issues for June, September and December 1955 (vol. 2), and all 4 issues for 1956 (vol.3).

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

Nothing found in BTO archives. Questionnaires were probably shredded by Ron Hickling, as were those for other gull surveys which he had organised. Details are, however, in the appendix of the published report.

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