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NORTH WALES BREEDING BIRD ATLAS NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2009

HOT OFF THE PRESS

The North Wales Breeding Bird Atlas project has been awarded £3260 by Awards for All Wales. These monies will enable the smooth running of the project over the next 12 months by providing resources for promotion, training and general support for all the volunteers.



Greetings from the Atlas Co-ordinators

The Atlas Co-ordinators and the BTO Regional Representatives are all busy validating breeding records for 2008 and are delighted with the numbers received – so thank you for all your efforts so far, keep it up! It is hoped to have more detailed results for the Autumn Newsletter, but a picture is already forming of our successful breeding species and those that may be struggling – or maybe hopefully just under recorded as yet. However, there is still a long way to go as you will read further on **and if nothing else the priority for 2009 is to gather breeding evidence.**

Validation includes double checking on rarities or sightings in unusual circumstances or habitat and unusual numbers. If the Local Atlas Organiser is unsure about a record, they may consult the County Bird Recorder about any rare or unusual species and if the record cannot be resolved, this results in the record being **queried**. Queries come up on the on-line system when the observer next logs on and appear as a yellow strapline indicating that 'x' records have been queried. The observer can then click on 'Click here to view' and has the option to edit the record

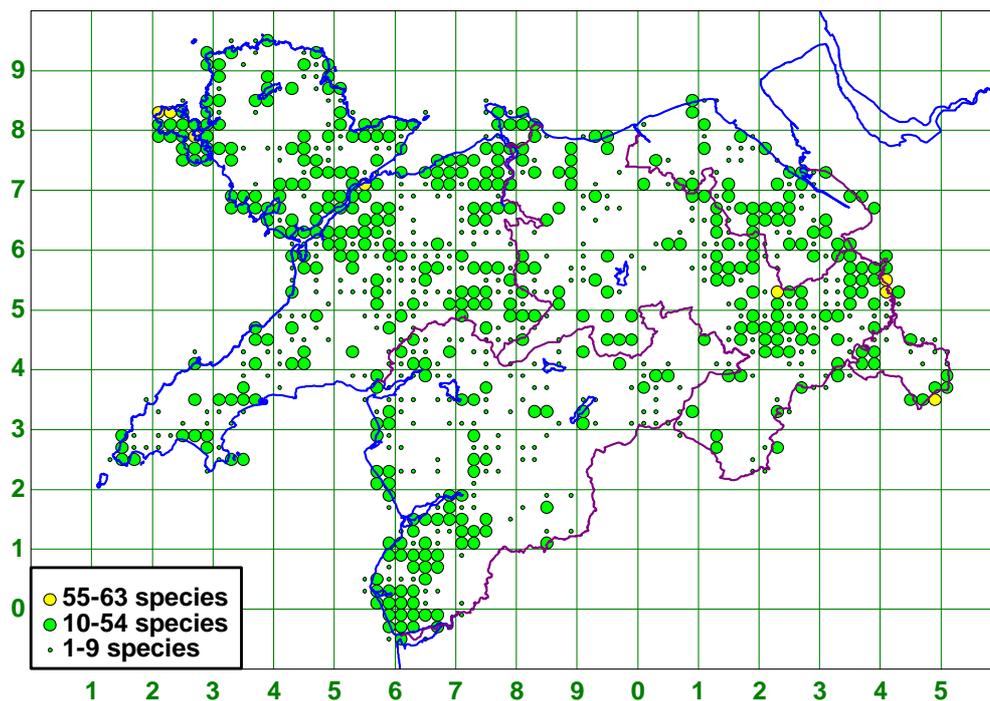
or email the person querying the record. This is all very straightforward and quite often the query is resolved very simply. If the observer doesn't respond to a queried record within two weeks, they may receive an email from the Atlas Organiser asking them to do so. We know that not everyone looks at the Atlas website as frequently as we do! So please don't be alarmed if you receive an email or phone call from your Co-ordinator – it's all part of the validation process.

If you are using paper forms for your records, please send these to your County Coordinator rather than direct to the BTO. We can then do a quick check-over, resolving any problems before data are input by the BTO.

