

# Woodpigeon Movements

## Title

Woodpigeon - autumn movements 1955

## Description and Summary of Results

The Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus* had been described as being an almost completely sedentary resident in Britain and also a winter visitor. The winter immigrants were said to arrive on the east coast, between the Thames and the Northern Isles, from September to January chiefly in November; and the numbers involved were stated to be small in some years but 'immense' about every four to six years. There was also argument as to the source of the, sometimes quite large, flocks occurring in winter as to whether they were British bred birds simply moving around or were immigrants from continental Europe and Scandinavia. Even apparent "arrivals" along the south coast were thought by some to be due to a tendency for birds to fly a short distance out to sea over the English Channel on leaving roosts and then returning. There was too some "evidence" of movements in various parts of the country.

Clearly there were conflicting ideas about the origin of autumn and winter flocks of the species, but one thing which was clear was that large flocks of Woodpigeons were being seen from the end of October onwards, both inland and at the coast.

The overall enquiry to try to resolve these issues was in three parts, all of which were included in the main report: 1) analysis of ringing and recovery data held by the BTO; 2) direct observations by many observers scattered across the country; and 3) a more detailed four-year study of observations of roosts in SE Kent by the organisers. The second of these became a Trust-aided enquiry and is considered further here.

A total of 117857 individual flights distributed between the eight cardinal compass points were recorded from all areas of the British Isles between 9 October and 24 December 1955. Most records were of birds flying between northeast and south (perhaps especially concentrated to this in the early morning) with relatively few flying north or west.

There was a significant increase in the total number of birds seen per observer hour in November, some recorded directions were specifically affected by local topography, and many records could be associated with birds leaving nocturnal roosts. There were no specific records of immigration in 1955 although there was clearly some movement into more southerly areas of the country. (In some years anyway there is some recorded emigration from the south coast, and there were periodic records of large flocks coming in to the east coast, eg in November 1959, when several large flocks were seen between East Anglia and northeast England.)

## Methods of Data Capture

Each observer was asked to choose a watching point with an extensive view, but where local features would not be expected to cause a deflection of the birds' flight. Four sets of observations were requested: 1) total number of Woodpigeons seen flying in each of eight compass directions between dawn and 1000 hours each day, from October to December

1955; and recording the date, place and times of watch; 2) numbers and directions of birds seen returning to roost in the evenings during the last two hours of daylight – to try to determine if morning movements could be traced back to evening roosts; 3) directional counts of birds specifically leaving a roost in the early morning period; 4) counts of any Woodpigeon flocks seen flying in towards land from the sea at any time of day. In all cases all negative watches were to be recorded.

In the event over 2000 record cards were distributed and 147 observers sent in records. There was a proposal to continue in the autumn of 1956 but to record observations only at weekends in November. However this was never reported on in any detail and it is unknown how many replies were received.

### **Purpose of Data Capture**

To determine any patterns in the movements of Woodpigeons in the autumn.

### **Geographic Coverage**

All of UK.

### **Temporal Coverage**

The autumn of 1955 with counts actually received from 9 October to 24 December primarily of movements between dawn and 1000 on as many days as possible from one point.

### **Other Interested parties**

The survey was organised and run by Ron Murton and Mike Ridpath with support from the BTO as a Trust-aided enquiry.

### **Organiser(s)**

Ron Murton and Mike Ridpath.

### **Current Staff Contact**

archives@bto.org

### **Publications**

The report on the enquiry is:

Murton, R.K. & Ridpath, M.G. 1962. The autumn movements of the Woodpigeon. *Bird Study* 9: 7-41.

The enquiry was noticed in *Bird Study* vol. 2 issues for September and December 1955, vol. 3 all four issues, and vol. 4 issue for March 1957.

**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**

Nothing found in the BTO archives. All data and correspondence are presumed to have been retained by the organisers and never returned to the BTO.

**Notes on Access and Use**

**Other information**

**Notes on Survey Design**

**Specific Issues for Analysis**