

Redshank 1939

Title

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Description and Summary of Results

In the 19th Century the Redshank *Tringa totanus* appeared to be a bird of the coast, tidal rivers and the neighbouring coastal districts, and breeding only on the eastern side of Great Britain, but since the beginning of the 20th Century it had been increasingly found breeding well inland. Hence it was thought desirable to place this increase on record and to find, if possible, whether the distribution had stabilised or was still expanding. In addition it was hoped through subsidiary questions to obtain information on its breeding habits and the nature of its food at different periods of the year.

Observers or societies sent in 91 schedules. The area covered by each varied from a few hundred square metres to a whole county, and a large amount of information was extracted from ornithological publications and correspondence. Most of the latter and a few of the schedules referred to years other than 1939-1940, and the amount of information given in the replies to the questions on the schedule varied from a simple record of distribution in the observer's area to a full and detailed answer to all, or almost all, the questions asked. The published report includes a detailed history of breeding occurrences all over Britain and Ireland since the 17th Century as far as could be gleaned from publications, although because of wartime restrictions full details of all records from the survey itself were not included unlike in most contemporary reports. In 1939-1940 Redshanks were found to be breeding over most of the country, and in most areas still to be increasing – 56% of responders said increasing, 33% no change, 11% decreasing – although the situation in Ireland appeared to be stable. In winter the species moved almost entirely to the coast. For breeding the most important habitat feature needed seemed to be some kind of wet area within at most 200m of the nesting area. The report summarises the answers given to all the questions on the schedule as to breeding habits, and some on the feeding habits. The latter included some quite detailed analyses of pellets by Alice Hibbert-Ware.

Methods of Data Capture

The most useful results came in as responses to the questionnaire (schedule). This asked for details of the area covered; whether or not Redshanks were breeding and if so where; were birds found between the end of July and 1 March and again if so where; had there been any marked increase or decrease and if so when; what habitats were favoured for breeding and at other seasons. Observers were also asked to describe local breeding habits – arrival dates, nest sites, nest material, egg-laying date and time, incubation period, when do young first fly, proportion of addled eggs (and those which failed to hatch), causes of any losses, occurrence of any “cock nests” and how near they were to any occupied nests; and local feeding habits – nature of food at different seasons, method of getting it, times of day favoured, habitats favoured for feeding, and other points such as tides, weather etc.

Much information especially on the history of the species's breeding was obtained from many and various publications. A few people made a particularly careful study and notes of the occurrence of the species in specific areas.

Purpose of Data Capture

The main purpose was to do a breeding season census and to determine the year-round food requirements. Also to obtain fuller details on breeding habits.

Geographic Coverage

All of Britain and with some records from Ireland.

Temporal Coverage

1939-1940 with an emphasis placed on the breeding season.

Other Interested parties

The survey was run by J F Thomas with the support of the BTO.

Organiser(s)

J F Thomas

Current Staff Contact

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Publications

The main report is:

Thomas, J.F. 1942. Report on the Redshank Inquiry 1939-1940. *British Birds* 36: 5-14; 22-34.

The survey was noticed in *BTO Annual Report* numbers 5 and 6, and *BTO Bulletin* numbers 9, 11, 12 and 13.

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 containing data sheets and letters, and draft copies of the report. They have not been scanned.

Notes on Access and Use**Other information****Notes on Survey Design****Specific Issues for Analysis**