

Lesser Black-backed Gull 1949-1951

Title

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Description and Summary of Results

In the 1940s there was considerable uncertainty, even confusion, about the status of the Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus* in Britain. Until 1910 it was almost invariably described both in national and local literature as a resident species. But in 1941 *The Handbook* described it as a summer resident and passage migrant with a few staying through the winter in most years. The enquiry was designed to find out the true situation. In the 1949/50 winter about 120 observers took part and 70 did so in 1950/51. Birds in mid-winter were reported from all areas of England and Wales and from Scotland and Ireland, but most records were of occasional occurrences or of one or two sedentary individuals. Late migrants were still passing through in November in both years, with lingering birds more numerous in the north of England than in the south, and especially within 60km or so of a large breeding colony on the Pennines. Return migration in February was noticeable in both years. Up to about 20 birds spent the winter of 1949/50 near each of London, Bristol and Cardiff, with rather more in Bristol and rather less in the London area the following year. In several places there were quite large numbers in November, but only a few stayed through the winter.

Almost all the larger counts were made either in or near towns or on gravel ponds and reservoirs. Inland waters were not only favourite roosting places but were also frequently visited during the day for resting, bathing and preening.

The published report on the winter survey provides full notes of numbers seen with places and dates.

The extension into summer 1950 provided more information on the seasonal movements. Immigration into the British Isles occurred mid-February to the end of May, with a large proportion of immatures among the later arrivals. Numbers of non-breeding adults spent the summer in various parts of the country. Southward movement began before the end of June and continued into November.

The great majority of winter birds in all areas were recorded as belonging to the British subspecies. However, a few of the darker Scandinavian race were recorded, most but not all of them on the eastern side of England. Information on the proportions of different age groups was limited due to the identification difficulties of distinguishing the age groups themselves and distinguishing immatures from Herring Gulls *Larus argentatus*.

Methods of Data Capture

Observers were asked to provide counts of birds at various sites as often as they could. Questionnaires were produced for each season which asked for Date, Location, Number of birds preferably divided into different races and different ages, Habitat, Activity (feeding, resting or flying), and if any Other gulls were present. A new questionnaire sheet was

requested for each month. Negative counts from areas with other gulls present, especially Herring Gulls, were also requested.

Any notes on numbers in previous years were also noted to be helpful.

Purpose of Data Capture

The main purpose of the enquiry was to obtain definite information on the winter status of the species in the British Isles (including age ratio and the different races) and, if possible, to discover if there had been any significant change in recent years. The enquiry was extended in 1950 to encompass March to October to cover all the migratory movements of the species.

Geographic Coverage

All of the British Isles although few counts were received from Scotland or Ireland.

Temporal Coverage

The main survey was conducted in the winters 1949/50 and 1950/51 (1 November to 28 February in each case). However after the first winter it was decided to extend counts through March to October 1950 to cover the whole migration periods of the species.

Other Interested parties

J A G Barnes organised and ran the survey on his own with the support of the Trust.

Organiser(s)

J A G Barnes

Current Staff Contact

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Publications

The main report of the survey is:

Barnes, J.A.G. 1952. The status of the Lesser Black-backed Gull. *British Birds* 45: 3-17.

The extension into the summer of 1950 is reported in:

Barnes, J.A.G. 1953. The migrations of the Lesser Black-backed Gull. *British Birds* 46: 238-252.

The survey was also noticed in *BTO Annual Report* numbers 16 and 17 and in the *BTO Bulletin* numbers 34, 35, 37, 38 and 39.

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

3 boxes containing 8 folders of data sheets. All have been scanned.

Notes on Access and Use

Other information

Notes on Survey Design

Specific Issues for Analysis