

Wryneck 1954

Title

Wryneck 1954-1958

Description and Summary of Results

County bird reports and similar publications were indicating that the Wryneck *Jynx torquilla* was declining quite fast. However some counties were not covered well by these reports, notably for this species Kent. So, in 1953, the BTO agreed to aid an investigation of the status of the species in the British Isles.

The main finding was that by 1958 the Wryneck was extremely scarce as a breeding bird in the British Isles compared with a century previously, but the maximum in one year of only 26 proved breeding pairs was even lower than expected. There were 26, 14, 23, 12 and 15 pairs proved breeding in 1954 to 1958 respectively, but adding the records of probable, possible and just possible breeding birds, the figures became 121, 106, 117, 72 and 65. If it is assumed that up to two thirds of breeding pairs were unrecorded (probably an overestimate), the estimate of the breeding population for the British Isles became about 365, 325, 365, 220 and 205 pairs in 1954-1958. The main concentration was in the extreme southeast, in Kent, with pockets in Surrey, middle Thames, Norfolk-Suffolk boundary, Middlesex, Hampshire and Northamptonshire. North of a line from the Wash to the Dee estuary, including Cheshire, Leicester and Rutland, records were of migrants only, except for one surprising observation in Northumberland in June 1955 with a bird seen in the same place as where one had been found dead in August 1954. The published report lists or summarises the actual records in each county in each year.

It also became clear that the reduction in numbers had not been sudden or dramatic, but was a gradual contraction from the more northern and western areas of the known range. However it was not generally realised that the species frequently stops calling almost completely when the clutch has been completed and therefore some records of singing birds in May could actually be breeding pairs, and also that unless the species was expected or actively searched for it was probably widely overlooked.

Methods of Data Capture

The survey was conducted on a county basis. Observers were asked, privately or by circulars through their county societies, to record every Wryneck seen during each year, and to make a special effort to find nest-sites and obtain breeding data.

Data collected in this way were noted as likely to be uneven, both because of the distribution and attentiveness of observers, which vary from year to year, and because some counties are better organised than others for disseminating requests for information and for organising the response – these leading to opposing biases. This is compounded because the species is cryptically coloured and secretive, it is more often heard than seen, both birds of the pair become silent on completing the clutch and because individuals of a pair sometimes range widely, with both males and females calling perhaps from widely separate locations. Isolated records in the breeding season provided further difficulties.

Records received were divided into six categories: B = proved breeding; P = probably breeding; S = possibly breeding, T = just possibly breeding; M = migrants; and U = unknown status. This division, except for the proved breeding pairs, was set on the following basis. Records from: March-26 April -- regarded as migrants (M); 27 April-14 May -- single records just possibly breeding (T), two records possibly breeding (S), and three probably breeding (P); 15 May-31 July -- single records possibly breeding (S), more than one record probably breeding (P); 1 August-20 August -- single records just possibly breeding (T), more than one possibly breeding (S); 21 August onwards -- regarded as migrants (M). These were known to be arbitrary but the dates were based on the known general breeding behaviour, with a deliberate bias in favour of a breeding status.

Purpose of Data Capture

To estimate the number of breeding pairs and distribution of Wrynecks in Britain.

Geographic Coverage

All of Britain but effectively the southern half of England, and Wales.

Temporal Coverage

The breeding seasons of 1954-1958.

Other Interested parties

The survey was organised and run by the BTO as a Trust-aided enquiry from March 1955 having originated as a Request for Information.

Organiser(s)

James Monk

Current Staff Contact

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Publications

The main report of the survey is:

Monk, J.F. 1963. The past and present status of the Wryneck in the British Isles. *Bird Study* 10: 112-132.

And a preliminary report is:

Monk, J.F. 1955. Report on Wryneck Survey. *Bird Study* 2: 87-89.

The survey was noticed in *Bird Study* issues for March, September and December 1954, and every issue from March 1955 to March 1960.

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 including a large printed table of numbers which was not published.

Notes on Access and Use

Other information

Notes on Survey Design

Specific Issues for Analysis