

Bird Atlas 2007-11

October 2008



Fantastic first year... but still a lot to do

We are grateful to everyone who has contributed records to the Bird Atlas during the first year of fieldwork, from all parts of Britain and Ireland, and to individuals, companies, trusts and organisations that have helped to fund the project. We have made a fantastic start, with records of 45.6 million birds received so far, based on 54,031 Timed Tetrad Visits, 905,773 Roving Records, and 892,322 BirdTrack records. Information from other surveys, such as Garden BirdWatch and the British and Irish Ringing Scheme, are still to be fed into the maps.

The Timed Tetrad Visits (TTVs) and Roving Records are the two complementary methods we are using to gather records that will enable us to produce maps of relative abundance of species (from the TTVs) and the most comprehensive distribution maps we can (from TTVs, Roving Records, BirdTrack and many other sources).

The TTVs ensure we get a good spread of records from every 10-km square and are a useful measure of our progress so far. For the national Atlas we are aiming to cover a minimum of eight tetrads (2 x 2-km squares) in each 10-km square or, where fewer than eight tetrads exist (e.g. in some coastal 10-km squares), then to cover them all. Those counties undertaking tetrad-level atlases are aiming for a higher level of coverage (see page 2).

The maps below (Figures 1 & 2) show our progress with TTVs in winter and in the breeding season. For many 10-km squares you have helped us to achieve a minimum coverage of eight tetrads but there are still many areas where we need volunteers. More detailed maps of coverage can be found on the Atlas website www.birdatlas.net

Timed Tetrad Visits - coverage so far

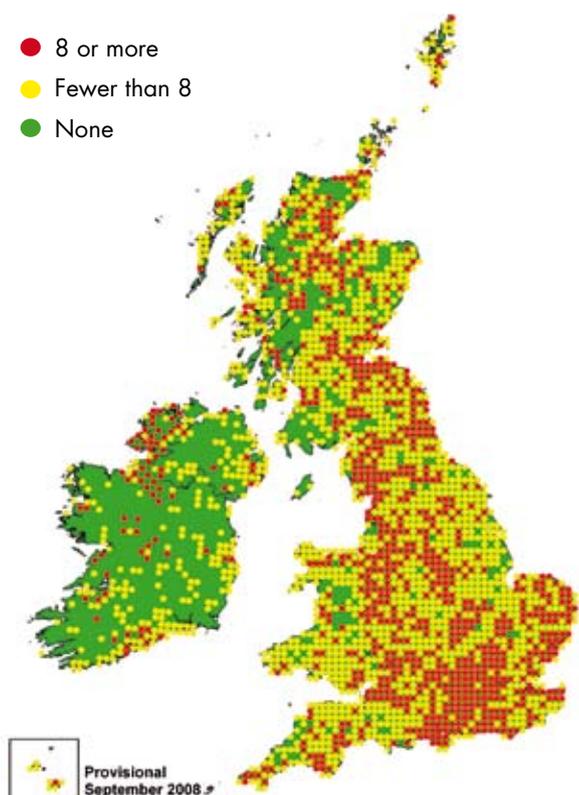


Figure 1. Winter: The map is based on paper and online submissions. A small number of paper TTVs are still to be added. In Winter 2008/09 we need to focus effort on those 10-km squares that have not yet achieved eight tetrads covered.

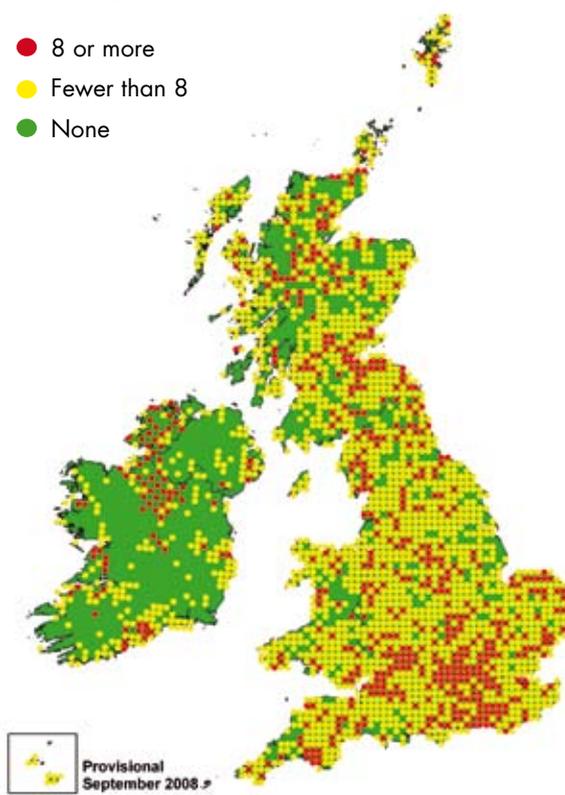


Figure 2. Breeding: The map is based on online submissions only up to 5 September. Further online submissions will be made over the coming months. Paper TTV records will be added during November.