Some interesting statistics

BTO Region	Tetrad with most species recorded in breeding season	Tetrad with most breeding species confirmed	Number of tetrads where no records have been received
Anglesey	SH39G (Cemlyn Bay) 86	SH57K (Bangor Botanic Gardens) 46	91/238
Caernarfon	SH77Y (RSPB Conwy) 102	SH33C (W of Pwllheli) 37	173/405
Clwyd East	SJ25G (Llandegla/Bwlchgwyn) 65	SJ24I (World's End/Ruabon Moor) 26	154/341
Clwyd West	SH87D (Conwy Estuary - east) 66	SH06Q (between Prion and Mynydd Ilech) 29	170/266
Merioneth	SH50R (Morfa Gwyllt) 62	SH50R (Morfa Gwyllt) 18	253/462

Tetrads with breeding codes 2008



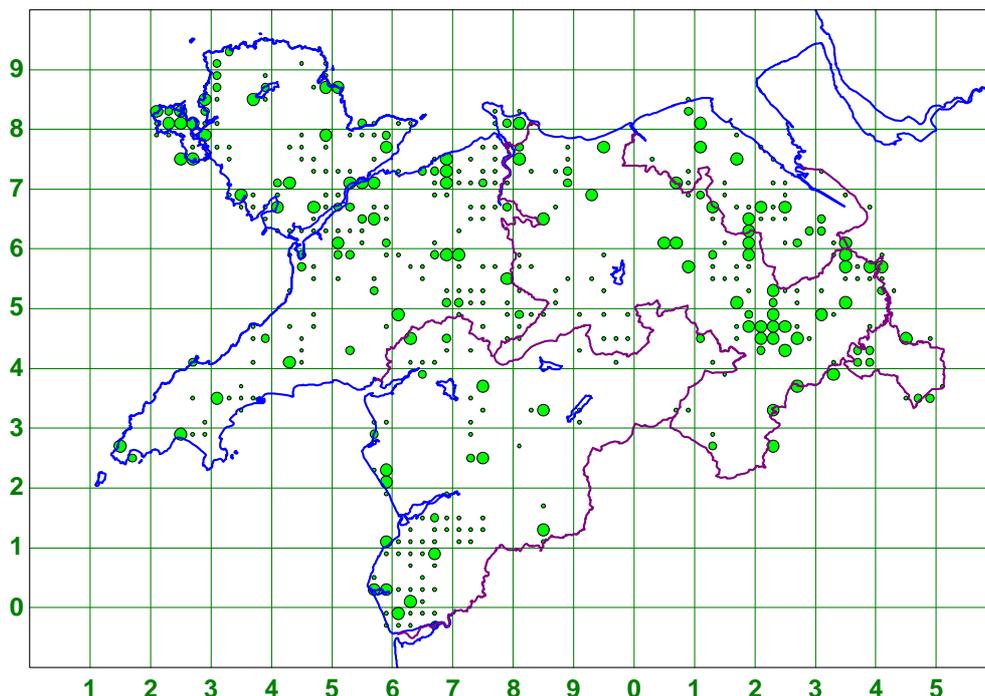
64% of the tetrads in our five main Welsh BTO regions (see table above and map) have yet to have any records and although some tetrads have a large number of species recorded, many of these records were of birds on migration, flying over or just recorded as present but with no Breeding Code. The majority of tetrads have only a handful of records. With only three seasons left, all your help and support is needed to get the total coverage that is our aim.

Anne Brenchley and Geoff Gibbs

Make your records count – More Roving Records needed

If you undertook Timed Tetrad Visits (TTVs) in 2008, please consider going back to your tetrad and help to fill in the gaps. Whilst the TTV data is vital to the national BTO Atlas for creating abundance maps, much of these TTV data have no Breeding Codes and so at best can only indicate Possible breeding. We really need TTVs to be followed up with some more detailed Roving Records **with Breeding Codes** so why not return to your tetrads and have a good day out birdwatching without the need to keep an eye on the time or do any counting? On average, tetrads will have around 40-50 breeding species so even for those tetrads where we have records, the breeding information needs to be significantly enhanced. Can we suggest that perhaps you 'adopt' a couple of tetrads each year and dedicate time observing and recording the breeding status of as many species as possible. You can see from the map below that our coverage for Wren, a species that is probably found in almost all tetrads, does not yet reflect the real picture.

Winter Wren 2008



If you are an online user, you can get a record from the 2008 season of all the birds recorded in a tetrad and the level of breeding evidence by going to the Bird Atlas Home Page and, under the heading 'Your Atlas Options', clicking on 'Any Square Summary' where you have 10 opportunities each day to check the species recorded in the tetrad you've selected. If you are not an online user, then you can

receive a paper copy of this information on request from your local Atlas organiser.

So, if you're going for a day out in Wales, why not use the Google map found on your Roving Records page to identify the tetrad you'll be visiting and then see which gaps need to be filled?

How are our Biodiversity Action Plan species doing?

