

Woodland Bird Enquiry 1936-37

Title

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Description and Summary of Results

Following the Heathland bird enquiry of 1934 the BTO decided to try to find out the characteristic bird populations of each main woodland type. A general survey was decided upon rather than a detailed study of one or a few species or woodland types, and it was not intended to obtain figures for the density or total populations of woods, nor to look at the geographical distributions of British woodland birds investigated, except where these had some bearing on habitat.

In the event 152 woods were investigated in summer and 120 in winter, and 57 individuals and organisations took part in the survey. Both mixed broad-leaved woods and natural pine forest were found to be rich in birds, but plantations of both were poor, correlated especially with close planting and scarcity of holes (for nests) and secondary growth, the latter two of which in particular were found to be especially important in promoting numbers and range of species. Eleven species of birds were almost confined to broad-leaved *cf* coniferous woods (two being characteristic of birch), and five to coniferous *cf* broad-leaved woods. A few species were abundant in all the main types of woods. Some species were limited to open *cf* closed canopy woods, others were limited by secondary growth, nesting holes, tall trees (as nests or song posts), and a few by water.

(Many of the findings of this enquiry are now taken as standard and general knowledge – eg Goldcrests *Regulus regulus* and Crossbills *Loxia curvirostra* being most prevalent in coniferous trees and Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix* largely in oakwoods of western Britain. However at the time even such general knowledge was largely unknown.)

Winter habitat distributions were mainly similar to those of the breeding season, although several species became more widespread when some of the specific constraints for breeding were not necessary (eg song-posts, holes for nesting). Both breeding and wintering habitat distributions were found to be similar to what had been found on the northern European mainland.

The species occurring in each wood and the main characteristics of each are detailed in the appendix of the published report.

Methods of Data Capture

Observers were asked to record the actual number of each species observed during a slow walk through their chosen wood. Total populations were not an object of the enquiry, largely as it would have involved an enormous amount of work. It was noted that the figures obtained on one sample walk were likely to be only a very rough indication of the numerical abundance of the different species, and so figures could not be used too precisely. An index was calculated to determine the relative abundance of a species between woods and to an extent this could be used to produce a figure between different species although different conspicuousness was specifically noted as being a problem.

Observers were asked to investigate woods of as pure types as possible, although a few counts from mixed woods were included. Detailed descriptions of the actual woods counted by each observer were also requested.

Breeding season counts were taken between mid-April and June with at least two counts where possible, and wintering ones between November and February.

Purpose of Data Capture

The object of the enquiry was to determine the habitat distributions (within woodland types) of the different species, to investigate which factors provided by woods were important in limiting such, and to compare the differences in species composition of the different woodland types.

Geographic Coverage

All of Britain.

Temporal Coverage

The breeding seasons of 1936 and 1937 with counts requested from mid-April to June, and winter counts from November to February.

Other Interested parties

The enquiry was run by the organisers on behalf of the BTO.

Organiser(s)

David Lack and L S V (Pat) Venables

Current Staff Contact

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Publications

The main report of the enquiry is:

Lack, D. & Venables, L.S.V. 1939. The habitat distribution of British woodland birds. *Journal of Animal Ecology* 8: 39-71.

The enquiry was also noticed in the *BTO Annual Report* numbers 2, 3, 4 and 5; and in *BTO Bulletin* numbers 3 and 5.

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 Folder containing photocopies of the Instructions and of 15 typed results sheets of James Fisher – originals in James Fisher archive in Natural History Museum.

The Edward Grey Institute has 10 pages of wood descriptions and data from Bagley Wood (Oxford) and Green Walk (Royston) in the David Lack archive.

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