Species richness

Another way of looking at our progress is to look at species richness. Using lists of birds found in each 10-km square in the 1988-91 Breeding Atlas, we can work out what proportion of each expected list we have already detected in the 2008 breeding season (Figure 3). This will help us direct volunteers to those 10-km squares that have received little coverage so far.

Out of season recording

Our main recording periods for the Atlas are winter (November – February) and the breeding season (April – July). During the ‘out of season’ months of March, August, September and October we are keen to receive records of early or late breeding attempts. March is a good time to go out looking for species such as Crossbill and Goshawk that may be difficult to prove breeding during April – July. Late nesting species such as Bullfinch, Spotted Flycatcher, Reed Warbler and Storm Petrel may be confirmed breeding after July. These records can be submitted as Roving Records, either online or on paper.

Breeding codes in winter

During the winter recording period we only need to record breeding codes for those species that are confirmed breeding or are difficult to record later in the year; e.g. a displaying Goshawk in late February should be recorded. A small number of species may be found breeding in the winter months, such as Crossbill, Collared Dove, Woodpigeon and Feral Pigeon, and you should record these with the appropriate code. It is not necessary to use the codes ‘H’ (habitat) or ‘S’ (singing) for common species that normally breed during our breeding season recording period of April-July, such as Robin and Blackbird.



Gaick in NN78, Inverness-shire, photo by Alastair McNee

Contact details

If you want to help out with Atlas fieldwork, please contact your Regional Organiser, visit the website www.birdatlas.net or contact the organisers below. Online you can find out who your Regional Organiser is (http://www.bto.org/birdatlas/taking_part/yourro.htm), sign up for Timed Tetrad Visits and download instructions and forms.

Atlas Coordinator: Dawn Balmer, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk, IP24 2PU. Tel: 01842 750050. Email: birdatlas@bto.org

Scottish Organiser: Bob Swann, c/o Scottish Ornithologists' Club, Waterston House, Aberlady, East Lothian, EH32 0PY. Tel: 07919 378876. E-mail: scotatlas@bto.org

Irish Organiser: Brian Caffrey, BirdWatch Ireland, Midlands Office, Crank House, Banagher, Co. Offaly. Tel: 05791 51676. E-mail: bcaffrey@birdwatchireland.ie

- Over 90%
- 75 - 89%
- 50 - 74%
- 1 - 49%
- No coverage

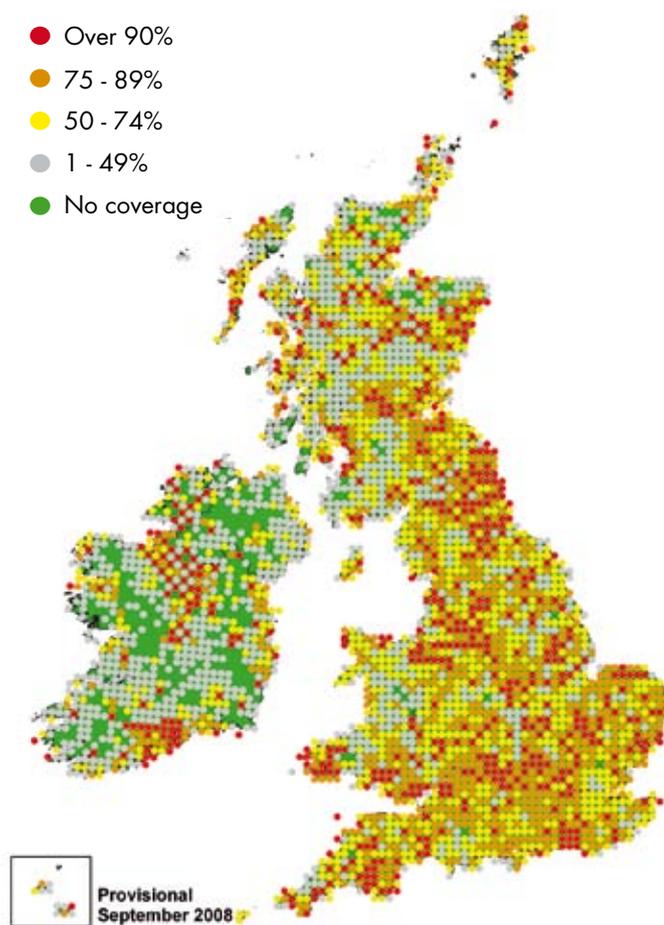


Figure 3. Percentage of expected species richness in the breeding season. This map is based on online submissions received up to 5 September and does not include paper records. Only records of birds that are possibly, probably or confirmed breeding are included.

