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NORTH WALES BREEDING BIRD ATLAS NEWSLETTER AUTUMN 2008

Greetings from the Atlas Coordinators

We have to thank all the many volunteers who have helped make this first season of our North Wales Breeding Bird Atlas so successful. Many people, both experienced and some totally new to bird surveys, have taken part and records have already been received from 47% of the 1826 tetrads within North Wales. Thanks are also due to all those bird ringers, nest recorders, Garden Birdwatch recorders, Breeding Bird surveyors and Birdtrack users as all your records will contribute to this exciting project. We know that not all the data have been put on the system yet so if you are holding onto information we urge you to either submit on-line or send in your paperwork as soon as possible.

Timed Tetrad Visits: For the national Breeding Bird Atlas we only need 8 out of 25 tetrads in each 10km square to be surveyed, also, the BTO suggests preference be given to those tetrads surveyed for the last Breeding Atlas where possible. In some areas we have already exceeded this minimum however, in others, further TTV's are required and we would urge you to register for another one if you have already completed a TTV. Remember a TTV survey is only required in one year of the four year project. Alternatively please continue to put more effort into compiling that ever important species list and breeding evidence for squares which may have already had TTVs; the more comprehensive we can make these the better. There is no time limit on this and indeed we know that noting bird behaviour takes some time.

For the North Wales Breeding Bird Atlas we are just looking for volunteers to compile a comprehensive list of the birds present in each tetrad in the breeding season and then look for evidence of breeding, using the BTO codes for Possible, Probable and Confirmed. You can either take responsibility for covering one or several tetrads (please tell us if you want to do this), or get into the habit of jotting records down whenever you are out in the field – a true Roving Recorder!

A couple of reminders: For Roving Records to contribute to the North Wales Breeding Bird Atlas we do need both the full date and the tetrad letter provided on **all** records; also, please only record Marsh/Willow Tit if absolutely sure of identification.

Our Atlas, when published, will provide tetrad distribution maps for all breeding species, the first time this has been attempted in North Wales, so please keep up the good work!

Anne Brenchley and Geoff Gibbs

Progress in the first Breeding Season

Distribution of Tetrads for North Wales Breeding Bird Atlas by Region

	SH29	SH39	SH49	SH59										
	SH28	SH38	SH48	SH58	SH68	SH78	SH88	SH98	SJ08	SJ18	(SJ28)			
	SH27	SH37	SH47	SH57	SH67	SH77	SH87	SH97	SJ07	SJ17	SJ27	SJ37		
		SH36	SH46	SH56	SH66	SH76	SH86	SH96	SJ06	SJ16	SJ26	SJ36		
			SH45	SH55	SH65	SH75	SH85	SH95	SJ05	SJ15	SJ25	SJ35	SJ45	
	SH24	SH34	SH44	SH54	SH64	SH74	SH84	SH94	SJ04	SJ14	SJ24	SJ34	SJ44	SJ54
SH13	SH23	SH33	SH43	SH53	SH63	SH73	SH83	SH93	SJ03	SJ13	SJ23	SJ33	SJ43	SJ53
SH12	SH22	SH32		SH52	SH62	SH72	SH82	SH92	SJ02	SJ12	SJ22			
				SH51	SH61	SH71	SH81	SH91						
				SH50	SH60	SH70	SH80							
				SN59	SN69	SN79								

1. BTO Region included in North Wales Breeding Bird Atlas	2. No. of Tetrads in North Wales Area	3. No. of Tetrads covered for TTVs	4. % of Tetrads covered for TTVs	5. No. of other Tetrads with Roving Records/ BirdTrack	6. Total No. of Tetrads with Records	7. % of all Tetrads with Records
Anglesey	232	48	20.7	93	141	60.7
Caernarfon	395	75	19.0	141	216	54.7
Clwyd East	321	64	19.9	89	153	47.7
Clwyd West	264	50	18.9	41	91	34.5
Meirionydd	462	50	10.8	148	198	42.9
Wirral & Mid Cheshire	28	11	39.3	8	19	67.9
Shropshire	45	4	8.9	20	24	53.3
Cardigan	19	8	42.0	6	14	73.7
Montgomery	28	0	0.0	1	1	3.6
S. Cheshire	2	0	0.0	1	1	50.0
TOTAL	1796	310	17.3	548	858	47.8

Notes on the Table of Atlas Statistics

The table includes the core counties in the NWBBA area (top 5 in table), also tetrads within our area which are allocated to other BTO Regions (bottom 5 in table)

Column 1. List of BTO Regions within the North Wales Breeding Bird Atlas area.

Column 2. Total number of tetrads in each Region.

