

Great Crested Grebe 1975

Title

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Description and Summary of Results

Numbers of Great Crested Grebes *Podiceps cristatus* in Britain had been severely reduced by early in the 20th Century due largely to the plume trade for hats. A national census was carried out in 1931 to try to find out what was the actual situation and, to monitor the recovery, sample counts were made in 1935 and then annually from 1946 to 1955. These showed an increase and redistribution, as well as a much improved appreciation of the problems of censusing the species. Following a report of high levels of organochlorine insecticide residues, a second national census was performed in 1965, and the population was found to have continued to increase, although the results for individual counties varied considerably. The biggest increases were in areas with many new reservoirs and gravel pits, and some decreases were evident in counties where few new waters had been created since 1931.

A 1973 census in Scotland produced numbers almost identical to those found in 1965, but subjective impressions from other parts of Britain were often conflicting. Therefore in 1975 a third national census was organised, with the primary objective of determining the number of adult grebes in England, Wales and Scotland. No formal arrangements were made in Northern Ireland, but some counts were made.

Regional coverage varied considerably but overall, more sites were visited in 1975 than in 1965, and it was thought that in most areas the majority of birds were found. The details of numbers in each county are given in the appendix to the published report with the total counted as 6094 adult birds leading to an estimated 6813 for the country. Comparing these to the 1965 totals of 4111 and 4651 showed that the population had continued to increase at a similar rate as during 1955-1965. Only in five counties in England, one in Wales and five in Scotland were the numbers lower in 1975 than in 1965.

In 1975, 60% of the grebe population in England and Wales was on gravel pits and reservoirs, compared with 55% in 1965, and it was found to be spreading into more marginal habitats, such as lowland rivers, which would make it difficult to census the species in future using the same methods.

Methods of Data Capture

The methods adopted were similar to those used in the 1965 survey to allow direct comparison of the results.

It was known that non-breeding birds move around from one site to another, so it was agreed that, ideally, all sites should be visited on the same day. However, in view of the large number of potential sites involved it was decided that at least two days would be required and the weekend of 31 May-1 June was selected. (In 1965 the dates chosen were 29-30 May for similar reasons.)

Observers were requested to complete a simple record form for each site. The basic information requested was a count of adult grebes seen, although an estimated total could also be given where it was thought that one or more birds had been missed, eg those birds incubating out of sight in reed beds. They were also asked to give a habitat description: the type of water (natural lake, gravel pit, clay pit, reservoir, other (details requested) or not known), its age, a brief description of marginal vegetation and surrounding land (including agricultural use), details of current water usage and usage in 1965, 1950 and pre-war if known. Observers were also asked as an extra to record breeding success, but data received were too few for analysis.

Previous surveys had had some problems with sites being duplicated under different names so accurate map references were requested for each site, and some corrections were made to earlier survey data as a result.

Purpose of Data Capture

A complete census of adult Great Crested Grebes.

Geographic Coverage

All of Britain. Nothing formal was organised in Northern Ireland but some counts were made.

Temporal Coverage

The weekend 31 May-1 June 1975, although in some of the more remote parts of Scotland some counts were done 7-8 June 1975.

Other Interested parties

The survey was organised and run by the BTO.

Organiser(s)

Stuart W.M. Hughes and Phil J. Bacon. R.W.J. (Bobby) Smith organised the census in Scotland.

Current Staff Contact

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Publications

The main report of the survey is:

Hughes, S.W.M., Bacon, P.J. & Flegg, J.J.M. 1979. The 1975 census of the Great Crested Grebe in Britain. *Bird Study* 26: 213-226.

The survey was noticed in *BTO News* numbers 70, 71, 75, 77 and 95.

The counts made in Northern Ireland were summarised in:

Furphy, J.S. 1977. Census of Great Crested Grebes in Northern Ireland, summer 1975. *Irish Birds* 1: 56-58.

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

1 archive box contains all the data and letters. All have been scanned.

Notes on Access and Use

Other information

Notes on Survey Design

Specific Issues for Analysis