Local atlases

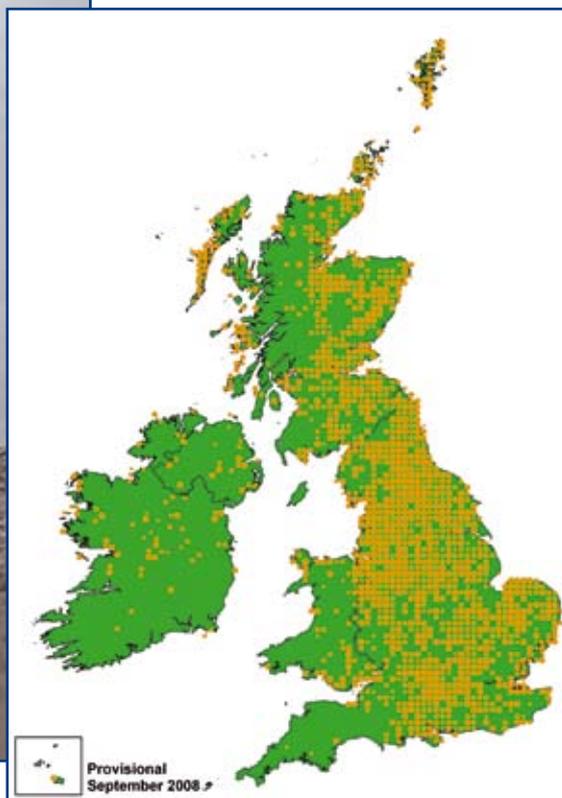
Thirty-five local atlas projects are underway across England, Wales and Scotland, with one in Ireland, in Co. Waterford. These local projects hope to achieve comprehensive species lists for every tetrad in both the winter and breeding season, with many aiming for Timed Tetrad Visits in 100% of tetrads. The BTO has been working closely with the Bird Clubs involved and organised a successful meeting in Thetford in April. A list of local projects with links to Bird Club websites can be found online at http://www.bto.org/birdatlas/taking_part/localatlases.htm

Photos

We are keen to receive photos of you out Atlasing or the habitats you are visiting. Contact Dawn Balmer at BTO.

Early findings from the breeding season

The high level of online submissions gives us a great opportunity to have a look at early patterns emerging in the distribution of birds. The maps below are **provisional** and based on online submissions up to 5 September 2008 only. Further online records and paper submissions will add to the map for 2008 but it will take another three breeding seasons to gain a complete picture. Many areas in Ireland and some parts of Scotland have received little or no coverage so far, so this needs to be considered when interpreting the maps. At this early stage it is easier to detect range expansion than any range contraction, due to the incomplete coverage. In the maps below the three sizes of dot show possibly (small), probably (medium) and confirmed (large) breeding.



Lapwing

The Lapwing is an obvious species during the breeding season, and is likely to have been well recorded during 2008. The provisional map shows fewer 10-km squares with Lapwing recorded so far, compared with the last breeding Atlas. The main gaps are in Wales and south-west England and there is a more patchy distribution in south-east England. The BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey suggests Lapwing have declined by 18% between 1994-2007 in the UK. Not enough squares record Lapwing in the Countryside Bird Survey in the Republic of Ireland to monitor this species. (Lapwing photo by John Harding)

Figure 4. Distribution of Lapwing in April – July 2008.



Barn Owl

When compared with the distribution map in the 1988-91 Breeding Atlas, there are several areas where gains in Barn Owl distribution can be seen. In Scotland, the central belt has been colonised and there are more records from Sutherland. The Barn Owl now appears widespread across East Anglia, perhaps partly as a result of local conservation effort (and hundreds of new boxes) over the last 10 years. There are many areas that were previously occupied in which Barn Owls have not yet been recorded – is this under-recording or have they been lost from these areas? Atlas visits in the early evening will help to record this species more accurately. (Barn Owl photo by Richard Brooks)

Figure 5. Distribution of Barn Owl in April – July 2008.