Column 3. Number of tetrads where TTVs have been recorded (includes some with only an early or a late survey - most include both).

Column 4. This gives column 3 as a percentage of column 2 - this is the percentage of tetrads where TTVs have been recorded.

Column 5. In addition to the tetrads recorded in column 3 these are the additional tetrads with either Roving Records &/or BirdTrack Records.

Column 6. This is the sum of columns 3 & 5 - the total number of tetrads with records of one kind or another.

Column 7. This gives column 6 as a percentage of column 2 – this is the percentage of tetrads with records of one kind or another.

Columns 3 – 7 are based on data entered on the BTO database in mid-September, data on paper may not show yet

Peter Stuttard

Which tetrad has the most species? And other interesting statistics!



This isn't a competition but it will be interesting to note which 10km square or tetrad has the most recorded species over the four years. Which tetrad has the most confirmed number of breeding species? We don't have a complete picture of the 2008 season yet but it looks like the west is definitely beating the east in all aspects! In **Caernarfon** for example, SH77 has recorded 131 species (Yes, this does include RSPB Conwy and does have a lot of migrants (Whiskered Tern, Citrine Wagtail, Yellow Wagtail (Spanish)).....also Lesser Whitefronted Goose probable breeding! This

isn't a joke, record was entered by Mike Duckham, RSPB Information Officer and SH67 comes a close second with 108 species. Over in **Clwyd East** SJ35 has only recorded 86 species. The individual tetrad with the most species is SH77Y with 102 (RSPB Conwy again) and in the east we have a long way to go as SJ25G (Llandegla Forest – north) has only 65 species. The tetrad with the most confirmed number of breeding species (46) is SH57K, also in the west, a tetrad which straddles the Menai Strait, including both bridges and also Treborth Botanic Garden.

Clearly gathering breeding evidence is time consuming but very rewarding.

Top Ten most widely distributed species in Clwyd East in 2008



Blackbird Louise Jones 2008

1. Blackbird
2. Blue Tit
3. Great Tit
4. Carrion Crow
5. Swallow
6. Robin
7. Chaffinch
8. Chiffchaff
9. Magpie
10. Wren



Juvenile Blackbird George Reszeter 2006

In the next issue we hope to report on the Top Ten for the whole of North Wales.

Progress in Clwyd East

Volunteers, both new and more experienced, have either signed up for or completed the majority of the TTVs required for the national Atlas. I still need surveyors for the more far flung parts of the patch such as SJ12 and SJ13 but with three more seasons to come I am confident that this work will be finished well ahead of schedule. Gathering species lists and breeding evidence for ALL species in ALL tetrads is more challenging but as we spread the word and get new volunteers on board even this target will be reached, I'm sure.



Young Tree Sparrow Ian Spence 2008



Local farmer holding her breeding Barn Owl Ian Spence 2007

The preliminary results have shown some surprises. Breeding evidence has been recorded in all 7 tetrads where Black Grouse has been seen this year, however Red Grouse has only been seen in 3 tetrads and breeding evidence noted in only two of these. Who would have thought that Black Grouse could be more common than Red Grouse? Owls in general are poorly recorded and whilst we had many winter Woodcock records, this isn't present as a breeding species – or is it? I have received only one record of Grey Partridge, Kingfishers and Little Grebes are possibly under-recorded and bird ringers see more Tree Sparrows than do ordinary birdwatchers. If you think these results don't show the true picture then your help is needed next year to fill in the gaps in our knowledge.

Anne Brenchley

Progress in Caernarfonshire



Ringed Plovers Steve Roberts 2008

In general, I'm very pleased with the progress made in the first breeding season. Many of my 20 or so 10km squares have reached the minimum sign-up of 8 TTVs suggested by the BTO, although some observers have booked in but not really started yet. Of course I'm sure they will get going soon! Squares which still need considerable further effort are:

- SH23: SW of Morfa Nefyn
- SH33: Pwllheli – Nefyn
- SH34: Yr Eifl (the Rivals & Trefor
- SH43: Chwillog - Criccieth
- SH75: Gwydir Forest & Moel Hebog

These are all areas with lots of interesting habitat (and birds), but few birdwatchers!

The other effort we need, and it's the same everywhere, is: THINK ROVING RECORDS!! I've entered on-line 818 roving records in over 100 tetrads, and we NEED MORE PEOPLE doing the same. No special commitment, just note down species, date, breeding evidence and location. Discover your easiest way of finding which tetrad you're in, then log all the records on a Roving Record form, or enter on-line from your notebook. It's as easy as that!

Geoff Gibbs

Progress elsewhere in North Wales?

