

Garden Bird Enquiry

Title

Garden Bird Enquiry 1991-1994

Description and Summary of Results

The BTO's first attempt to monitor birds in gardens was the Garden Bird Feeding Survey (GBFS) which started in the 1970/71 winter and continues to the present. It operates from the beginning of October to the end of March each winter. It was increasingly being realised though that it was not just in the winter that gardens were an important habitat. Hence from 1987 to 1990 the BTO/BASF Garden Bird Survey ran on similar lines to the GBFS but extended to the whole year and with much greater participation, hence giving details of the numbers of each species using gardens through the year. This survey ceased at the end of the funding in 1990.

From autumn 1991 BTO launched a further enquiry looking at the numbers of birds in gardens year round, named the Garden Bird Enquiry. It was a direct descendent of the earlier ones but with less emphasis on the provision of food. In due course it evolved into Garden BirdWatch.

For the Garden Bird Enquiry there were about 600 observers in Britain and a further 150 in Ireland who sent in records for most weeks. Unfortunately no formal report on the project was produced.

Methods of Data Capture

Observers were asked to record the highest count at any one time of each of ten most frequent species (these ten species were listed on the form) seen in their garden each week. Also to list all other species recorded each week. Birds simply flying over were not recorded although such as hirundines were if they were feeding. Observers were also asked to note whether or not they provided food and/or water in each week.

The recording card was read by an Optical Mark Reader.

As with most other BTO garden bird enquiries the information requested was the largest count of each species seen in the garden at any one time in each week. However in this case it was the number of each species seen in the garden, not necessarily just those at artificially provided food. Observers were requested to make their observations using approximately the same amount of effort each week so that figures were comparable. Observers were also asked to fill in a form (also Optical Mark Reader compatible) describing their garden and its main characteristics.

Purpose of Data Capture

To determine the numbers of each species of bird using gardens throughout the year.

Geographic Coverage

All of Britain and Ireland.

Temporal Coverage

Autumn 1991 - Autumn 1994 inclusive for bird data.

Other Interested parties

The project was organised and run by the BTO in conjunction with the Irish Wildbird Conservancy (now BirdWatch Ireland) who took the lead in the Republic of Ireland. At the start the project was funded by the Waltham Centre for Pet Nutrition (Mars UK) Ltd. By July 1992 this funding had ceased and the project was supported by CJ Wildbird Foods.

Organiser(s)

Most of the setting up of the project was by Paul Donald. Rachel Lindsay, with help from David Glue, took over the running of the project in late 1991 until early 1993 when it was taken over by Philip and Mary Jackson as volunteers, again with considerable input from David Glue. This arrangement continued until the project became Garden BirdWatch in 1995.

The organiser in the Republic of Ireland was Jim Wilson.

Current Staff Contact

gbw@bto.org

Publications

Regular newsletters were produced: No.1 December 1991, No.2 March 1992, No.3 July 1992, No.4 October 1992, No.5 January 1993, No.6 August 1993. However no formal report on the overall results was produced.

The project was also noticed in *BTO News* numbers 175 and 176.

Available from NBN?

No.

Computer data -- location

BTO Windows network central area.

Computer data -- outline contents

The data files consist of the count of each species in each garden in each week. The top ten species are recorded as A to D referring to categories of number and the rest as P or X for Presence or Absence.

Computer data -- description of contents

There are three types of data file for each season of each year. xxx.a (eg summer92.a) records the count categories (A B C D) for each of the top ten species in each of the thirteen weeks of the quarter; xxx.b (eg summer92.b) records the presence of the remaining 37 species in each week; and xxx.g combines these and rearranges the data into the format:

Cols 1-5 Site number; 6-7 year; 8-9 week number; 10-56 each species with records A to D for the top ten and P or X for the others. A dot means not recorded. For Blue Tit, Chaffinch, Great Tit, Greenfinch and Collared Dove the categories are: A=1, B=2, C=3-4 and D=5+; for Robin, Blackbird, Dunnock A=1, B=2, C=3, D=4+; for Starling and House Sparrow A=1-5, B=6-10, C=11-20, D=21+.

Species: The top ten: Blue Tit, Robin, Blackbird, House Sparrow, Starling, Dunnock, Chaffinch, Great Tit, Greenfinch, Collared Dove; and the remaining 37: Blackcap, Black-headed Gull, Brambling, Bullfinch, Coal Tit, Crow, Feral Pigeon, Fieldfare, Goldcrest, Goldfinch, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Jackdaw, Jay, Long-tailed Tit, Magpie, Marsh/Willow Tit, Mistle Thrush, Nuthatch, Pied Wagtail, Redwing, Reed Bunting, Rook, Siskin, Song Thrush, Sparrowhawk, Tawny Owl, Treecreeper, Tree Sparrow, Woodpigeon, Wren, and Yellowhammer. These are followed by columns for Suspended Peanuts, Suspended Seed, Suspended Other, Seed on the Ground, Other on the ground, and Water.

There are also some programs used to analyse the data and some preliminary analyses.

Information held in BTO Archives

Nothing is retained. All data were read by the Optical Mark Reader and the original paper disposed of.

Notes on Access and Use

Other information needed

Notes on Survey Design

Specific Issues for Analysis