Bird Atlas 2007-11 Fundraising Update

The species sponsorship scheme is proving to be a popular way for larger donors to support the Atlas. The scheme has drawn together a broad coalition of organisations and companies and over 60 of the 250 available species have already been sponsored. Sponsorship income of £168,000 complements the individual generosity of members and supporters, the Joy Danter legacy, an Esmée Fairbairn Foundation grant, donations from other charitable trusts and £35,000 raised through the June book auction, instigated by David Musson.

A year ago, it seemed as if we had an impossible mountain to climb if we were to raise the £1,150,000 needed to fund the British part of Bird Atlas 2007-11. If we take account of promised income and a continued flow of individual gifts, all we need to do is to find another 60 organisations and companies that are prepared to sponsor species and we should hit the amended funding target of £1,300,000.

Species are being sponsored for between £2,000 and £10,000. If you know of an organisation or company that we might approach, please contact Kate Aldridge for further details and a copy of the National Bird Atlas Appeal booklet, on 01842 750050 or e-mail: kate.aldridge@bto.org. For details of how to sponsor species in Ireland please see page 7. (Kingfisher photo by John Harding)



Sponsored Species

<i>Eider</i>	The Crown Estate (Marine)	<i>Lesser Spotted Woodpecker</i>	John Woodland & Mark Blacksell
<i>Common Scoter</i>	Scottish Environment Protection Agency	<i>Woodlark</i>	Hampshire Ornithological Society
<i>Ptarmigan</i>	Scottish Countryside Alliance	<i>Skylark</i>	Syngenta
<i>Grey Partridge</i>	The Holkham Estate	<i>Swallow</i>	BTO Member
<i>Manx Shearwater</i>	BTO Member	<i>House Martin</i>	Ruth Jones
<i>Gannet</i>	BTO	<i>Meadow Pipit</i>	Trevor Poyser
<i>Cormorant</i>	Essex & Suffolk Water	<i>Grey Wagtail</i>	Environment Agency
<i>Shag</i>	The Crown Estate (Marine)	<i>Dipper</i>	Environment Agency
<i>Little Egret</i>	Thames Water Utilities	<i>Wren</i>	Waste Recycling Environmental
<i>Red Kite</i>	Northumbrian Water	<i>Duncock</i>	BTO Ringing Scheme
<i>White-tailed Eagle</i>	Natural Research Projects Ltd	<i>Robin</i>	Gardman Ltd
<i>Montagu's Harrier</i>	Devon Birdwatching & Preservation Society	<i>Black Redstart</i>	RPS Group plc
<i>Goshawk</i>	Forestry Commission	<i>Redstart</i>	R R Langley
<i>Osprey</i>	Anglian Water	<i>Whinchat</i>	David Musson
<i>Merlin</i>	The Moorland Association	<i>Stonechat</i>	Sussex Ornithological Society
<i>Hobby</i>	The Royston Scroggs Memorial Fund	<i>Ring Ouzel</i>	North Northumberland Bird Club
<i>Corncrake</i>	Sponsored for BirdWatch Ireland	<i>Reed Warbler</i>	Vine House Farm
<i>Dotterel</i>	Scottish Countryside Alliance	<i>Garden Warbler</i>	Simon Roddis
<i>Golden Plover</i>	Scottish Countryside Alliance	<i>Dartford Warbler</i>	Clinton Devon Estates
<i>Lapwing</i>	Philip Merricks, Elmley Estate	<i>Wood Warbler</i>	DJEnvironmental
<i>Woodcock</i>	Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust	<i>Firecrest</i>	Penny & David Hollow
<i>Black-tailed Godwit</i>	Associated British Ports	<i>Pied Flycatcher</i>	Lake District National Park Authority
<i>Curlew</i>	Scottish Countryside Alliance	<i>Long-tailed Tit</i>	BTO Garden BirdWatch Scheme
<i>Red-necked Phalarope</i>	Baroness Young of Old Scone	<i>Blue Tit</i>	Gardman Ltd
<i>Kittiwake</i>	BTO Member	<i>Crested Tit</i>	Scottish Ornithologists' Club
<i>Sandwich Tern</i>	Kent Ornithological Society	<i>Coal Tit</i>	CJ Wildlife (for BirdWatch Ireland)
<i>Guillemot</i>	The Crown Estate (Marine)	<i>Nuthatch</i>	John & Jean McCaig
<i>Puffin</i>	Opticron	<i>Chough</i>	EcologyMatters
<i>Barn Owl</i>	Sheepdrove Trust & Wildlife Conservation Partnership	<i>Starling</i>	Garden BirdWatcher
<i>Little Owl</i>	Athene Communications Ltd	<i>Twite</i>	Snowdonia National Park
<i>Tawny Owl</i>	In memory of Dilys Breese	<i>Common Crossbill</i>	Forestry Commission
<i>Short-eared Owl</i>	Hamish & Doris Crichton Charitable Trust	<i>Hawfinch</i>	Hertfordshire Bird Club
<i>Nightjar</i>	Forestry Commission	<i>Snow Bunting</i>	Scottish Environment Protection Agency
<i>Green Woodpecker</i>	Energy Solutions Ltd working with Oldbury Power Station	<i>Yellowhammer</i>	Songbird Survival
		<i>Corn Bunting</i>	Vine House Farm