Anglesey – there are significant gaps in the north-east and central parts of the island. Notably SH37-39 and SH49, from Rhosneigr to Cemaes Bay. However, coastal areas are receiving many records from local birdwatchers and visitors alike.

Clwyd West – Gaps in coverage are mainly around SJ05-06 (Cyffylliog and Denbigh) and SH86 (Llanrwst east to Gwytherin) and SH95 (Alwen Reservoir, Llyn Brenig and Llyn Aled).

Merioneth – this covers some of the more remote parts of North Wales and not surprisingly there are few records from the south-east part of Snowdonia National Park and around Trawsfynydd (SH63-64, SH73 and SH82-84). Also surveyors are still needed for the Bala and Corwen areas.

If you are interested in combining some lovely scenery, wonderful walking and birdwatching do sign up to do surveys in these areas.

What is happening to our Biodiversity Action Plan species?

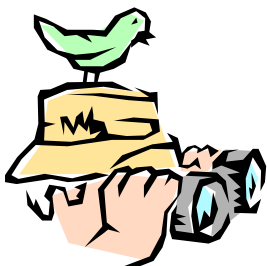


House Sparrow fledglings
Jane Hemming 2008

Many of our species in Wales are known to have declined quite markedly in recent years and special conservation action has been put in place to try and understand what is happening and why. Several species only spend the winter in North Wales or pass through on migration but the actual or potential breeding species on the Welsh Biodiversity list include:

Skylark	Grasshopper Warbler
Tree Pipit	Woodlark
Great Bittern	Corn Bunting
Nightjar	Yellow Wagtail
Lesser Redpoll	Spotted Flycatcher
Linnet	Curlew
Twite	Willow Tit
Hawfinch	Marsh Tit
Corncrake	House Sparrow
Cuckoo	Tree Sparrow
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	Grey Partridge
Yellowhammer	Wood Warbler
Reed Bunting	Duncock
Red Grouse	Common Bullfinch
Herring Gull	Roseate Tern
Turtle Dove	Song Thrush
Starling	Ring Ouzel
Black Grouse	Lapwing

It will be particularly valuable to establish a comprehensive picture of the status of these species, which can contribute to their conservation management and protection, and monitor future fluctuations in their local populations. If you think these species are present in your square or you see them as Roving Records, please make a particular effort to establish their breeding status and ensure the record is submitted.



Volunteer Experiences.....

On 20th of April at Croesor I was investigating the more hard-to-reach corners of one of my inland Tetrads. I was hoping to add ring ouzel and wheatear as Roving Records as my usual route doesn't take me into this highest corner on the slopes of the Cnicht. It started well and I soon heard pied flycatcher and redstart as I left the village behind and climbed through the oak woodland. Surprisingly there were quite a few siskins singing as well – not a bird I'm used to seeing here in spring.

Up through the sheep pastures on the Cnicht footpath I was pleased to add a smart male wheatear and plenty of displaying meadow pipits. A skylark was nice addition to the tetrad although it was staying close to the ground in the strengthening wind. After a third of the way up the mountain I dropped east off the ridge and scanned the screes and steep rough pasture high above the valley below. A pair of displaying ravens, four chough and three singing male wheatears was nice, with more displaying meadow pipits and a stonechat.

The highlight came after scrambling down the slope almost to the valley floor. A meadow pipit started its song flight directly above me and I looked up. High above it another bird grabbed my attention. Confusion gave way to disbelief as the silhouette with long powerful wings and a long tapering tail resolved itself into an adult dark phase arctic skua. I only had a few brief seconds before it disappeared northward over the ridge – I'd estimate at an altitude of about 1200 feet.

Now I don't mind if a few divers deliberately divert around my coastal tetrad if I can pick up the odd Skua in an upland tetrad!

Rhys Jones, Caernarfon

A personal report on summer Atlas Fieldwork in Meirionydd

Tetrads surveyed twice for at least an hour each time – 29

Approximate number of hours spent in field – 70

Trips by foot or public transport – 25

Trips by shared car – 2

Other trips by car – 7

Total species found – 117

Sparrowhawks found – 0

Most biodiverse tetrad – SH50R (Tonfanau, 61 species)

Least biodiverse tetrad – SH60L (Trum-gwr, 5 species)

Bites from horse flies – 4

Bites from dogs – 1

Favourite find – Reeves' Pheasant

Biggest failure – Treecreepers, found in only 2 tetrads during timed visits, and 5 elsewhere

Tom McCanna, Tywyn



I have to admit that I didn't have much idea of what I was letting myself in for when I said yes to helping with the Bird Atlas, but after attending a training day I couldn't wait to get going.