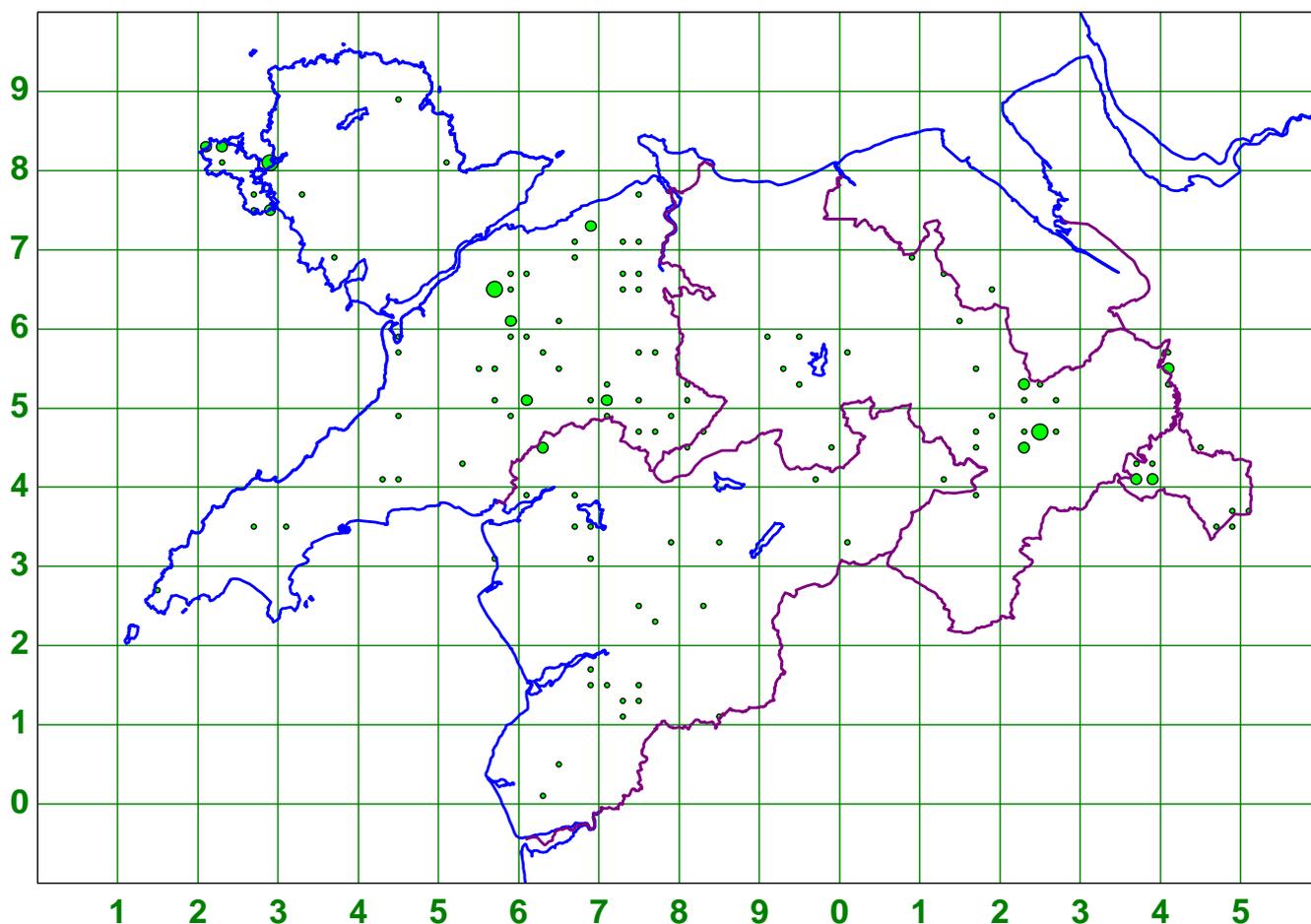


Herring Gull Louise Jones 2008

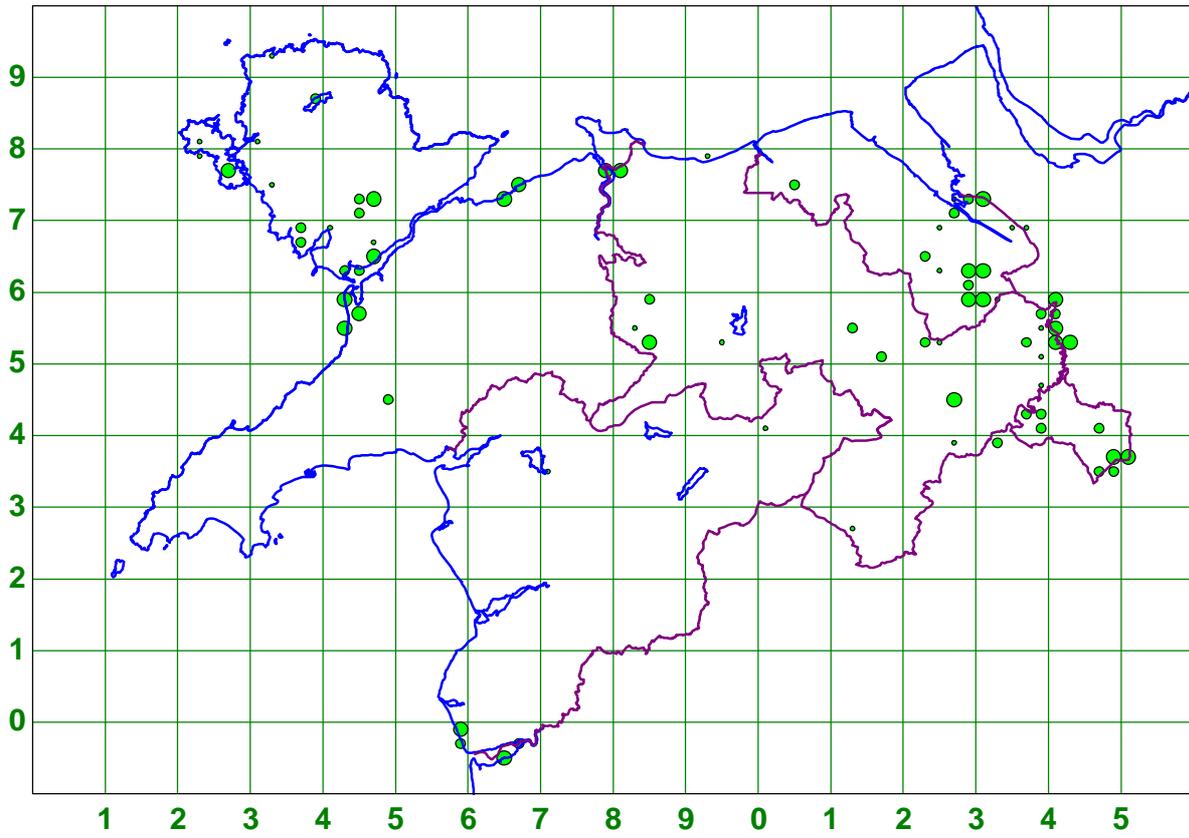
Overall we are pleased to report that we've already had encouraging numbers of records for some BAP species, including, Black Grouse, Herring Gull, House Sparrow and Bullfinch. We appear to have had more records of breeding Little Ringed Plover last year than in the national survey in 2007! However, there are indications that species such as Grey Partridge, Lapwing, Cuckoo, Spotted Flycatcher and many farmland species have declined since the last national Atlas (1988-1991). In the Autumn 2008 newsletter we promised to provide some provisional maps for these species.

However, there isn't enough space to include them all here but the maps for Cuckoo, Lapwing and Spotted Flycatcher make it apparent that the situation is quite serious for these species. The provisional distribution maps for all the BAP species will appear on the local Atlas website in the next few weeks.

