

Bird Atlas 2007-11

August 2010



Welcome to the August 2010 issue of the Bird Atlas 2007-11 Newsletter. Three years of fieldwork have now been completed and we have made superb progress. Thank you for your help!

Big push for final winter

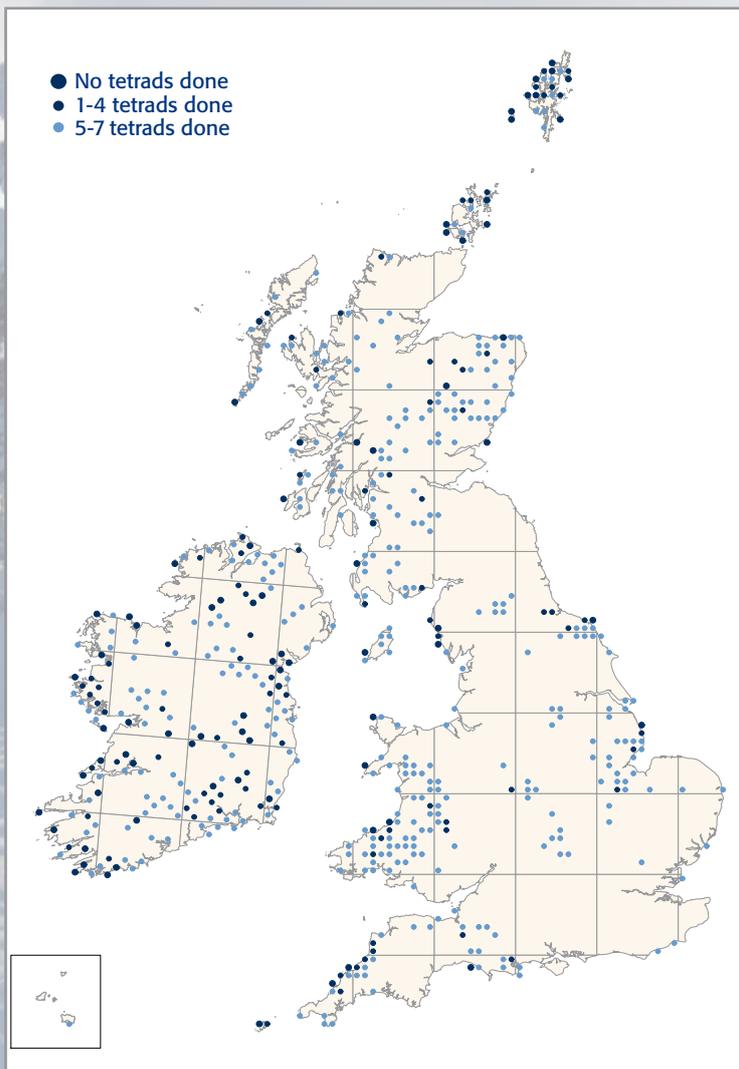


Figure 1. 10-km squares where Timed Tetrad Visits are still required to achieve minimum coverage across Britain and Ireland. For counties undertaking local tetrad Atlases, help is still required in many 10-km squares to achieve complete coverage of tetrads.

Writing this newsletter in the balmy days of summer 2010, the kind of scene behind should be far from mind. But our thoughts are already on winter 2010/11, our final winter of fieldwork and our last chance to find wintering species and complete timed counts. Let's hope the final winter isn't as harsh as the last one!

As we enter the final winter we are in a very strong position, with over 90% of the required number of tetrads having had at least one visit completed and most 10-km squares have a high proportion of the expected species richness recorded. We need your help to ensure we achieve comprehensive coverage across Britain and Ireland.

This means there are a few simple priorities for the final winter. To complete the national aim of eight tetrads surveyed in each 10-km we only have around 2000 tetrads left to cover in 537 10-kms, which is an achievable target if volunteers are prepared to travel.

The priority 10-km squares where more Timed Tetrad Visits (TTVs) are required are shown in Figure 1. We need more volunteers to take on tetrads in these areas. Some 10-km squares could be tackled by 'Blitz Groups', with a group of friends travelling to a 10-km square and covering the tetrads on the same day and following up with a repeat visit in the late winter period. Could you organise that locally?

Another priority is to complete second visits on TTVs already begun. Have a look at page four to see the map of 10-km squares with at least one visit completed. You'll also see what tremendous progress we've made towards species richness – and where the gaps are! The final challenge is to go birding and fill in the gaps in the 10-km square species lists. Thank you for all your help and enjoy Atlasing this winter.

Dawn Balmer, Atlas Coordinator (This post has kindly been funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.)