I confess to being a little apprehensive especially as it would include knocking on a couple of doors to ask permission to collect the data. I needn't have worried; the landowners were only too pleased to allow access and then wanted to know what I had seen. The opportunity to explain about the Bird Atlas was a pleasure and I felt proud to be a part of it.

My chosen tetrad took me into beautiful wild areas on my own doorstep and as usual the more common birds gave me much pleasure in seeing and counting. I was rewarded with two surprises. One was noting a couple of Crossbills in an area that I just wouldn't have been in, and the other was being told that a Barn Owl was regularly patrolling my tetrad.

Julie Chicken, Clwyd East

After a fascinating winter contributing records to the BTO's Wintering Bird Atlas I was looking forward with keen anticipation to surveying for the North Wales Breeding Bird Atlas as well as the BTO's own Breeding Bird Atlas. Like many local observers I had decided to contribute to the programme of so called Timed Tetrad Visits. Although the recorder has to make a note of all birds seen and heard within two one-hour slots, I enjoyed the discipline of this type of recording. I also contributed Roving Records for my 6 tetrads when I was working outside my two-hour time slots. Like many other recorders, I also collected numerous Roving Records for a wide range of other locations, mainly on Anglesey, but also occasionally on the mainland.

My first records in mid April were from the area around The Dingle in Llangefni, not far from home. I was pleased to record good numbers of Willow Warblers, Chiffchaffs and a solitary Blackcap. The tetrad also covers part of Cefni Reservoir where I recorded small numbers of Swallows and House Martins as well as over fifty Sand Martins, although most of these were almost certainly just migrating through.

In late April another pleasant surprise was the tetrad on the southeast edge of Llangefni where I recorded the largest number of species on my allocated tetrads, despite including residential areas and most of the industrial estate. Not only did I flush a Mallard from a nest of nine eggs but I also counted forty-five Ravens many of which were young of the year. I was pleased to flush a couple of Snipe as well as recording two singing Grasshopper Warblers. With birds like Skylark becoming so uncommon in many areas I was happy to record one in song flight as well as two Common Sandpipers by the edge of the Afon Cefni.

I can certainly recommend to any birder to get out and simply record birds that you see in your regular haunts as it can be both very pleasurable as well as rewarding for the Atlas projects.

Peter Stuttard, Anglesey

Training



In autumn 2007 and spring 2008, we managed to run several training courses in different locations in North Wales. Thanks to support from a grant from Environment Wales, we have been able to purchase a laptop, projector and screen and pay for advertising, venues and supporting materials. We intend to run more training courses this autumn and spring 2009. These courses are designed to bring on new volunteers, build confidence and increase the capacity of the potential volunteer workforce across Wales. These courses cover a range of BTO surveys, not just the Atlas work but of course the Atlas is a great focus to encourage volunteers with some local knowledge of birds to contribute to their conservation.

North West Wales:

November 1st 2008, Pwllheli, 10.30am: indoor session for current and new Atlas surveyors, to continue after lunch with fieldwork in under-recorded local squares.

January 25th 2009: winter Atlas field recording and ID training, Mawddach estuary. Meet Morfa Mawddach station 11am. (Joint with NWWT Merioneth Branch)

For more information contact Geoff Gibbs.

North East Wales:

I have already run one very successful course at Rhydymwyn, nr Mold on October 11th, with 17 participants. This course incorporated a mixture of indoor presentations, map reading exercises and outdoor fieldwork in the afternoon. I hope to run some further courses in the spring, possibly in the Llangollen and Clocaenog areas.

For more further information contact Anne Brenchley.

Sponsor a Species!

In order to raise some of the monies to pay for the production of the North Wales Breeding Bird Atlas 2008-2011 we will be running a species sponsorship programme in spring 2009. Whilst some key species may be offered for corporate sponsorship, the majority will be available for volunteers and the general public. We hope to run this sponsorship programme through an auction scheme with minimum bids starting at £15. Choose your favourite species and start saving your pennies! All sponsors will get their name printed in bold in the species pages of the Atlas.

So watch this space.

Local Atlas Co-ordinators

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Next Issue

Many thanks to all those people who contributed to this issue. We plan to produce the next newsletter in spring 2009 (February to March) and would like to include further contributions from surveyors and provide more detailed results for key species, with preliminary distribution maps. If you have an interesting experience to relate when recording or perhaps a photograph to share, please let Anne or Geoff know.

Final Thanks

Thanks to Chester Zoo for the grant-aid of £500 to help set up this project and to Jane Hemming (BTO Asst. Regional Rep for Clwyd East) who helped put this newsletter together.