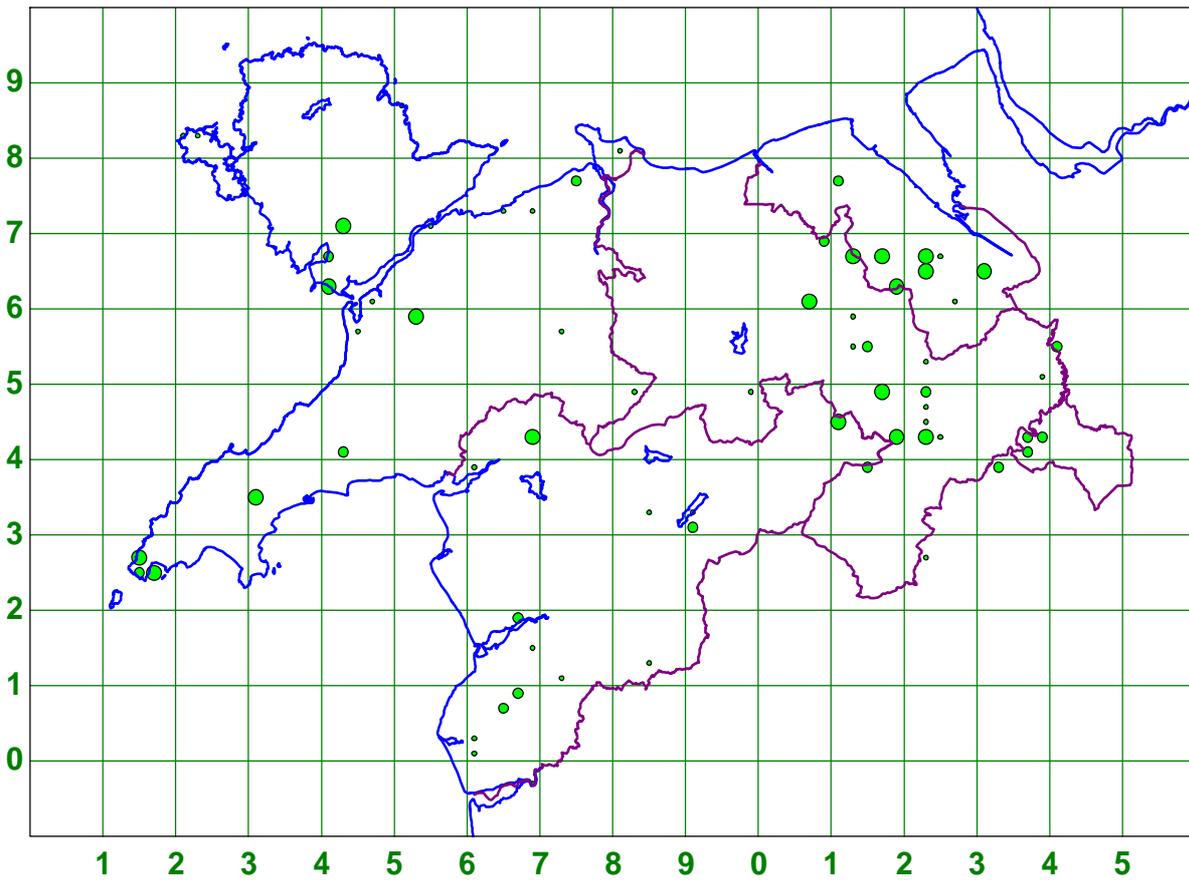
Common Cuckoo 2008



Northern Lapwing 2008



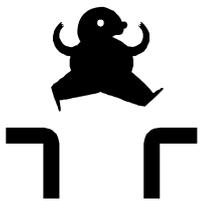
Spotted Flycatcher 2008



The State of Birds in Wales 5

This publication produced jointly by the RSPB, Welsh Ornithological Society, Countryside Council for Wales, the BTO and the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, was published in January 2009. This report highlights the key changes in bird populations for all the Biodiversity Action Plan species and is based on annual survey such as the BTO's Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), raptor (birds of prey) monitoring and some individual species surveys. The report also highlights that the index of widespread breeding birds of farmed habitats is now at its lowest point since 1994 when the survey began. Our North Wales Breeding Bird Atlas is mentioned as one of those surveys that will help to inform future bird conservation needs in Wales. For further information contact the RSPB Cymru, Cardiff (029 2035 3000 cymru@rspb.org.uk).

