

Great Crested Grebe 1946-1955

Title

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Description and Summary of Results

The first census of the Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* was in 1931 with a further sample census in 1935. Following the Second World War and the suspected further recovery of the species from the depredations of the plume trade and that it was known to be colonising new areas, a further census was organised for 1946 and this carried on as a sample in all years to 1955. (Later censuses were carried out in 1965 and 1975.)

The census was virtually complete for some years in succession in some counties (notably Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Cheshire, Hertfordshire, Huntingdonshire, Lancashire, Middlesex, Oxfordshire, Surrey and Worcestershire), but in others a varying number of waters were not visited each year and so adjustments had to be made to compare the results of one year with another – in most years less than 10% of suitable waters were thought to have been missed. Following these it was found that the estimated total in 1946 was much the same as in 1931, in 1947 it decreased by 17-18% (probably due to the very cold 1946/47 winter) but then increased by 20%, 13-14% and 9-10% in the three following years to 1950 compared to the previous year, and changed by +5%, -2%, +15%, -1% and -10% to 1955 similarly.

However a considerable shift in population had occurred since 1931. The only counties to show a decrease in 1950 compared with 1946 were Cheshire, Lancashire, Derbyshire, Worcestershire and Bedfordshire, but others had up to three times the number of grebes they had held in 1931. Also there were some marked fluctuations between one year and the next with the species appearing somewhat fickle as to occupancy on a particular site. A total of 1671 grebes was counted in 1946, 1157 on lakes etc already colonized in 1931, and 514 on waters colonized since 1931. In 1950 1839 were counted, 1687 on waters already used by 1946 and 152 on new waters since, suggesting changing of sites of about 2% of the total population each year. By 1955 the total had reached 2195 with about 15% on new waters colonised since 1950 leading to site changing of about 3% per annum. Many of the new waters were newly dug reservoirs and gravel pits especially in the London area. There was also wider movement of birds from one region to another. Between 1950 and 1955 numbers in the North (about Yorkshire to Staffordshire) increased by 38%, numbers in the Central (about West Midlands to Bedfordshire) increased by 15% but in the South (Hertfordshire and Oxfordshire to London area) numbers decreased by 19%.

Methods of Data Capture

The intention was to count the total number of adult grebes at each site. Observers were not required to distinguish between breeding and non-breeding birds, because to do so usually necessitates many more visits than are needed to count the combined total. The breeding season was taken to be May and June, but for the purposes of the census, the key

date was fixed at 7 June every year, and observers were requested to make the count as near as possible to that date.

It was accepted that it was easy to overlook birds, especially on large waters with plenty of cover, so the figures counted were always somewhat less than the total population.

Because of this observers were asked to record a single bird as one of a pair, if there were reasons for supposing that it had a mate incubating out of sight in reeds or other thick cover.

It was decided that the area to be covered by the sample census should be of adjacent counties over as large an area as seemed likely could be covered annually, and that this area would not be extended in later years.

Purpose of Data Capture

To determine the number of adult Great Crested Grebes on all waters in the area sampled.

Geographic Coverage

In practice England from Lancashire and Yorkshire south to Essex, Surrey and Berkshire. In most years it was thought that 90-95% of waters likely to hold grebes were counted.

Temporal Coverage

The breeding seasons of 1946-1955 with a request to count birds on as near as possible to 7 June each year.

Other Interested parties

The survey was organised and run by Phil Hollom as a Trust-aided enquiry.

Organiser(s)

Phil A D Hollom

Current Staff Contact

archives@bto.org

Publications

The main reports of the survey are:

Hollom, P.A.D. 1951. Great Crested Grebe sample census: report to end of 1950. *British Birds* 44: 361-369; and

Hollom, P.A.D. 1959. The Great Crested Grebe sample census 1946-1955. *Bird Study* 6: 1-7. The survey was noticed in the *BTO Annual Report* numbers 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20; in the *BTO Bulletin* numbers 20, 24, 28, 32, 35, 37, 38, 41, 45, 47, 49 and 50; and in *Bird Study* issues for March, June and December 1954, and all four issues for 1955.

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

4 boxes contain the data collected and various notebooks. All records are thought to be present. Data sheets have been scanned.

Notes on Access and Use

Other information

Notes on Survey Design

Specific Issues for Analysis