

Stonechat 1961

Title

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Description and Summary of Results

A study of records of the Stonechat *Saxicola torquatus* showed that there had been a gradual decline during the 20th Century. So an investigation into the breeding distribution and the causes of its apparently widespread decline were instigated for 1961.

As was to be expected, the majority of completed questionnaires came from those counties with well-established breeding populations: the maritime counties of the south, west and northwest of England, Wales and Scotland. Unfortunately there were some counties from which satisfactory information could not be obtained, although information subsequently published in local bird reports showed that in a few counties some birds bred that were not communicated to the organiser of the Enquiry.

Only in Cornwall, Somerset and Hampshire, western Wales, parts of western Scotland, and perhaps Ireland were numbers found to be of the same order as they were in the early part of the 20th Century with declines in the rest of the country varying from slight to total disappearance. In 1900 Stonechats bred in every county of Great Britain. In 1961 though there were no breeding records at all from 36 counties and, for the majority of the 16 English counties among these, and maybe for the Scottish and Welsh counties, it was fairly certain that the absence of records reflected the true situation. Also it seemed that the breeding population in 1961 was higher than for some years.

The reasons for the decline were determined primarily to be hard winters and habitat change and destruction. However there were plenty of areas with apparently suitable habitat which remained unoccupied.

Methods of Data Capture

Questionnaires were circulated to members through the Regional Representatives, and further information was obtained from numerous individuals following publicity in the national press and periodicals, and through personal correspondence. This asked for details of numbers, localities and habitats. Wherever possible a completed questionnaire was obtained. Over 400 were issued, of which 338 (or the equivalent thereof) were returned completed.

Purpose of Data Capture

To determine the current status of the species in Britain and Ireland.

Geographic Coverage

All of Britain and Ireland although very few specific records from Ireland and the smaller islands were received.

Temporal Coverage

The breeding season of 1961.

Other Interested parties

The survey was organised and run by the BTO as a Trust-aided enquiry.

Organiser(s)

J D Magee

Current Staff Contact

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Publications

The main report of the survey is:

Magee, J.D. 1965. The breeding distribution of the Stonechat in Britain and the causes of its decline. *Bird Study* 12: 83-89.

The survey was noticed in *Bird Study* vol. 8 (for 1961) all four issues.

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 box contains some letters; 2 boxes contain data sorted by county.

Notes on Access and Use

Other information

Notes on Survey Design

Specific Issues for Analysis