

Farm Woods

Title

Farm Woods 1999

Description and Summary of Results

Woodland holds more species of breeding birds than other major habitats in the UK and during the 20th Century many smaller farm woods had been cleared for increased agriculture. Concern was being expressed about this reduction in woodland area, and as a result some government schemes were introduced to increase the amount of woodland – the Farm Woodland Scheme (FWS) in 1988 and the Farm Woodland Premium Scheme (FWPS) in 1992 – and by the late 1990s about 30000ha of new farm woodlands had been registered under one of these schemes. However knowledge of their bird populations was minimal and it was unknown how much effect they might be having in general conservation terms. So a survey was organised to look specifically at the birds which occurred in the woodlands which had been registered under either of the two schemes.

In winter 54 species were recorded and 51 in summer but the average number of species in each wood was higher in the breeding season. Overall density of birds was similar in the two seasons once the effect of large flocks of such as thrushes was removed from the winter figures. Location, area, age and conifer content all affected the occurrence of individual species and species richness was found to be higher with increased woodland area and sites connected to hedgerows with trees. Overall abundance was higher along field boundaries than in the woodlands although density in the woodland was higher than in the surrounding crop land. The conclusion was that small farm woodlands provided extra habitat for several species currently declining and was a useful way to increase the overall bird diversity in an area. However preservation of existing woodlands, trees and hedgerows was also considered vital.

Methods of Data Capture

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) supplied a list of 128 candidate sites that had been entered into FWS or FWPS in England. A random selection of these by region was made and a final list of 65 sites was agreed with landowners.

Four counts were made in each, two from 1 January to 15 March (winter) and two from 15 April to 15 May (breeding season) with visits at least 14 days apart. Observers walked all around the woodland and through it to within 50m of every part, and recorded species and numbers seen and heard. For a subset of 11 farms the numbers and species of birds within a 25m strip around the edge of each field and in other non-crop areas of the farm were also recorded onto a 1:2500 map. Birds were counted on as much of the farm as possible on these farms although the centre of fields was deemed not possible.

Habitat data were recorded on each visit along with management details obtained from the farmer. Data included: age of planting the woodland, types of surrounding hedgerows and farmland, percentage conifer and whether herbicide had been used in the establishment of the woodland.

Purpose of Data Capture

To determine the species and numbers in new farm woodlands planted under government incentive schemes aimed at increasing the habitat diversity of farms.

Geographic Coverage

65 sites in England.

Temporal Coverage

The winter of early 1999 and subsequent breeding season, with two winter counts requested between 1 January and 15 March and two breeding ones between 15 April and 15 May.

Other Interested parties

The project was carried out in collaboration with Cranfield University and was funded by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Organiser(s)

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Publications

The main report of the project is:

Vanhinsberg, D., Gough, S., Fuller, R.J. & Brierley, E.D.R. 2002. Summer and winter bird communities in recently established farm woodlands in lowland England. *Agriculture, Ecosystems and Environment* 92: 123-136.

The survey was noticed in *BTO News* number 227.

Available from NBN?

No.

Computer data -- location

BTO Windows network personal space.

Computer data -- outline contents

Computer data -- description of contents

Information held in BTO Archives

Notes on Access and Use

Other information needed

Notes on Survey Design

Specific Issues for Analysis