

Peregrine 1981

Title

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Description and Summary of Results

The 1961 Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* Enquiry documented the post-1955 crash in breeding population induced by pesticides, and the 1971 national census found that a marked recovery in numbers was taking place. The upward trend was monitored by annual partial surveys and reports up to 1979 and by 1981 it was thought that a repeat countrywide breeding census was warranted.

In the UK at least 1058 nesting territories out of a known total of 1142 were looked at in 1981. Of these, 783 were found to be occupied – 703 by pairs and 80 by apparently single birds, though some of the latter may actually have been paired. At least 531 pairs produced eggs and probably another 81 pairs did so; and of these at least 363 pairs reared young. Allowing for uncovered areas, the estimated total was 808 territorial pairs.

There were marked differences, however, in occupation between regions. Most of those where numbers were still appreciably below the 1930-1939 level were coastal. In SE England and the east coast from Yorkshire to Aberdeenshire recovery was nil or negligible and, probably due to the use and legacy of cereal seed dressing contamination, there was not a single instance of successful breeding from 1963 to 1980. In 1981 there were, however, signs of incipient recovery in Scotland south of Ross-shire, which may well have been a result of the final phasing out in 1975 of dieldrin as a cereal seed dressing.

In coastal districts of SW Scotland, NW England, Wales and SW England there was a considerable recovery since 1971. However the coastal areas of the north and west Highlands continued to be the most puzzling, especially in the west where numbers were no higher than in 1971. It was thought that this was perhaps because of a legacy of PCBs in seabirds which is the main prey in that area.

In all inland districts except the north and west Highlands, numbers were back to 1930-1939 levels. The population of Wales had shown an increase from 25% occupation of territories in 1971 to 125% in 1981. The population level in the Southern Uplands was well above the pre-war level and numbers had also begun to rise in most parts of the south and east Highlands.

Peregrines had a poor breeding season in many parts of UK in 1981. Exceptionally adverse weather at nesting time (especially a very cold spell in late April and a very wet May in many areas) was probably the main reason for breeding failure, but human robbery of nests contributed appreciably in certain districts.

Methods of Data Capture

Observers were asked to make, if possible a minimum of three, visits to each known Peregrine nesting territory during the breeding season, at appropriate intervals to establish presence of birds, evidence of breeding, and the final outcome of any breeding attempt. No attempt was made to locate Peregrines in non-breeding areas or outside the nesting

season. The presence of a Peregrine at or near an actual or probable nesting cliff was regarded as evidence of territory occupation. Sight of an eyrie with eggs or young was required for proof of breeding, but parental activities such as settling down on a ledge in incubating posture or apparent feeding of young when nest contents were unviewable, were also accepted as evidence of nesting. Data on clutch and brood size, and nature and cause of breeding failure, were collected when possible.

Purpose of Data Capture

The main aim of the survey was to establish how many territories were occupied in 1981 for comparison with previous surveys. The stated aim was to find all birds. A second aim of the survey was to assess breeding success in each region of the country.

Geographic Coverage

All of the UK. A parallel survey was carried out in the Republic of Ireland at the same time.

Temporal Coverage

1981 breeding season.

Other Interested parties

The survey was organised and run as a joint project between BTO and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Nature Conservancy Council and the Conservation Branch of the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland. The RSPB and NCC provided much of the financial support for fieldwork in certain districts where cover would otherwise have been inadequate, and several staff of both assisted in the survey.

A parallel survey was conducted in the Republic of Ireland by the Forest and Wildlife Service, with the aid of the Irish Wildbird Conservancy (now Birdwatch Ireland).

Organiser(s)

Derek Ratcliffe.

Current Staff Contact

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Publications

The main report of the survey is:

Ratcliffe, D.A. 1984. The Peregrine breeding population of the United Kingdom in 1981.
Bird Study 31: 1-18.

The parallel survey in Ireland was reported in:

Norriß, D.W. & Wilson, H.J. 1983. Survey of the Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* breeding population in the Republic of Ireland in 1981. *Bird Study* 30: 91-101.

Available from NBN?

No.

Computer data -- location

BTO Windows Network but with restricted access due to the sensitivity of some of the records.

Computer data -- outline contents

An Excel spreadsheet contains all relevant information on sites, habitats and records of visits.

Computer data -- description of contents

The spreadsheet contains:

County, Grid Reference, Site Name, Nest Site Description (Aspect, Altitude etc), Habitat, Records of Visits (Date, Signs of Activity, Nest Contents, Status Codes, Summary, Notes).

Information held in BTO Archives

No material is extant.

Notes on Access and Use

The Peregrine is on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act and is still subject to persecution, so access to the detailed records from the survey are restricted. For details including any specific requests please contact Liz Humphreys or Chris Wernham at BTO Scotland.

Other information

Notes on Survey Design

Specific Issues for Analysis