

Urban Starling Roosts

Title

Urban Starling roosts 1962/63 - 1963/64

Description and Summary of Results

In the 1950s the Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* had been benefiting from agriculture, but also from urbanisation. Increasingly it was roosting on buildings in the centre of some of the larger cities, birds were fouling buildings and pavements, and their droppings had been alleged to constitute a health hazard by harbouring various diseases. There was also a widespread impression that urban roosts were becoming more extensive and more numerous in Britain and there was no efficient method known for eliminating them. Hence a Trust-aided investigation was launched in late 1962 to find how many birds were involved and where.

A total of 69 urban roosts in 39 conurbations were recorded. Fifteen of the localities contained roosts on masonry in their central areas, with most located in the northern industrial areas. There were no large roosts of this kind in southern and eastern England, except for London and Bristol, and none in Wales. The roost distribution patterns in all fifteen urban areas were in areas with tall stone buildings, mostly of Gothic or Classical Revival style, and dating from the Victorian era. Typical sites were ledges, sills, ornamented facades, the Acanthian leaves on the top of Corinthian columns and ornamented porticos. Most birds roosted at least 6m from the ground. More modern buildings were not used and appeared to be mainly unsuitable, not having ledges or other suitable perches.

In London, Bristol and Manchester the birds moved onto buildings from trees during the autumn leaf fall and reached peak numbers in the late summer (London) or winter (the other two). In Newcastle upon Tyne and Birmingham no such pattern was evident, but here the trees were sheltered by buildings. Nowhere did numbers increase with the autumn influx of Starlings from the Continent, suggesting that most birds roosting in urban areas are British bred.

It soon became clear that communal roosting on the outside of buildings was exceptional in small towns and settlements, apart from in some coastal areas where cliff roosting is a normal habit.

Historical notes sent in suggested that there had been a continuous extension of the urban roosting habit at a steady rate over a period of about 140 years, but even by the early 1960s the proportion of the total Starling population roosting in urban areas was small.

Methods of Data Capture

The first objective was to locate the large communal roosts on buildings in urban areas and to trace their history. An attempt was made to establish the date when Starlings first roosted on buildings in each town, but this was usually difficult. A new classification of the types of roost was:

Class I: Roosts on masonry in the centre of urban areas;

Class II: Roosts on industrial plant, bridges, jetties, cranes etc, on masonry outside of urban areas, and those inside buildings;

Class III: Roosts on trees in urban areas or urban parks and those not moving onto buildings with leaf fall.

Coverage of Class I roosts was probably complete, and the recorded roosts of Class II and Class III were assumed to be a valid sample of the total number in any year.

Purpose of Data Capture

The main object was to determine the distribution and overall numbers of Starling roosts in urban areas and any seasonal patterns of use.

Geographic Coverage

All of Britain and Ireland.

Temporal Coverage

Primarily October 1962 to April 1964, ie two winters. There had been a pilot survey in 1958.

Other Interested parties

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

Organiser(s)

G R (Dick) Potts

Current Staff Contact

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Publications

The main report of the survey is:

Potts, G.R. 1967. Urban Starling roosts in the British Isles. *Bird Study* 14: 25-42.

The survey was noticed in *BTO News* number 17; and in *Bird Study* vol. 5 for 1958 (March, June and September issues), vol. 9 for 1962 (September and December issues) and vol. 10 for 1963 (March and September 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 Archive Box containing the data, letters and reports, all stored in 5 folders, 5 notebooks and with 1 large map. All data have been scanned.

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