

Rook 1944

Title

Rook Survey 1944

Description and Summary of Results

By the middle of the Second World War the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries was becoming concerned that the Rook *Corvus frugilegus* was causing damage to the country's potential food production and therefore it commissioned a project, via the Agricultural Research Council, to determine whether or not this was the case and if so what could potentially be done about it.

During the 1930s the BTO had carried out censuses of rookeries in some areas of England so there was a baseline figure for some areas against which some comparisons could be made. From 1944 to 1946 at least 350 observers censused Rooks over about two thirds of England, Wales and Scotland. In the area which was repeat censuses the overall population had increased by around a quarter but there was considerable regional and local variation. In all the total estimate of the population was just under 1 million nests in England, about 100000 in Wales and nearly 400000 in Scotland.

Flocks of feeding Rooks were counted throughout the year by more than 500 observers. Over half the time recorded was for Rooks on grassland and less than a quarter on root crops and ploughed land.

Also 1577 Rooks were shot to investigate food preferences. Food was found to be just over 80% vegetable matter and 20% animal (invertebrates). The conclusion was therefore that on balance the Rook caused more harm than good although harm was greater at some times of year than at others. However control measures were not thought necessary as the harm was not sufficient to warrant it.

Methods of Data Capture

Fieldwork by members of the Trust consisted of: a) censuses of nests; and b) counts of feeding flocks. Fieldwork for the nest censuses was concentrated especially into areas where Rooks had been counted during the 1930s but this new survey covered a much larger area. The counts were of "occupied nests" in rookeries.

The counts of feeding flocks also included as much information as possible on the habitat the birds were feeding in and if possible on what food was being taken.

Purpose of Data Capture

To determine the size of the Rook population in Britain especially referring to any recent changes; and to find out its food and feeding habits especially in relation to any damage it might cause to agricultural crops.

Geographic Coverage

All of Britain.

Temporal Coverage

February 1944 to September 1946.

Other Interested parties

The project was commissioned and funded by an Agricultural Research Council grant to the BTO. The project was carried out in conjunction with the Edward Grey Institute.

Organiser(s)

James Fisher with W B Alexander as scientific adviser. Staff of the project included Mrs J Fitzpatrick, W D Hincks, E Cohen, G Edwards, G Waterston and Miss V Larkman.

Current Staff Contact

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Publications

There was no formal published report on the survey. A cyclostyled Agricultural Research Council report "R4" dated May 1947 is noted as a summary of the Rook Investigation – it was written by James Fisher. There were some other earlier reports during the course of the project.

Analysis of the food samples was reported by:

Holyoak, D. 1972. Food of the Rook in Britain. *Bird Study* 19: 59-68.

The survey was noticed in *BTO Annual Report* numbers 12 and 13; and in *BTO Bulletin* number 18.

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 large boxes containing maps of rookeries and a few press cuttings; 1 large box containing a few pellets – most of these were disposed of in 2006 as there were no supporting data; 1 box containing data cards; 4 boxes containing miscellaneous correspondence and papers. The Edward Grey Institute holds rather more: copies of several reports; 3 small ringbinders containing data on 8x5 inch cards; a small ringbinder containing references; a large ledger containing summaries by county; 4 large foolscap ringbinders containing original data sheets; 1 large foolscap ringbinder with density analysis; 2 foolscap ringbinders containing miscellaneous papers; 3 Transfer Cases containing analyses; 1 Transfer Case containing feeding habitat cards; and 7 Transfer Cases of miscellaneous correspondence etc.

Notes on Access and Use

Other information

Notes on Survey Design

Specific Issues for Analysis