

## A newsletter for BTO members and volunteers in the Buckinghamshire region

Spring 2018

### Welcome

With the first of the summer migrants arriving, and the breeding season not far off, now is a good time for an update on some of the BTO work, and to let you know how you can get involved (if you are not already that is!)

### Is there a heronry near you?

The Heronry Census celebrates its 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2018; it is the longest running bird survey in the world. In 1928 the survey was aimed at Grey Heron only but, more recently, Cormorants have been counted and now the survey picks up Little Egrets too. You can read about the Heronries Census online: <https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/heronries-census> . We have very good coverage in the region, with the following sites being actively monitored—

Broadwater Gravel Pit	Mount Farm, Milton Keynes
Frays Wildfowl Lake	Claydon House
Little Britain Lake, Uxbridge	Newport Pagnell GP
Eythrope, Stone	St.Tiggywinkles
Grotto Island, Wotton Lakes	Octagon Lake, Stowe Park
Addington Manor	Shelswell Park
Hartwell House	R.Thames, near Aston
Little Marlow GP	Wycombe Abbey
Linford Gravel Pits	Furzton Lake, Milton Keynes
Willen Lake	Emberton Country Park

—but if you know of a site that is not listed above, please get in touch with me, Phil Tizzard [phil.tizzard@care4free.net](mailto:phil.tizzard@care4free.net) , or Ian Woodward ([ian.woodward@bto.org](mailto:ian.woodward@bto.org))

### Help needed to count our common birds

The Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) and Waterways Breeding Bird Survey (WBBS) are the surveys which we use to monitor the population trends of our common and widespread birds. If you can identify common birds by sight and sound, then you can help with these surveys. Two visits in the breeding season to count birds are required, and you can count mammals too if you are interested. You can read about BBS here: <https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/bbs> ...and WBBS here: <https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/wbbs>

There are still a number of vacant sites in the region shown by the orange squares on the map below, so if you are interested in getting involved, please get in touch via the links above, or with me directly ([phil.tizzard@care4free.net](mailto:phil.tizzard@care4free.net))



If you're heading to Scotland for your summer holidays and are up for a challenge, you might be interested in making a one-off visit to a remote upland BBS square. We call these Upland Rover squares and you can see where they are online: <https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/bbs/taking-part/upland-rovers>

### We're worried about Woodcocks...

The Woodcock Survey was run in 2013 and identified a worrying decline in the breeding population of almost a third since the previous survey of 2003. The survey has ticked over quietly in the years since with a few sites being resurveyed on request from the national organiser.

We are keen to cover a few more squares. If you can make three evening visits to a 1-km pre-selected square this summer, please contact Greg Conway at BTO HQ

([greg.conway@bto.org](mailto:greg.conway@bto.org))

<https://bto.org/volunteer-surveys/woodcock-survey>.



Photo: Graham Giddens

### Project Owl

Thank you to everyone that recently support the Owl Appeal. We plan to undertake two surveys this autumn. One is the structured Tawny Owl Survey and will repeat (and enhance) the surveys carried out in 1989 and 2005, and will investigate the occupancy rates of squares. The second survey, will be open to all, and will be based mainly in gardens, or places that you can record from on a weekly basis. This will be run by the Garden BirdWatch team, and will repeat the survey carried out in 2005 which looked at the calling behaviour of Tawny Owls throughout the autumn, winter and spring. We

will also be working with ringers and nest recorders working on owls, to provide support and advice on their long-term studies, and to encourage new well-designed projects. We will provide more details in the coming months. There is more information online at <https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/project-owl> Contact: Dawn Balmer ([dawn.balmer@bto.org](mailto:dawn.balmer@bto.org))

### 53 million observations recorded through BirdTrack

Please do submit your bird records into BirdTrack ([www.birdtrack.net](http://www.birdtrack.net)), especially those in the form of complete lists. These data will contribute to a range of surveys and monitoring, such as recent use of data for the second European Breeding Bird Atlas. It is also a great way of storing your sightings and inputting to the local picture.

### Vacant sites – how are birds using smaller bodies of water?

The Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) is co-ordinated by the BTO on behalf of, RSPB, JNCC, in association with WWT, to monitor non-breeding populations of water birds. The high priority sites are well covered in our region, but there is a long list of smaller water bodies that are available for cover. See: [www.bto.org/webs-vacant-sites](http://www.bto.org/webs-vacant-sites) . If you are interested in getting involved, please get in touch with Heidi Mellan ([Heidi.mellan@BTO.org](mailto:Heidi.mellan@BTO.org))

### Seabird Census

Although not a BTO survey itself, you may be interested in helping out with the Seabirds Count census that is being run by the JNCC in collaboration with the Seabird Monitoring Programme Steering Group. Coastal sites will be counted, as well as inland sites for gulls, terns and Cormorants. You can read more here: <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-7483>



Photo: Edmund Fellowes

### Watching your garden birds? Make your records count!

GBW monitors the populations of birds in our gardens and is run centrally by the BTO. It's a great way to take part in BTO survey work. More information about the GBW and how to take part can be seen on the BTO's website at <https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/gbw>.