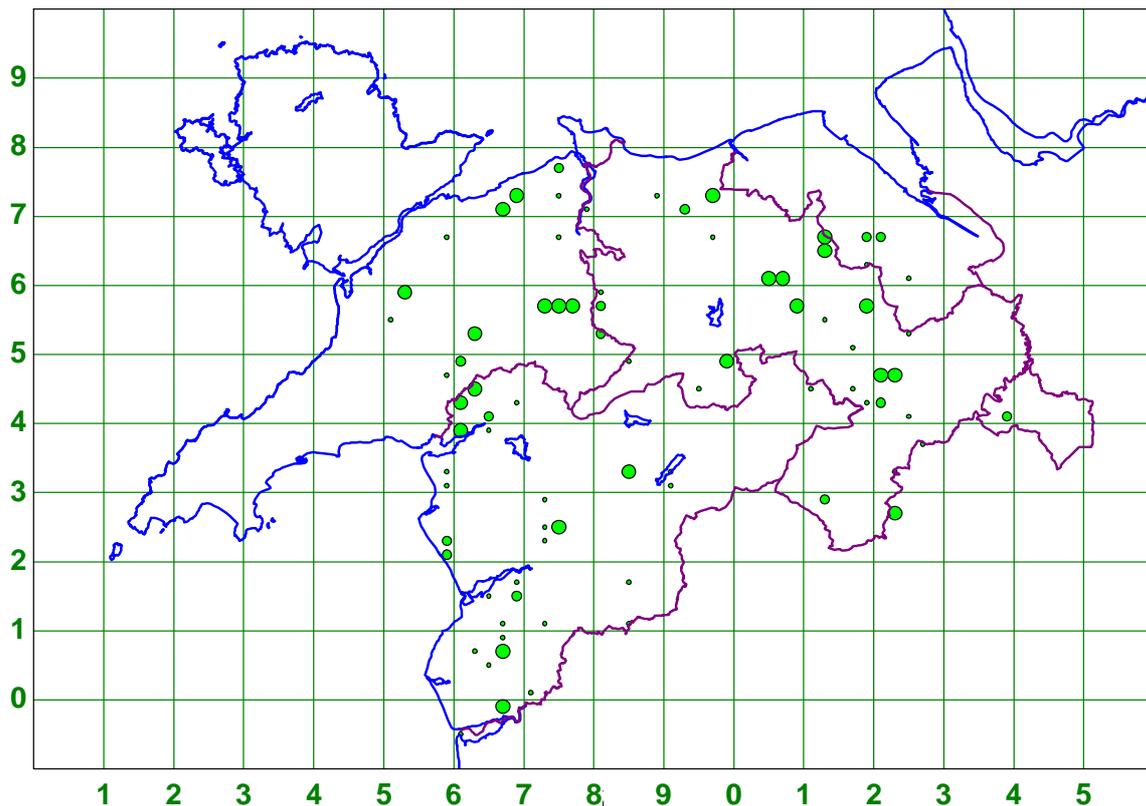
Filling in the Gaps



'Common' species that seem to be under recorded include Tawny Owl, Sparrowhawk, Treecreeper and Pied Flycatcher but hopefully this will change over the next 3 years as more records come in. Although Marsh and Willow Tit are notoriously difficult to distinguish we'd like to hear about ALL possible M/W tits, even if you can't clinch the ID. We might be able to send someone to check them out, even in a subsequent year.

To try and fill in these gaps we'd like to encourage surveyors to dedicate time to find some of the missing species. **Pied Flycatchers** can be easily missed other than in late April/early May, when the males are singing, or early June when the adults alarm-call near nests with young. We suggest targeting suitable woods at this time and you could also pick up Wood Warblers and Redstarts; if you are willing to help please contact your RR, Anne or Geoff. Our website will be linking to the RSPB website so surveyors can remind themselves of their song and habitat.

Pied Flycatcher 2008



Nocturnal Species



Always a bit more difficult to record given that most of us prefer to get our beauty sleep when they're most active, however, despite this, can we put in a plea for some more late evening visits? Currently, we have very few records for Nightjar, Woodcock and owls and you never know what else might turn up! However for the Lleyn Peninsula we've had a great offer from Richard Arnold (ex Regional Rep for Caerns). Geoff is giving him a list of squares and tetrads where Tawny Owls have been recorded, and Richard's going out with his camper-van to fill the gaps! This may produce some Little Owl records as well.

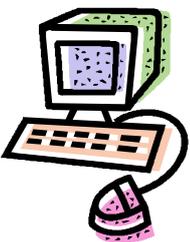
HEALTH AND SAFETY NOTE! If you're surveying at night or in remote/inaccessible areas please remember to tell someone where you're going and when you expect to return. Make sure you have a torch, map, water and mobile phone and never put yourself in danger.

Colonial Birds (Rooks, Herons etc)



We are not getting many confirmed breeding records of colonial birds. If you have the time please do check your tetrad thoroughly for Rooks and Herons in particular. Rooks and Herons start their nesting activities quite early in the season before the leaves come out and can be quite obvious in March and April. Check out suitable habitat and then do a nest count at the peak period. Although House Martins and Swifts are not officially classified as colonial species they can nest in quite close proximity, particularly on large buildings. We know of a couple of House Martin colonies in the Ruthin area that were destroyed in 2008 and it would be good to highlight this issue but first we do need to know where these colonies are. Also Swifts usually nest in small groups in suitable high buildings. Nest counts of Swifts are not expected but locations would be particularly useful. Detailed locations can be reported to your County Bird Recorder or to your local Atlas Coordinator.

Tips for entering data online



If you have access to a computer it saves a lot of time and effort if you can enter data online on www.bto.org/birdatlas although paper records can be sent to your area Atlas Co-ordinator.