Jill Pakenham

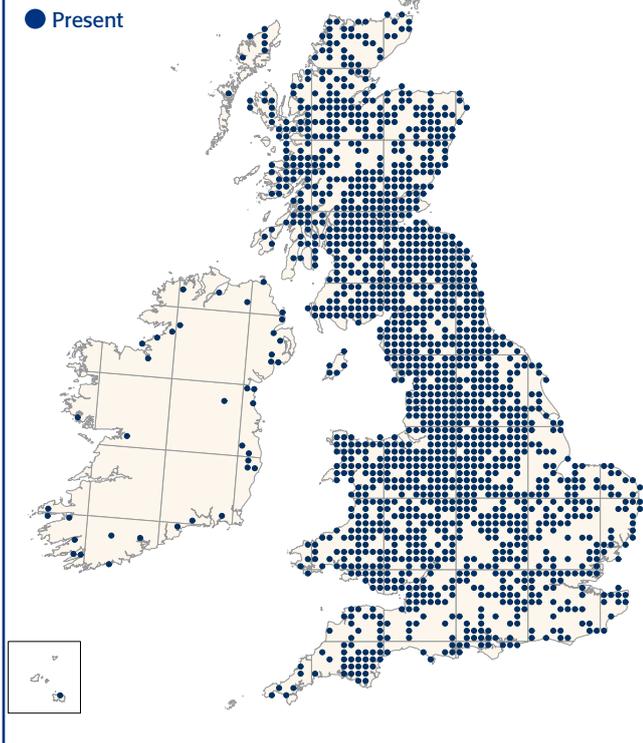


Figure 2. Goosander – winter distribution 2007/08 to 2009/10. Since the Winter Atlas of 1981-84 Goosander have expanded their wintering range across the whole of Britain and are now regularly found in Ireland.



John Harding

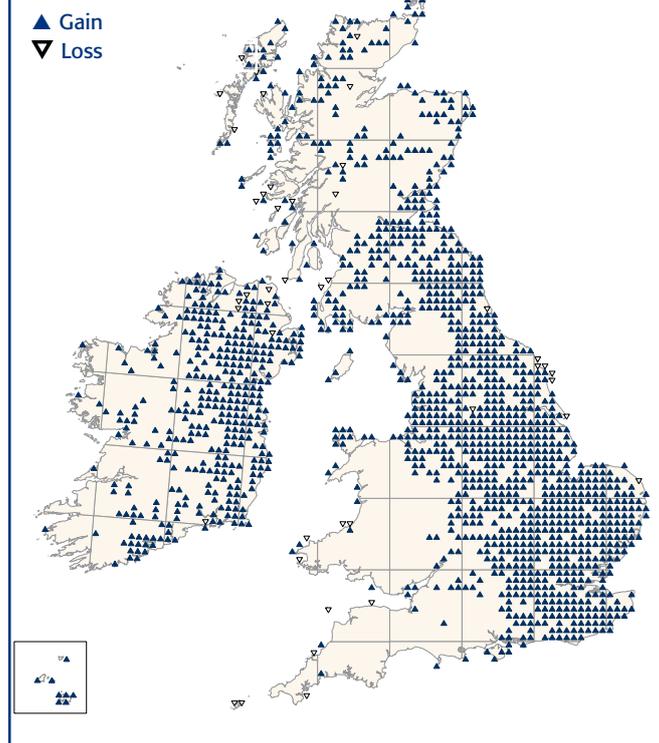


Figure 3. Buzzard – change in winter distribution between 1981-84 and 2007-10. The map clearly shows the range expansion to the north and east in Britain and across the eastern part of Ireland; they are still very scarce in the west of Ireland.



John Harding

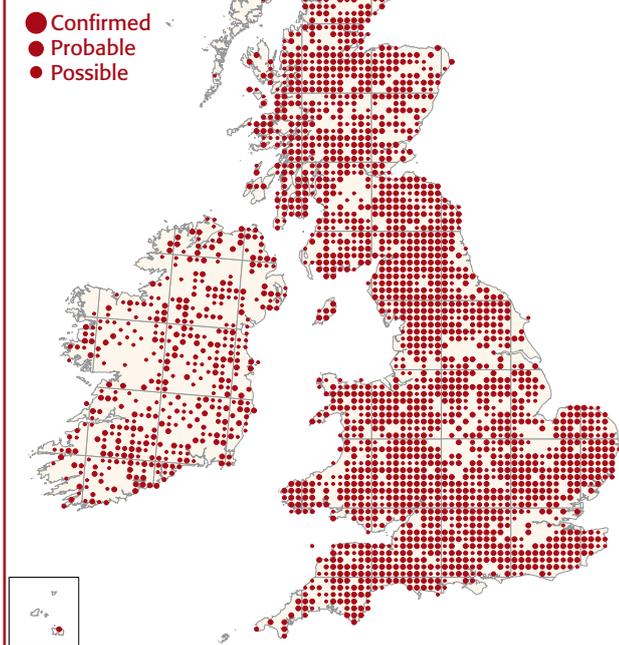


Figure 4. Spotted Flycatcher – breeding distribution 2008-2010. There are many more gaps in Britain compared with the 1988-91 distribution – can you fill any? The map suggests considerable loss across Ireland, although coverage has been patchy.