### Wader Tales

For interest and especially if you like waders, you may be interested in a blog called Wader Tales at <https://wadertales.wordpress.com/about> . These blogs are written by Graham Appleton, formerly the Director of Communications for the BTO, to celebrate waders and wader research. Many of the articles are based on previously published papers, with the aim of making wader science available to a broader audience and often these draw on data collected by BTO surveys, for example WeBS.

### Nightingale paper published

A paper from the 2012 Nightingale survey has been published in *Journal of Applied Ecology*.

Estimation of national population size can be important for setting conservation priorities but its methodology has received little critical attention. Sites for highly aggregated species are often prioritised if they contain 1% of national or biogeographic populations but the utility of this approach for other species is unclear. For Nightingale, survey effort was directed by prior knowledge of the species' distribution and the survey design maximised detectability by focussing on the period of greatest song output. Using three different statistical methods to account for detectability, the authors estimated that 55–65% of the national population was detected during the surveys. Birds in areas not known to contain the species accounted for 13–23% of the population estimate. Methods to account for these individuals contributed the greatest uncertainty to the results, due to the difficulty of surveying a very large sample of random sites and consequent need to stratify the sample. The 12 derived estimates ranged between 5094 and 5938 territorial males, with the confidence limits ranging from 4764 to 6534. Site delimitation, using clustering based on nearest-neighbour distances, identified one site clearly of national importance and several others potentially nationally important, depending on the population threshold and clustering distance used. The authors concluded national population estimation is difficult and requires that species-specific variability in detectability and individuals present outside surveyed areas are accurately accounted for through survey design and statistical analysis. Accounting for these sources of error will not always be possible and will hamper efforts to assess true population size and consequently to determine whether sites, however defined, exceed critical thresholds of importance. They suggested resources may be better invested in other activities, for example in generating population trends based on relative indices. The latter are generally easier to produce, potentially more robust and arguably more suitable for many conservation applications (but not always possible!).

Hewson CM, Miller M, Johnston A, et al. Estimating national population sizes: Methodological challenges and applications illustrated in the common nightingale, a declining songbird in the UK. *J Appl Ecol*. 2018;00:1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1365-2664.13120>

### Peregrine Survey paper

Just published, the results of the 2014 Peregrine Survey reveal the Peregrine population is estimated at 1769 pairs; 22% larger than the population estimate from the previous survey in 2002. Most of this increase is accounted for by increases in lowland England, whilst populations in some upland areas have declined. The likely reasons for the continued success of Peregrines in the lowlands include increasing uptake of breeding sites on human structures, abundant availability of prey in many lowland situations and, in many areas, a relative lack of conflict with humans. Factors likely to be limiting upland Peregrine populations vary between different regions, and include ongoing illegal killing and deliberate disturbance, and food supply. There is a summary on the BTO website: <https://www.bto.org/science/latest-research/breeding-peregrines-thanks-growth-lowland-populations>

Thank you to all the volunteers that took part in the 2014 Peregrine Survey.

M. W. Wilson, D. E. Balmer, K. Jones, V. A. King, D. Raw, C. J. Rollie, E. Rooney, M. Ruddock, G. D. Smith, A. Stevenson, P. K. Stirling-Aird, C. V. Wernham, J. M. Weston & D. G. Noble (2018) The breeding population of Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* in the United Kingdom, Isle of Man and Channel Islands in 2014, *Bird Study*, DOI: [10.1080/00063657.2017.1421610](https://doi.org/10.1080/00063657.2017.1421610)

### Update on Winter Thrushes Survey

The paper on the Winter Thrushes Survey has not been accepted by a peer-reviewed journal yet and requires a little bit more work before re-submission. We do have some results from the survey though, presented by BTO region, available on the website: <https://app.bto.org/results/thrush/>

## Surveys of pollinating insects

BTO have been working with Centre for Ecology and Hydrology and partners on the Pollinator Monitoring Scheme. They have designed two survey methods to provide better information on pollinators. One is a Flower Insect Timed (FIT) Count and can be carried out anywhere (ideally on one of their target flower species), and can be repeated throughout the summer. The second method is more intensive and requires taking on a site for monitoring and sampling. You can read more here: <https://www.ceh.ac.uk/our-science/projects/pollinator-monitoring>

### Contact details:

Dawn Balmer at BTO HQ ([dawn.balmer@bto.org](mailto:dawn.balmer@bto.org))

BBS/WBBS: Sarah Harris at BTO HQ ([sarah.harris@bto.org](mailto:sarah.harris@bto.org))

Heronries: Ian Woodward at BTO HQ ([ian.woodward@bto.org](mailto:ian.woodward@bto.org))

Woodcock Survey: Greg Conway at BTO HQ ([greg.conway@bto.org](mailto:greg.conway@bto.org))

WeBS general: Heidi Mellan ([Heidi.mellan@bto.org](mailto:Heidi.mellan@bto.org))

Bucks Regional Representative: [phil.tizzard@care4free.net](mailto:phil.tizzard@care4free.net)

### Note:

If you would like to update your contact details, please email: [membership@bto.org](mailto:membership@bto.org) or telephone 01842 750050