Focus on Wales - John Lloyd, BTO Officer for Wales

It's a hard life being an Atlas Regional Organiser in Wales; you get all the remote tetrads to do yourself, slogging up all the hills, no one else for miles, just endless vistas of more beautiful hills. So, on the 12 June, I found myself doing second visits to three tetrads around the Llyn Brianne reservoir. It took all morning, produced a lot of sweat as well as a list of over 40 species (not bad for Wales above the 1000 ft contour) and was a thoroughly uplifting experience. We know about the changes in numbers of several species I saw that morning (it was a joy to find both Spotted Flycatcher and Yellowhammer, the former with young in a nest), but some others were surprising. Most noticeable by their absence were Whinchats. I saw just one singing male all morning. In previous years I would have expected to get close to double figures in occupied territories. This situation is mirrored in the valley where I live. From three pairs in previous years, there were none in May or early June 2008. I did find a nest on 4 July which begged another question - normally Whinchat nests are complete by 10 June in this area.

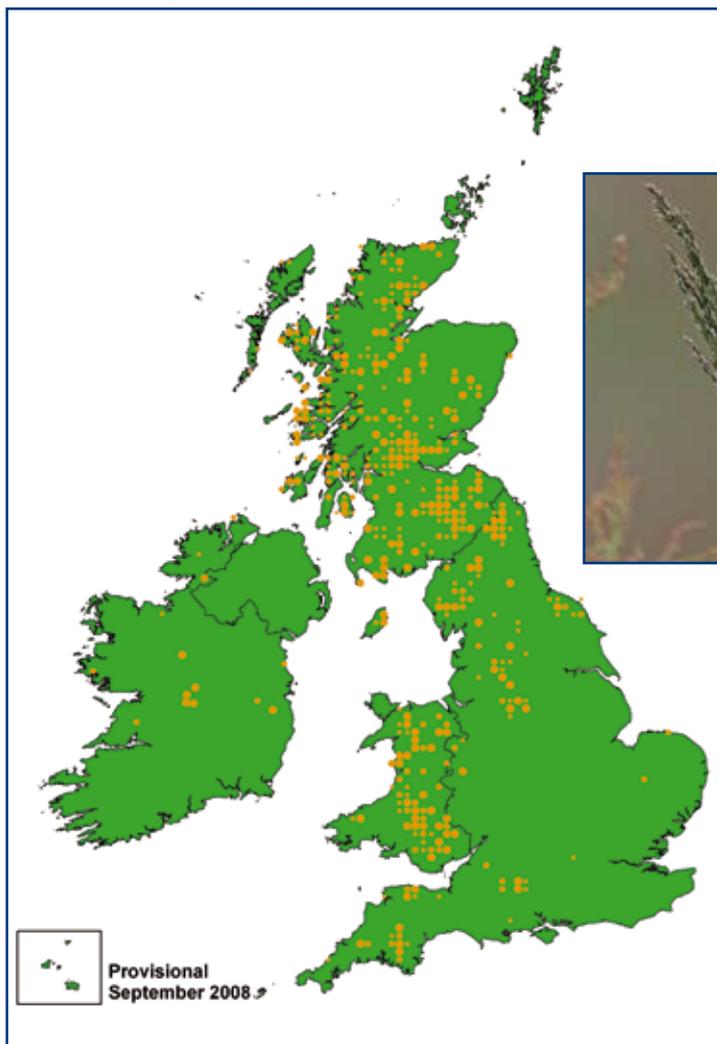
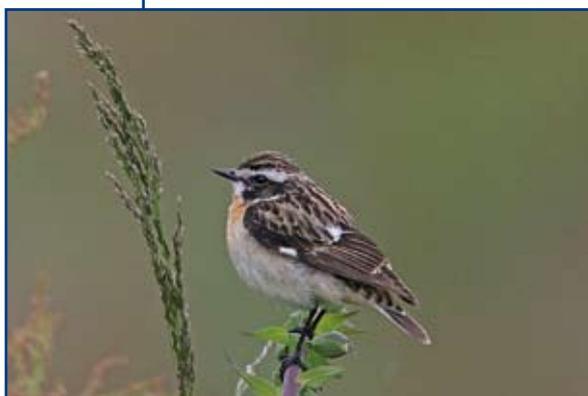


Figure 6. Distribution of Whinchat in April – July 2008. The three sizes of dot show possibly (small), probably (medium) and confirmed (large) breeding.