Jill Pakenham

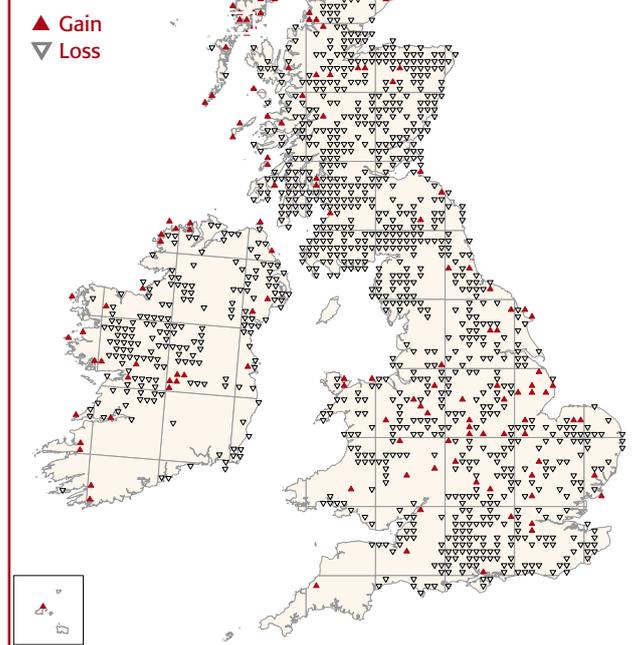


Figure 5. Redshank – change in breeding distribution between 1968-72 and 2008-10. It's clear from the number of 'loss' symbols that there has been a significant range contraction across Britain and Ireland in the last forty years.

Looking to the future – the lasting value of Atlas data

Thanks to the magnificent efforts of a huge number of fieldworkers, Bird Atlas 2007-11 is setting new standards for atlases. The quantity of data collected is huge and, when placed alongside the previous three distribution atlases, represents an immensely rich source of information about the changing status of birds in Britain and Ireland. This will prove to be an invaluable historical documentation of our avifauna. We can produce maps that document the distribution and broad abundance patterns of every breeding and wintering species at the start of the 21st century. But we can go well beyond this for many species. It will be possible to examine exactly how these patterns have changed over recent decades to illustrate in which regions the losses and gains have occurred. This great wealth of data creates the rather nice ‘problem’ of working out exactly how to squeeze the information into the published book. Elsewhere in the newsletter you can read about how pages in the published Atlas might appear (see pages 6-7).



Gaps in the distribution map for Nightingale suggest that there is an urgent need for further work on Nightingales. Photo: (c) Mark Coventry www.markcoventryphotography.co.uk

For many, the book will naturally be the main end point of the project but experience shows that atlases have a lasting legacy in terms of their conservation and research uses. Atlases offer the principal means of assessing which species are undergoing the most dramatic changes in distribution. Those showing large contractions in range are clearly strong candidates for conservation action and this is taken into account in the periodic reviews of the list of Birds of Conservation Concern (www.bto.org/psob). Atlas data can, therefore, help to set the priorities for species conservation. The BTO is already using the patterns emerging from the Atlas to inform decisions about which species are targeted in its programme of surveys over the next ten years. Atlas data can also be used to identify areas that are especially important in national contexts for particular species or assemblages of birds. This information can then be used in ‘risk mapping’ to identify areas where certain types of development or change in land-use may cause particular problems. Conversely, bird-rich areas can be thought of as ones where proactive conservation measures should be focused. This is the philosophy of the Bird Conservation Targeting Project to which data from Bird Atlas 2007-11 is already making a contribution (www.bto.org/birdtrack/bird_recording/bctp).

Well over 50 peer-reviewed papers using data from the 1988-91 Breeding Atlas have been published by a range of academic groups in partnership with the BTO. The current Atlas opens the way to even wider research applications. The data can be used to address a range of extremely important issues. One set of obvious questions concerns which types of species have shown the greatest increases and decreases in their ranges, and how these patterns relate to environmental changes. Understanding the relative effects of habitat change and climate change is an especially challenging and important area of work. Whilst it is important to identify the causes of past changes in the numbers and distribution of birds, we also need to predict where future changes are likely to occur. Models that address issues such as the effects on biodiversity of future expansion of forestry and urbanisation will be extremely valuable, especially if these can be coupled with climate change effects.

