

Garden Bird Census 1964

Title

Garden Bird Census 1964

Description and Summary of Results

By 1964 the Common Birds Census (CBC) was producing an annual index for the breeding population level of many of the common species of land birds in Britain. However, most of the census areas were farmland, with fewer areas of woodland and other habitats, an emphasis which was placed deliberately, since it was on farmland that changes in land use, combined with the danger from toxic chemicals, were potentially having the greatest impact. But it was also becoming important to know whether year-to-year changes on farmland were being matched by similar changes in other habitats. A country like Britain consists of a complex mosaic of different habitats and so changes in bird numbers are likely to be different in the different habitats, eg different birth and mortality rates and with differential movement between them.

To investigate the extent of annual population changes in gardens, for comparison with the CBC data for farmland, a small BTO enquiry was started in 1964. Five species were chosen -- Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*, Song Thrush *T. philomelos*, Blackbird *T. merula*, Robin *Erithacus rubecula* and Dunnock *Prunella modularis*.

Altogether, 91 observers provided figures for at least two consecutive years between 1962 and 1966, the number of records being rather small for the first two years. The gardens were nearly all between a third of an acre and two acres (0.15-0.85ha), and although they ranged from northern Scotland (a few) to southern England (the majority) there was no evidence for different annual changes in different parts of the country. The first two years were separated by the exceptionally severe winter of 1962/63, but the only one of the four species (Mistle Thrush was recorded too rarely for analyses) which was really hard hit was the Song Thrush, which showed a reduction of 58% in farmland. There was a very small sample in gardens but numbers reduced from 18 to 14 pairs in nine areas. The other species showed at most fairly slight decreases in both habitats, and Blackbird numbers did not change with 36 pairs recorded in gardens in both years. In all four species, the amplitude of the fluctuations was generally less in gardens than in farmland.

Methods of Data Capture

The information asked of each observer was simply the number of pairs of each of the five species that bred, or attempted to breed, in their garden in each year -- in the case of some very small gardens, a group of gardens was taken as the unit. Participation was restricted to observers (most of them also contributors to the Trust's nest record scheme) who kept their gardens under such close observation that they could give the number of breeding pairs of these species with a high degree of accuracy.

Purpose of Data Capture

To attempt to monitor numbers of five species in gardens to compare with the Common Birds Census results for farmland.

Geographic Coverage

Britain.

Temporal Coverage

The breeding seasons of 1964-1966 although there were a few records from 1962 and 1963 as well.

Other Interested parties

The survey was organised and run on a small scale by the BTO.

Organiser(s)

David Snow

Current Staff Contact

archives@bto.org or gbw@bto.org

Publications

The report on the first years of the survey is:

Snow D.W. 1967. Population changes of some common garden birds in gardens. *British Birds* 60: 339-341.

There do not appear to be any subsequent reports.

The survey was noticed in *BTO News* numbers 8 and 13.

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.

Notes on Access and Use

Other information

Notes on Survey Design

Specific Issues for Analysis