BBS data for Wales suggests a Whinchat decline of 32% between 1994 and 2007 and a 20% decline between 2006 and 2007 but this isn't statistically significant as they only occur on 18 Welsh BBS squares. A glance at the provisional



first year Atlas map (Figure 6), however, is further evidence that there may well be a serious decline in Whinchats, not just in Wales but across the whole of the area covered by the Atlas. Gone are the solid blocks of dots across much of Wales,

northern England and Scotland. Now there are only records from the heartland of the species, the area coloured red in the relative abundance map of the 1988-91 Atlas.

So what's the problem? Is it the stratospheric increase of Stonechat (up by 338% in Wales in the 14 year span of BBS)? Are they occupying the entire Whinchat habitat? Or is it a problem of being a migrant, in the same way as other summer migrants are struggling? In reality we have no idea about the extent of the decline, let alone its cause. But more slogging up beautiful Welsh hillsides on sunny mornings next spring will help to determine the change in range and abundance.

We are delighted with the coverage in Wales during the first year, but there are many areas in need of help with TTVs and Roving Records. Please contact your local Regional Organiser to take part. (Whinchat photo by Ron Marshall)

Training courses in Wales

Do you know anyone in Wales who might be willing to get involved in Atlas fieldwork but who just needs the confidence that comes from a small amount of training? Over the course of the last year, thirteen training courses were provided by John Lloyd and his team of volunteer Regional Representatives and more will be available this year. These local initiatives will be publicised on the BTO website or you can contact John on 01550 750 202 or e-mail: the_lloyds@dsl.pipex.com

A grant awarded by the Wales Council for Voluntary Action, via Environment Wales, is not only helping to subsidise the courses, it has also provided data projectors, lap tops and promotional materials to be used within north and south Wales. Welsh language leaflets and display boards are helping to publicise the need for more recruits, whilst training courses are giving people the skills and confidence they need to get involved in surveys. These courses are suitable for a wide range of birdwatchers, and Atlas fieldwork provides great opportunities to practise what others preach.

Graham Appleton



Focus on Scotland - Bob Swann, Scottish Atlas Organiser

Good weather early in the summer in Scotland enabled most fieldworkers to get their local squares covered. Many helped in remoter areas of Scotland, some whilst on holiday, others by making specific Atlas day trips. Help also came from further afield. One dedicated RSPB employee used his sabbatical to cover over 20 tetrads in north-west Sutherland, whilst a team from the Royal Air Force Ornithological Society covered 29 tetrads in Argyll. In future years we will probably require more of this assistance to get full coverage of Scotland for the Bird Atlas.

With most of last winter's data in, we can begin to examine species maps to look for changes in distribution, such as the expansion of Buzzard into east Scotland and Nuthatch into much of southern Scotland. What about species of conservation concern, how are they faring?



Figure 7. Distribution of Black Grouse in November 2007 - February 2008.

Black Grouse populations have been declining since the 1970s and this decline in numbers and breeding range became even more marked during the 1990s. The species current stronghold is Scotland, where it is the subject of a variety of conservation measures. How successful



these measures have been will be reflected in the final Atlas maps. It is often easy to find this species in late winter, feeding on the edge of plantations or around birch woods. The winter distribution recorded so far from Bird Atlas 2007-11 shows them to be fairly widespread through many parts of Scotland (Figure 7). There are, however, lots of gaps.

Are these real or not? Further survey work over the next three winters will tell.