It hardly seems possible that we are just a year away from completing the fieldwork for this remarkable project. The subsequent publication of the book will certainly not mark the end of Bird Atlas 2007-11 but rather it will signify a gateway to further important work aimed at understanding and conserving our birdlife in a volatile environment.

Rob Fuller
Director of Science - Ecological Change



Understanding bird distribution is a key element in environmental planning. Photo: Rob Robinson

Fieldwork update: Winter

Coverage so far

What a fantastic achievement! Thanks to all your hard work we are now in an excellent position as we start the final winter of fieldwork on 1 November. The Timed Tetrad Visit coverage (Figure 6) is excellent across England and Scotland. Professional fieldworker effort in the third winter helped to cover the remote and sparsely populated areas of Scotland. Professional fieldworkers and a well-organised 'Blitz Group' greatly improved coverage in Ireland. The chequerboard of 'priority' 10-km squares across Ireland is clear, but there is still much more to do. In parts of mid and west Wales coverage has been patchy and we intend using professional fieldworkers in the final winter to help finish off. Species richness (Figure 7) is a good indication of effort in a 10-km square and we are delighted to see the majority of 10-km squares have been well covered.

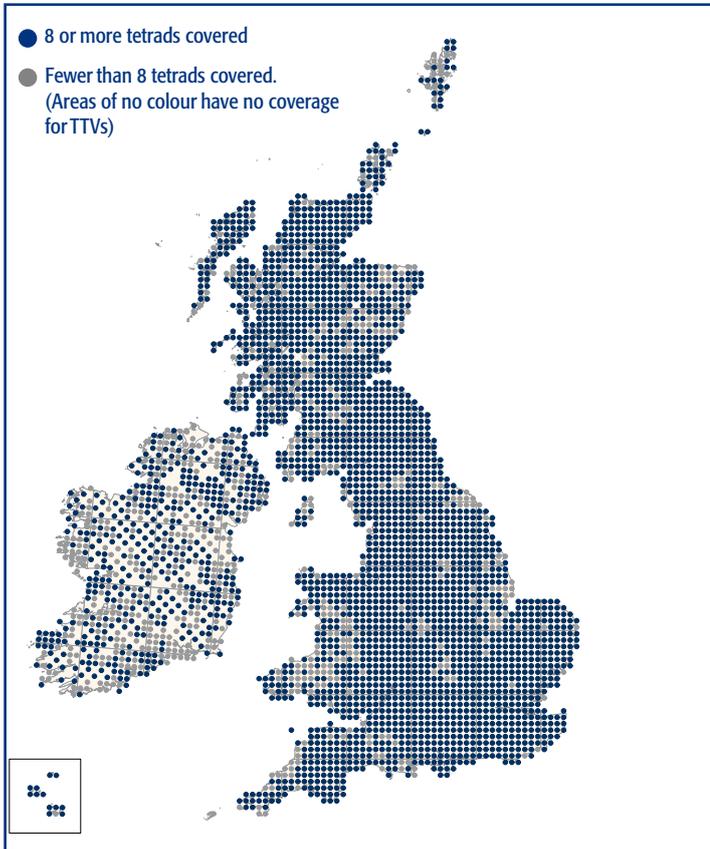


Figure 6. Timed Tetrad Visits in winter 2007/08 - 2009/10. In each 10-km square we aim to cover a minimum of eight tetrads (2 x 2 km squares) for timed counts.