If you need to check the tetrad code of the place where you've made recordings there is a Google map situated top right of the Roving Records page, when you place the pointer over the area you were in, the exact tetrad is indicated just underneath the map. Follow the instructions to enter the 10km square with two key strokes, then enter the tetrad letter manually. Providing a location name from within your tetrad is also important and this helps us with validation – just a double check that the tetrad letter and name match. Please choose a name that shows up on the 1:50,000 or 1:25,000 O.S. maps.

A word of caution when entering names of species! As soon as you type the first couple of letters a drop down menu offers a choice of names and it's all too easy to inadvertently click on the wrong one so double check! Beware that the default for Pied Wagtail is Pied/White Wagtail and most of you have chosen this option. We would prefer that you click on Pied Wagtail (*yarrellii*) if you can. White Wagtails may occur here in winter or on migration but our breeding

birds are purely Pied. Also our 'common' Redpoll is the Lesser Redpoll so please normally choose this option. Common Redpoll is a 'Welsh' rarity and a description (preferably accompanied by a sketch or better still a photograph) is required to be sent to your County Recorder.

Please record Breeding Status, even though the box on the right side of the page says 'optional' we really need to know the Breeding status whether it be obvious, ie feeding young, or just in suitable habitat. **Our local Atlas depends on this information.**

There is also a facility for editing or even deleting records if needed, you can delete a page at a time by going to View/edit my records and the click on the visit you want to edit (assuming it's a TTV). At the top right of the page you'll see four grey boxes. Click on the grey icon to delete a page and then start again.

Lots more useful and interesting information, including access to maps and which tetrads have yet to be surveyed can be found on our website: www.northwalesbirdatlas.co.uk

Volunteer experiences



I have a passion for bird watching and islands and have been fortunate to visit quite a number of islands world-wide and to see many birds endemic to various islands.....so what connection do islands have with BTO/North Wales atlas squares? Why not treat each square as an island?

If you are lucky, you are provided with a lovely, large scale, plastic covered tetrad map of your particular 'island' by the survey organizer, then you study the map to decide which way round to walk for either one hour or two – your choice. What could be more simple? You are surrounded by an imaginary sea (birds in this area do not count!) My Flintshire/Denbighshire squares have not yet produced any rarities, but I live in hope, and have visited places in the counties I have never been to before; also in gets me out into the countryside on days of my choosing – so it is never wet and miserable, or cold and windy. I walk with the map in my pocket for occasional reference, a pencil or two, and a piece of stiff card to record all the birds either seen or heard on my 'island'. A drink in a flask is an optional extra, as is a mobile phone in case of anything untoward – it is all very free and easy – the most difficult thing for me is counting large moving flocks such as Fieldfares mixed with Redwings, or fields full of constantly moving Common and Black-headed Gulls, but I just do the best I can. After all a good estimate is better than nothing at all. So why not get out there and do it?

New Year resolution for 2009? Returning to genuine islands and other obsessions – like visiting Landmark Trust properties – Elvet and I managed to combine all three passions in 2008, by having a holiday on Lundy Island. We visited a wonderful, isolated, traffic free, flower strewn paradise. We lived in three entirely different Landmark properties and saw countless birds. I limited myself to Roving Records while on Lundy and was blessed with a real rarity – a Collared Flycatcher – submitted to the Rarities Committee, but not yet accepted as this process takes over a year. We also saw many Spotted Flycatchers, Wheatears, etc. and 1000s of Swallows on migration. This is a highly recommended destination for birds, buildings and peace and quiet! While we were there in May there was a group of 'professional' birders doing the BTO timed tetrads – but they could not be everywhere at once, so I submitted my Roving records – as in our area all records count!

Louise Jones, Clwyd West



Having retired some 12 years ago I was hoping to visit more distant places to enjoy my bird watching but as the years passed I kept returning to my local patches. These have undergone many changes and far fewer birds than 40 years ago. So when the Atlas came along this was my opportunity to visit new bird watching places. The first year I have basically stayed within a handful of miles from home and was very surprised at the number of birds I've been missing. A Quail was calling no more than a couple of miles from home in an area I had never visited, also Spotted Flycatcher and Yellowhammer were seen in areas not visited before.

The second year I asked Anne if there were any tetrads available for surveying, she suggested some places I had hardly ever heard of let alone visited e.g. Ceiriog Valley, Tanat Valley and The Maelor but this was the opportunity to see somewhere new. Having completed the first Winter visit in these areas I have seen birds that have been missing from my list for many years. Goosander, Goshawk, Jack Snipe, Marsh Tit, Willow Tit have all been seen this winter. I am really looking forward to some happy days on the Summer visits. Who knows what might turn up. Thank you Bird Atlas for getting me out of my comfort zone.