So how can you help this coming winter? If your local 10-km square has reached the minimum level of coverage and you are not involved in a local atlas, it is better to move to a neighbouring 10-km square with fewer than eight tetrads covered, than to do more in your original square. Also, why not consider a fieldtrip to one of the remoter squares. A car load of fieldworkers dropped off at strategic locations within a 10-km square could easily cover eight tetrads in a single day. This could be a memorable day's birdwatching, not just visiting a new area, but testing your field skills as you build up species lists and gather valuable data for bird conservation - all in one trip - and who knows what surprises may be in store? (Black Grouse photo by George H. Higginbotham)

Building bird monitoring in Scotland

Scotland's birds should be receiving more attention from birdwatchers in Scotland, thanks to funding from Scottish Natural Heritage, The Gilman Trusts, BTO and SOC for 'Building Bird Monitoring in Scotland'. The Bird Atlas will be the initial focus, attracting new volunteers into a range of bird recording projects for birdwatchers of all skill and experience levels; from Breeding Bird Survey to BirdTrack and Wetland Bird Survey to SOC Local Recording.

Regional/local training events for volunteers will be laid on in selected parts of the country and there will be a national (Scottish) meetings for volunteer organisers. Promotional materials will be developed to entice birdwatchers to get more involved in recording the birds they see. We hope that this will benefit a range of BTO and SOC schemes and ultimately bird conservation in Scotland. The project will run until March 2010.

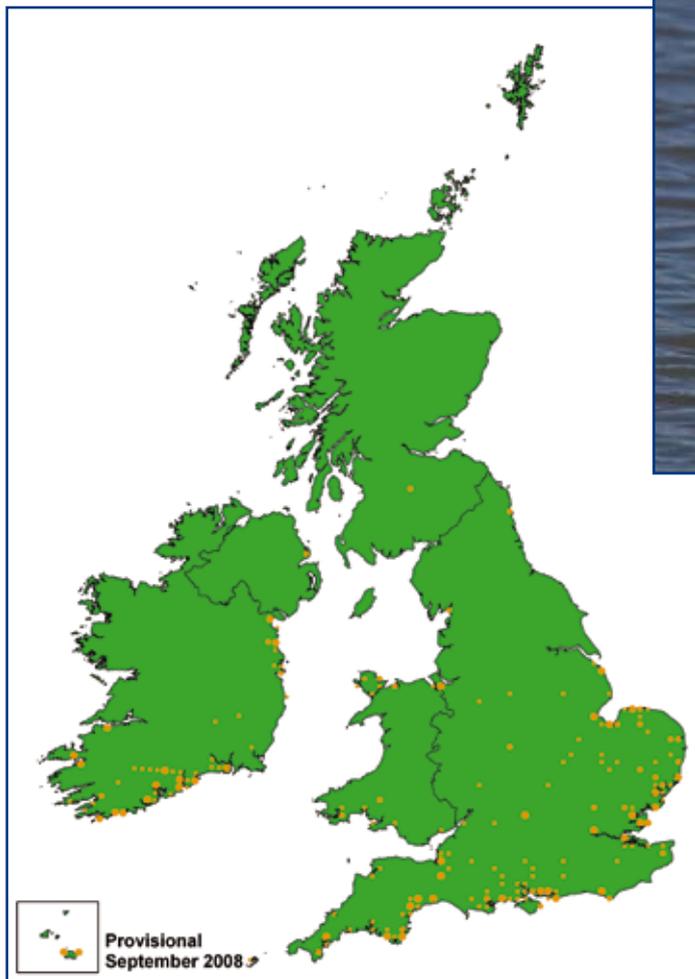
Volunteer training events will be advertised locally. If you live in Scotland and would like to know more please contact Robin Anderson at BTO Scotland; E-mail: robin.anderson@bto.org or telephone 01786 466 560.



Focus on Ireland - Brian Caffrey, Irish Atlas Organiser

Thanks to all your efforts, following the first year of Atlas survey work, approximately 20% of Ireland has been covered by Timed Tetrads Visits in both the winter and breeding season (based on the 'chequerboard' approach, i.e. covering every other 10-km square) and the species richness maps are also looking very positive, reflecting a huge number of Roving Records. This is a fantastic start to the survey but, with 80% of the country still to cover in the remaining three years, we will need to maintain this effort and continue to recruit new volunteers. We have taken on a big challenge and your help is crucial to ensure its success.

After a three month break from Atlasing, I'm sure you will be raring to get started with the winter season fieldwork starting on the 1 November. If you have completed your quota of TTVs why not get online and select a few more tetrads. For those of you submitting Roving Records, have a look at the species richness map for your county and focus on the 10-km squares which require additional coverage, to make the map turn red.