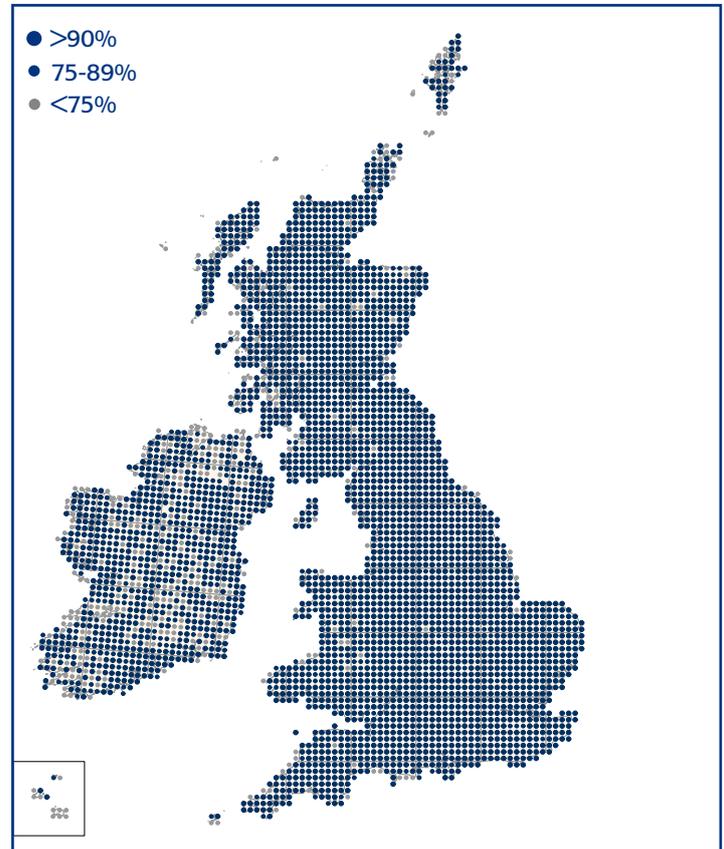


Figure 7. Percentage of expected species richness in winter. Using lists of birds found in each 10-km square in the Winter Atlas (1981-84) we can work out what proportion of the expected species list we have already recorded for winter.

Priorities for winter fieldwork 2010/11

Timed Tetrad Visits – complete any tetrads already allocated to you. If you think you will not be able to cover your tetrad please let your Regional Organiser know as soon as possible. We need more volunteers to take on tetrads in those 10-km squares that have not yet reached minimum coverage, for example, east Lincolnshire, North-east Yorkshire, mid and west Wales, Isles of Scilly, Ireland.

Roving Records – target the 10-km squares with less than 90% of the expected species to try and boost the species list. The 'Regional results' pages on the website will help you find your nearest 10-km to target. Consider weekend trips away to target 10-km squares – especially to Ireland!

Expeditions – we're looking for teams of four experienced fieldworkers to target areas for TTVs and Roving Recording. Limited expenses available. Contact Dawn Balmer at BTO for further information.



Harry Dott, Mark Holling, Phil Dean and Richard Watt returning from a week-long expedition on the Uists in late winter. They covered 32 tetrads for TTVs during the week and added many Roving Records. A superb range of species were recorded during TTVs, including two species of eagle. Photo: Bill McKenzie

Fieldwork update: Breeding

Coverage so far

At the time of writing we are mid-way through the third breeding season and fieldwork is progressing well. There has been a much greater effort to record breeding evidence for species in every 10-km square and this has helped enormously – thank you! The new ‘My Local Gaps’ on the website, accessed from ‘Data Home’, really helped to focus effort to confirm breeding for species in 10-km squares near to where you live. Professional fieldworkers continued their work in Scotland and Ireland, whilst Atlas volunteers organised their own trips to Coll, Mull, Ireland, Raasay and Wigtown, to carry out TTVs and Roving Recording. The species richness maps really highlight those 10-km squares which need more general roving to build species lists in the final summer. Blitz Groups have worked very well in northern and south-east Scotland.

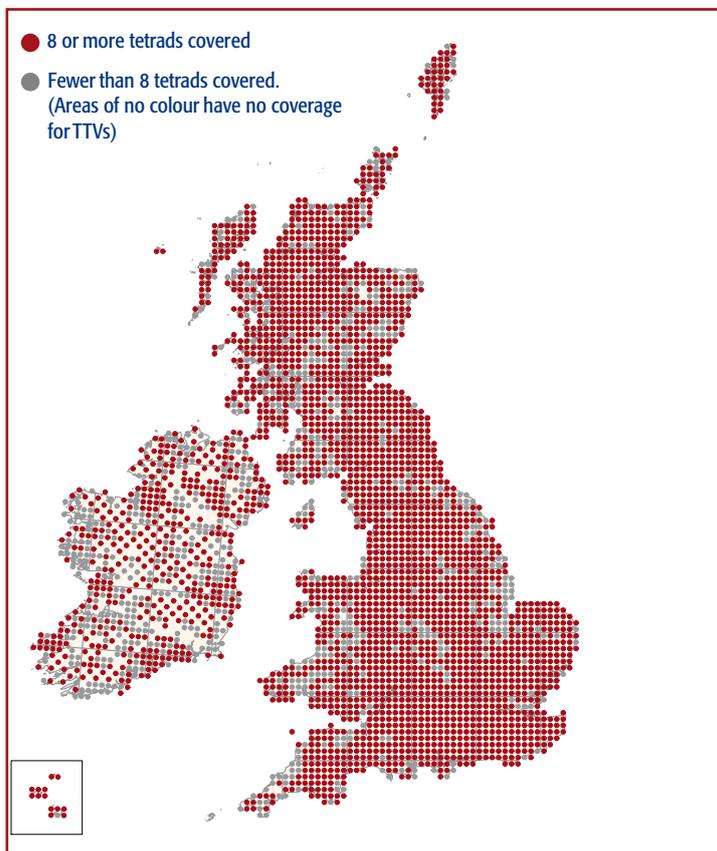


Figure 8. Timed Tetrad Visits in the breeding season. Includes 2008-09 data plus a limited amount for 2010 (up to mid June). In each 10-km square we aim to cover a minimum of eight tetrads (2 x 2 km squares) for timed counts.

