

Inland Wintering Gulls 1973

Title

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Description and Summary of Results

Gulls were first noted spending the winter inland in the London area at the end of the 19th Century. Numbers were at first small but a rapid increase and a spread to other industrial areas was soon noticed. By the end of the Second World War it was realised that numbers were now large, and similar observations had been made in other countries. A survey was organised for 1953 to get an idea of the numbers involved for use as a baseline for future studies of this changing habit, and there was another survey in 1963 which revealed a continued increase in the numbers. Some of this increase was facilitated by the construction of new and often large reservoirs near to industrial centres and which provided the essential safe roosts near to feeding areas which the gulls needed. A new reservoir could lead to a rapid and spectacular increase in the local population of gulls, for example Draycote Water in Warwickshire was an area which never carried many birds but the new reservoir was immediately occupied as a roost, and in 1973 was estimated to contain some 100000 gulls.

However there were no estimates of numbers at coastal sites so it was not possible to determine whether the apparent increase inland was due to a shift of population from the coast or whether it was a genuine increase in numbers.

The 1973 survey was the third such survey and found that the total number of roosting gulls counted had reached the order of a million birds, which was an increase of 83.1% from 1963, and of 177% since 1953.

Methods of Data Capture

For the previous surveys it had been recommended that birds were counted on the water (most roosts are on lakes or reservoirs), if necessary counting those in a small area in detail and then multiplying up. During the course of this 1973 survey though it was becoming clear that this was not necessarily the best way, especially for sites with large numbers. Many sites were therefore counted using the methods which subsequently became the standard. This is using a team of observers stationed strategically around the site with each observer counting birds as they came in to the roost on the predetermined flightlines, with each observer counting everything arriving between particular visible landmarks. It was accepted that not every bird could be counted or even identified individually, and estimates of totals were accepted, as were if necessary a division into "large" or "small" or even just unidentified. For all these surveys it is accepted that the figures produced are minimal, both because it is known that most observers tend to underestimate numbers and also that not all sites were covered. In addition it is known that some roosts are very variable in that some birds move around between nearby sites often on a daily basis.

Purpose of Data Capture

To determine the numbers of gulls wintering at inland sites, to compare with similar counts in 1963 and 1953.

Geographic Coverage

Counts at known inland roosts in England and Wales.

Temporal Coverage

A single count at each site was carried out during January 1973.

Other Interested parties

The survey was organised, run and funded by the BTO.

Organiser(s)

Ron A.O. Hickling

Current Staff Contact

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Publications

The main report of the survey is:

Hickling, R.A.O. 1977. Inland wintering of gulls in England and Wales, 1973. *Bird Study* 24: 79-88.

It was also noticed in *BTO News* number 54.

(Note that a comprehensive review of all wintering gull surveys previous to the survey of 2003-2007 is: Burton, N.H.K., Musgrove, A.J., Rehfisch, M.M., Sutcliffe, A. & Waters, R. 2003. Numbers of wintering gulls in the United Kingdom, Channel Islands and Isle of Man: a review of the 1993 and previous Winter Gull Roost Surveys. *British Birds* 96: 376-401.)

Available from NBN?

No.

Computer data -- location

BTO Windows network central area.

Computer data -- outline contents

A data file input from the published paper containing counts of the main species at each site counted.

Computer data -- description of contents

Data file is: 1973 Gull Data.csv

Columns are: sitename -- often the same as in subsequent surveys; gridref; habitat1 -- INLAND, COASTAL, OFFSHORE; habitat2 -- GP=Gravel Pit, RES=Reservoir, LAK=Lake, EST=Estuary, FLW=Floodwater, HAR=Harbour, ISL=Island, OC=Open Coast, RIV=River, DL=Miscellaneous, (PLA=Platform (offshore)), CW=Colliery Lagoon, CP=Clay Pit, SP=Sugar Factory, SW=Sewage Works; county -- most as GBXX; BH -- Black-headed Gull count; CM -- Common Gull; HG -- Herring Gull; LB -- Lesser Black-backed Gull; GB -- Great Black-backed Gull; unknown -- unidentified gull; alltotal -- the total of each species added together; date (as DD/MM/YYYY); day; month; year

Information held in BTO Archives

Nothing. All data sheets and cards were shredded by Ron Hickling when he retired. Data were input to the computer from the published paper.

Notes on Access and Use

Other information

Notes on Survey Design

Specific Issues for Analysis