One species that has changed remarkably in range in both Ireland and Britain is the Little Egret. There was one lonely dot on the 1988-91 Atlas in County Kerry, which was the only record in Ireland during this Atlas and was a non-breeding bird. Only 16 years later, Little Egrets have been recorded breeding along the south, west and east coast of Republic of Ireland and into Northern Ireland. The Atlas is essential in mapping species like the Little Egret, to monitor their changing distribution and range, and your help is crucial if we are to get the country covered. (Little Egret photo by Jill Pakenham)

Figure 8. Distribution of Little Egret April – July 2008. The three sizes of dot show possibly (small), probably (medium) and confirmed (large) breeding.

Species sponsorship scheme in Ireland

To help us reach our 1,028,415 Euros target in Ireland to co-ordinate the Atlas, we are seeking sponsorship for some of the 200 Atlas species found in Ireland. If you know of an organisation or company that might be interested in sponsoring a species please contact Katie Jennings on 353 (0) 1 2819878 or e-mail kjennings@birdwatchireland.ie for additional information.

Our thanks go to CJ Wildlife who has sponsored the Coal Tit and an individual donor who has sponsored the Corncrake.

Funding

In Ireland, funding for the organisation and undertaking Atlas fieldwork is being provided by The National Parks & Wildlife Service, The Environmental Protection Agency, The Heritage Council and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

Tetrad Population Estimates

One of the most difficult tasks ahead of us is to produce national population estimates for all species. These are in demand, for both the winter and breeding season, to identify important areas for protecting birds and their habitats, for example through the designation of Ramsar sites, Special Protection Areas or Sites of Special Scientific Interest. The calculation of national population estimates has never been an exact science and we hope that, through our work over the next few years, we will be able to increase the reliabilities of estimation techniques. We have at our disposal an array of information sources that can be combined with Atlas data to produce population estimates for birds in the breeding season and in winter.

It is important for us to recognise the limitations of each survey/method and, if necessary, combine information from different sources. We hope the Tetrad Population Estimates (TPE) will give us another strand of information to work with. Perhaps not on their own, but in conjunction with other data sources, they will really help us to produce population estimates for species for which we have never been able to make more than an educated guess.

In winter, one of the main problems for fieldworkers is flocks of birds and what to count. In order to minimise double-counting, we suggest that, if you see a flock of birds such as Wigeon, move from one tetrad into another (and you are counting both tetrads for TTVs on the same day) then you only include the flock in the tetrad where you first encountered it and use that as a basis for that tetrad's TPE.

If you are making TTV visits on different days to adjacent tetrads and you're not sure if the same flock has moved or if you are seeing different birds, then you should count them all and use your counts as the basis of your TPEs for both tetrads.

We have already given guidance that coastal TTV counts should be done at mid to high tide whenever possible, to facilitate counting and identification. Hence, including high-tide roosting waders in TPEs is permissible, as it shouldn't lead to duplication. However, if you are certain you have already counted these individuals in a different tetrad, and in that tetrad's TPE, then ignore them here. For more information on TPEs go to http://www.bto.org/birdatlas/taking_part/tpe.htm

Validation

Over the coming winter, the Atlas Regional Organisers and a small team of county experts will start the process of checking and 'validating' the records submitted to the Atlas. All records will be checked, including those submitted through Timed Tetrad Visits, Roving Records and BirdTrack. The Regional Organisers will use their experience and knowledge of their county to look for unusually high numbers for the time of year, early or late dates, out-of-range species and unusual breeding records. You may receive a message to your 'Data Home' querying one of your records. We would be grateful if you could take the time to look at the query and reply. You may be able to confirm that the record is correct or

in many cases the query may relate to a simple typing error which can be easily corrected online. If you submit your records on paper, any queries will come to you via the National Organisers in the first instance. If you have been fortunate enough to see a locally or nationally rare bird, you will be encouraged to submit details of the bird to the relevant organisation.

Policy for mapping and listing rare and scarce birds

Over the last two years, we have been working closely with the Rare Breeding Birds Panel (www.rbbp.co.uk) to ensure that records submitted to the Bird Atlas are treated correctly. To reflect the sensitivity of some rare wintering and breeding birds we have formulated a policy relating to online feedback, so that observers are satisfied that their records will be treated with the appropriate degree of sensitivity and confidentiality. Feedback includes the production of online maps and the listing of species in 'Square Summaries'. The policy also guides the production of maps for talks, magazines and newsletters. The full policy can be viewed online at: http://www.bto.org/birdatlas/taking_part/confpolicy.htm

If you would like a paper copy, or have any issues you would like to discuss, then please contact the Atlas Coordinator. The Policy is regularly reviewed to take account of the changing status of bird species. (White-tailed Eagle photo by Edmund Fellowes)



Records of White-tailed Eagle will only be presented at the 100-km scale in winter and the breeding season.