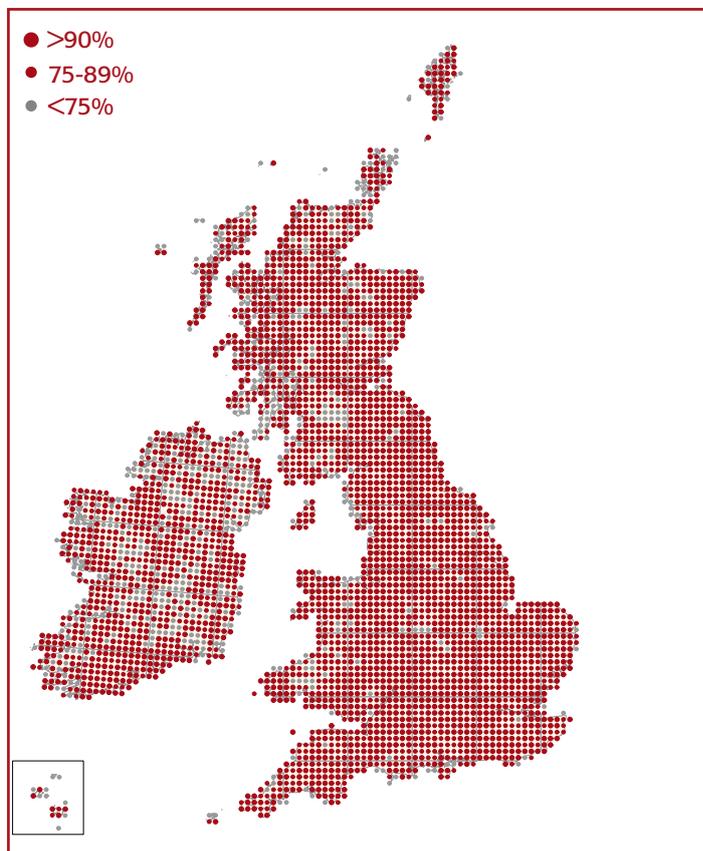


Figure 9. Percentage of expected species richness in the breeding season. Using lists of birds found in each 10-km square in the Breeding Atlas (1988-91) we can work out what proportion of the expected species list we have already recorded for the breeding season.

Priorities for breeding season fieldwork 2011

Timed Tetrad Visits – as for winter priorities (page 4). Complete any tetrads already allocated to you or part done. Take on new tetrads in priority 10-km squares.

Roving Records – target the 10-km squares with less than 90% of the expected species, to try and boost the species list. Species only contribute to the map if they have a breeding code (possible, probable or confirmed).

Breeding evidence – try to gain the highest level of breeding evidence for each species. Use ‘My Local Gaps’ on the website to help you focus your birdwatching to 10-km squares and species in need of more effort.

Expeditions – limited expenses available for experienced teams of fieldworkers to visit areas for TTVs and Roving. Contact Dawn Balmer at BTO.



Neil Moran carrying out a Timed Tetrad Visit in Uncleby, East Yorkshire. The TTV produced 47 species on the early breeding season visit and 43 on the late (both 2 hour visits), including Redstart and Lesser Whitethroat. Photo: Nick Moran

Key elements of a species account

Over the next year we will be working with designers and publishers to develop our ideas for page layouts so we can deliver a quality and contemporary Atlas.

Table of occupancy and range change (provisional)

Stonechat *Saxicola torquatus*



Table of 10km occupancy		Britain	Ireland	Britain & Ireland
Winter	1981-84	913	472	1385
	2007-11	2334	655	2989
Breeding	1968-72	1222	794	2016
	1988-91	1042	569	1611
	2008-11	1781	650	2431

Table of change %		Britain	Ireland	Britain & Ireland	Conf.
Winter	1980s to 2010	156	39	116	***
	1970s to 2010	46	18	21	***
Breeding	1990s to 2010	71	14	51	***

