

Red-backed Shrike 1971

Title

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Description and Summary of Results

The BTO organised a survey of the breeding population of Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio* in 1960. Since then most appropriate county bird reports and other sources had suggested that the population had shown a continued general decline outside the species' main strongholds. However, apart from a dramatic crash between 1961 and 1966 in the New Forest population which had been a major stronghold in 1960, numbers had apparently held up reasonably well in the main areas or were declining less rapidly. There seemed to be good reason to repeat a full census of the entire population and this was done in the summer of 1971, with a few confirmatory observations in 1972.

The result showed there was a breeding population in England of 81 pairs in the summer of 1971. This figure was a minimum, but the likely maximum total was probably no more than 90, which represented a substantial decline (from an estimated 253 pairs) in the 11 years since the previous survey. Particularly notable was that the New Forest (Hampshire) was no longer the stronghold it was and three quarters of the population was found in East Anglia, divided roughly equally between the Brecks and the coastal heaths.

In most counties the coverage was reasonably complete, since most traditional sites were well known and visited annually but, as the bird is not generally conspicuous at the nest, isolated pairs or those in unusual sites may have been overlooked. However, the survey was done during the penultimate year of the breeding atlas fieldwork and this probably helped to bring many such pairs to the notice of bird-watchers.

Methods of Data Capture

The census was organised by correspondence with likely contacts, mainly county recorders and people known to have a special interest in the species. Some difficulty in checking records arose because of an understandable lack of willingness to name sites – the species had been subjected to major egg-collecting pressure for many years.

Purpose of Data Capture

To obtain a complete census of breeding Red-backed Shrike to compare to a previous survey in 1960.

Geographic Coverage

All of Britain although in practice primarily the southeast.

Temporal Coverage

The breeding season of 1971.

Other Interested parties

The survey was organised and run by the BTO, primarily via specific contacts with local observers.

Organiser(s)

Colin Bibby

Current Staff Contact

archives@bto.org

Publications

The main report of the survey is:

Bibby, C.J. 1973. The Red-backed Shrike: a vanishing British species. *Bird Study* 20: 103-110.

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

Some letters.

Notes on Access and Use

The species ceased to breed in the UK in the early 1990s but remains on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981.

Other information

Notes on Survey Design

Specific Issues for Analysis