Sponsored by Sussex Ornithological Society

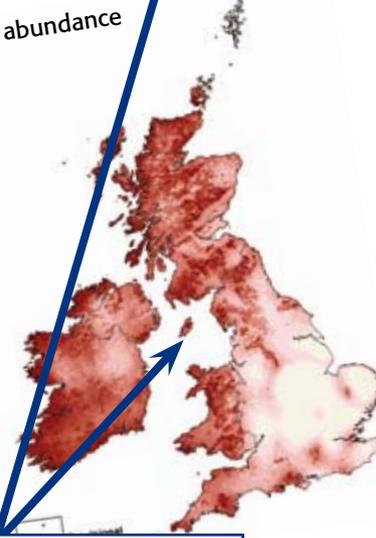


Acknowledgement of sponsorship

Winter abundance



Summer abundance



The text will discuss the patterns of distribution and relative abundance in winter and the breeding season and will highlight the key changes and discuss possible reasons

Counts from the Timed Tetrad Visits are used to map relative abundance

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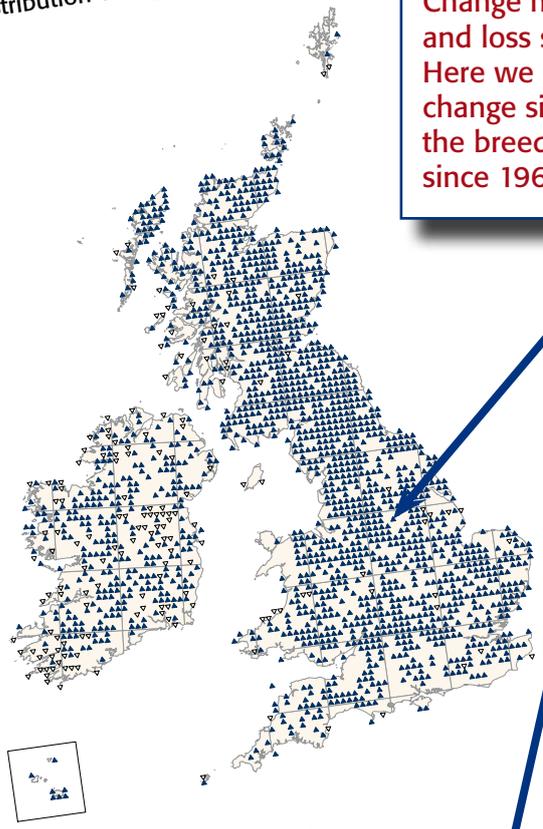
distribution

esent

Winter distribution change

- ▲ Gain
- ▼ Loss

Change maps show gains and loss since the last atlas. Here we show the winter change since 1981-84 and the breeding season change since 1968-72

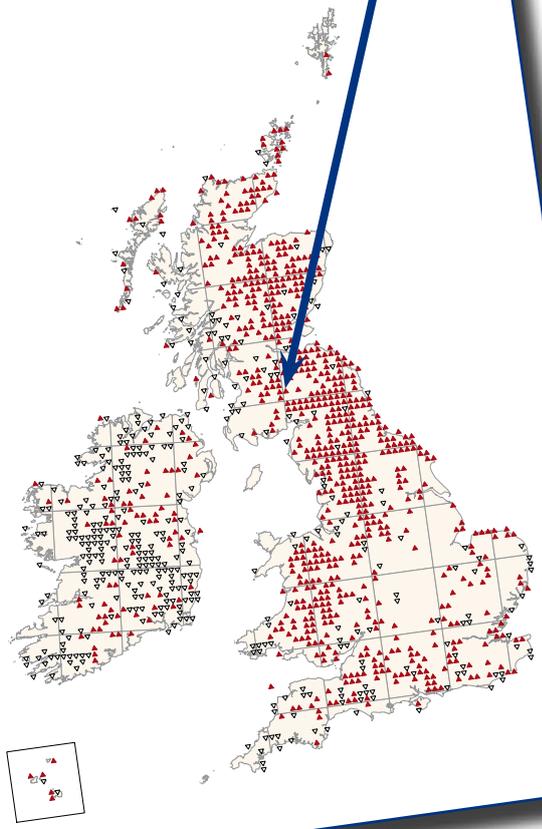
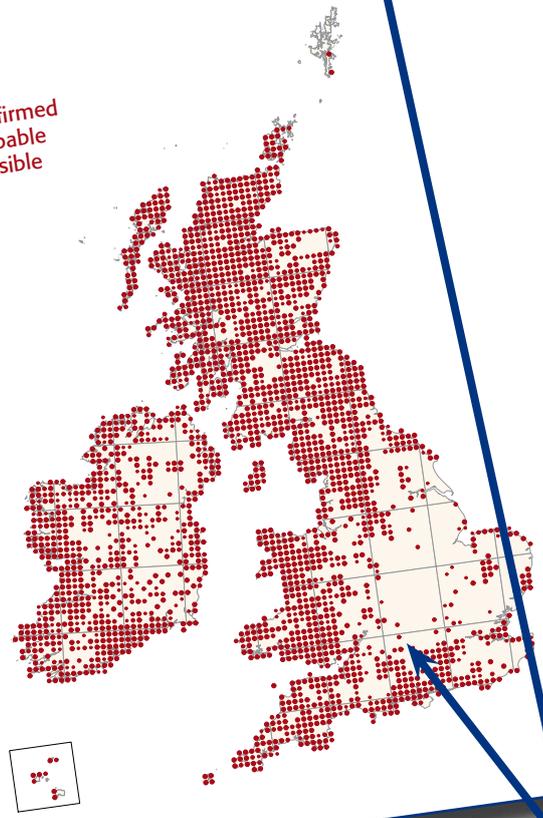


Breeding distribution change

- ▲ Gain
- ▼ Loss

Breeding distribution

- Confirmed
- Probable
- Possible



Maps of distribution use a range of data sources such as Roving Records, TTVs, BirdTrack, Ringing and Nest Records

Validation

The checking of all Atlas and BirdTrack records (from defined sites) by teams of local experts is progressing well. 75% of the winter and 64% of the breeding season records have now been checked and the number of records queried is very small (0.08%). Checking place names against grid references is one of the key aims and main source of error. Queries over identification of a species are very small. If you receive a query about one of your records, please respond as quickly as you can by editing records or confirming the record. Queries are shown in the orange box on your 'Data Home' page.

Records from other sources

We've been busy bringing in records from other BTO schemes to fill species gaps in 10-km squares (and tetrads) and have so far loaded information from the Ringing Scheme, Nest Records and Wetland Bird Survey. It's not been possible to use all records due to the size and shape of some of these sites; it's important that the site fits wholly within a 10-km square or tetrad for use in the Atlas. In due course we will be working on the Breeding Bird Survey, Garden BirdWatch, Heronries and records from schemes run by BirdWatch Ireland. Many bird clubs have kindly provided records which will help fill in gaps. We're also grateful for other records received such as from The Barn Owl Trust and a local Spotted Flycatcher study.

BirdTrack

Over 2.7 million records from BirdTrack are being used in the Atlas. These are all from sites which have been defined (in 'Manage sites') so they can be used at either the tetrad or 10-km level for Atlas purposes. You can also enter breeding evidence in BirdTrack and this is easiest done when your list is set to one column (in 'My Details & Settings').

Local Atlases

The second meeting of local Atlas organisers was held at The Nunnery, Thetford in February 2010. There are 40 local tetrad Atlases underway and we continue to work closely with, and support, these projects. A list of local Atlas projects can be found on www.birdatlas.net. Although fieldwork for the national Atlas comes to an end in July 2011, fieldwork for local Atlases will continue for another year or more in many countries.

Sabbaticals

We are delighted that the RSPB continue to support the Bird Atlas through their sabbatical scheme. David Gibbons, lead author of the 1988-91 Breeding Atlas, spent a month in North Cornwall carrying out TTVs and Roving during the breeding season. Conrad Smith has visited the west coast of Scotland during the summer and kayaked to many otherwise inaccessible islands to get valuable Roving Records.

Atlas holidays

Many thanks to all of you who have spent time whilst on holiday gathering Roving Records, and sometimes spending a whole week doing TTVs! During the final year of the Atlas do consider spending a weekend away and targeting 10-km squares to fill in gaps.

Expeditions

Over the winter and breeding season a small number of expeditions by Atlas volunteers were successfully completed. The target areas included Coll, Islay, Mull, Gairloch and Ireland. We also thank the continued support of the Royal Air Force Ornithological Society who have contributed a huge number of records from mainland Argyll and the north coast of Scotland. If you are interested in organising an expedition in the final year of the Atlas, please contact Dawn Balmer (below).

BirdWatch Ireland – Bird Atlas Species Sponsorship Opportunities

BirdWatch Ireland still has a few species available for sponsors who went to help support the Bird Atlas 2007-11. Sponsorship bids are welcome from companies, groups and individuals. The name of each sponsor will be published in the final book, as well as on the main Bird Atlas website and the BirdWatch Ireland website.

A full list of the species still available to sponsors appears below. Bidding starts at €400 per species, bids will remain confidential and the highest bid received for each species by 5:00pm on Monday 1st November will win.

To place your bid(s), please e-mail Niall Hatch at nhatch@birdwatchireland.ie, stating the species that you would like to sponsor and the amount of your bid.

Species available: Greenland White-fronted Goose, Long-tailed Duck, Pheasant, Great Northern Diver, Great Crested Grebe, Storm Petrel, Hen Harrier, Oystercatcher, Iceland Gull, Roseate Tern, Little Tern, Fieldfare, Hooded Crow, Bullfinch.



The Atlas Team: Brian Caffrey, Dawn Balmer, Simon Gillings and Bob Swann

Contact Details:

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