Glyn Roberts, Clwyd East

And something from the perspective of a bird ringer and nest recorder:

I have been interested in breeding birds for the past 65yrs or so, and sending records to the BTO nest record scheme for over 50yrs. Last year, 2008 was an up and down year for the tit family, both Blue and Great Tits had heavy losses in young. Not quite as bad as 2007, but clutch sizes were smaller. Some nests had only 3 eggs, and even then two of them lost all young. Much of this I put down to cold and wet conditions in the spring, hence very few caterpillars. One Coal tit did rear 6 young in the garden wall and a Nuthatch in the wall of the main road was also successful.

On a brighter side, the fire extinguisher that I fitted up under the bridge in Waunfawr produced two broods of Dippers. The 1st had 4 eggs on the 17th April and I ringed them on the 24th April, the 2nd had 3 eggs on the 12th of June and were ringed on the 19th of June. At the same time as the 2nd brood of Dippers were being raised, a Spotted Flycatcher built a nest on a small platform that I had fitted to the stone work on the bridge some years ago, which in previous years had been used by Grey Wagtails. The two nests were only about 10ft apart. Sadly the flycatchers nest was badly affected by 48hrs or more of heavy rain on the weekend of the 28th and 29th of June and the young died. Also whole broods of Swallows were lost on that same weekend.



Our Robins did well and had 3 broods, 7 & 5 & 4 young in each. Only one Pied flycatcher nested this year, all 7 young fledged, the same as last year, though in some years we have had 3 nests in the garden, this year we had no Redstarts. The Great Spotted Woodpecker had at least 3 young and a Green Woodpecker successfully had a nest and young on our neighbour's farm. Song Thrush had 4 young and Blackbirds did quite well as did Chaffinch, and Dunnock but it was a bad year for Greenfinches and Goldfinches in our garden.



Our resident Carrion Crow nested but did not rear any young again, we have had this pair for 9yrs now. They will not tolerate Jackdaws or Magpies in what they regard as their feeding area, when we put food out on top of the garden shed. Should one of the two, mentioned above, dare to try and have some, they are asking for trouble, and they get it right up their tail feathers or worse. Let us see what this coming year will bring.

David Greasley, Caernarfon

Training Courses

We began a series of training courses in autumn 2007, thanks to the support from Environment Wales. More courses will be run this spring – for details please look on the website or contact your local Atlas organiser.

Sat. 14 March 'The Conquering Hero', Rhewl Community Centre, near Llangollen
10:00hrs – 16:00hrs - Learn about a range of surveys organised by the British Trust for Ornithology such as: Garden Birdwatch/Birdtrack, Breeding Bird Survey, BTO Winter/Breeding Atlas, North Wales Breeding Bird Atlas – booking essential as places are limited, contact Anne Brenchley, 01352 750118

Sat. 21 March Clawddnewydd Community Centre, Nr Ruthin (details as above)

Sat.25 April Bala Lake warden centre. Bird ID and Atlas survey day. For further information email davidanning@freeuk.com or phone Geoff Gibbs.

Make your records count – County Bird Reports

The production of our Atlas will be a tremendous achievement but did you know that each year two bird reports are published that record the birds seen in our recording area? The publication of the Cambrian and North East Wales bird reports is overseen by the County Bird Recorders and a team of dedicated volunteers who help write the reports. The reports record the birds seen each year at a range of more popular birdwatching locations, record the sightings of rare birds, the first and last dates of migrant species, have interesting articles on places to visit and conservation projects and includes the annual ringing report. This work is ongoing and will continue long after the Atlas has been produced. Information provided by county bird reports is also valued by conservation organisations and so if you are interested in contributing to these reports, finding out more or simply buying a copy of the latest edition (2007 reports have been published and the 2008 editions are in preparation) contact:

Ian Spence – North East Wales (01352 750118) ianspence.cr@btinternet.com

Cambrian OS area – see list of Recorders below

Volunteers Needed!



The Atlas Working Group is only a small band of people and we urgently need some more volunteers to help us with this project. We are starting to plan the production of the book that we intend to publish after all the fieldwork has been completed. We need to pull together a small **publishing group** and would welcome offers of help from anyone interested, particularly anyone with experience of publishing but volunteers with a bit of time and commitment would be just as helpful.

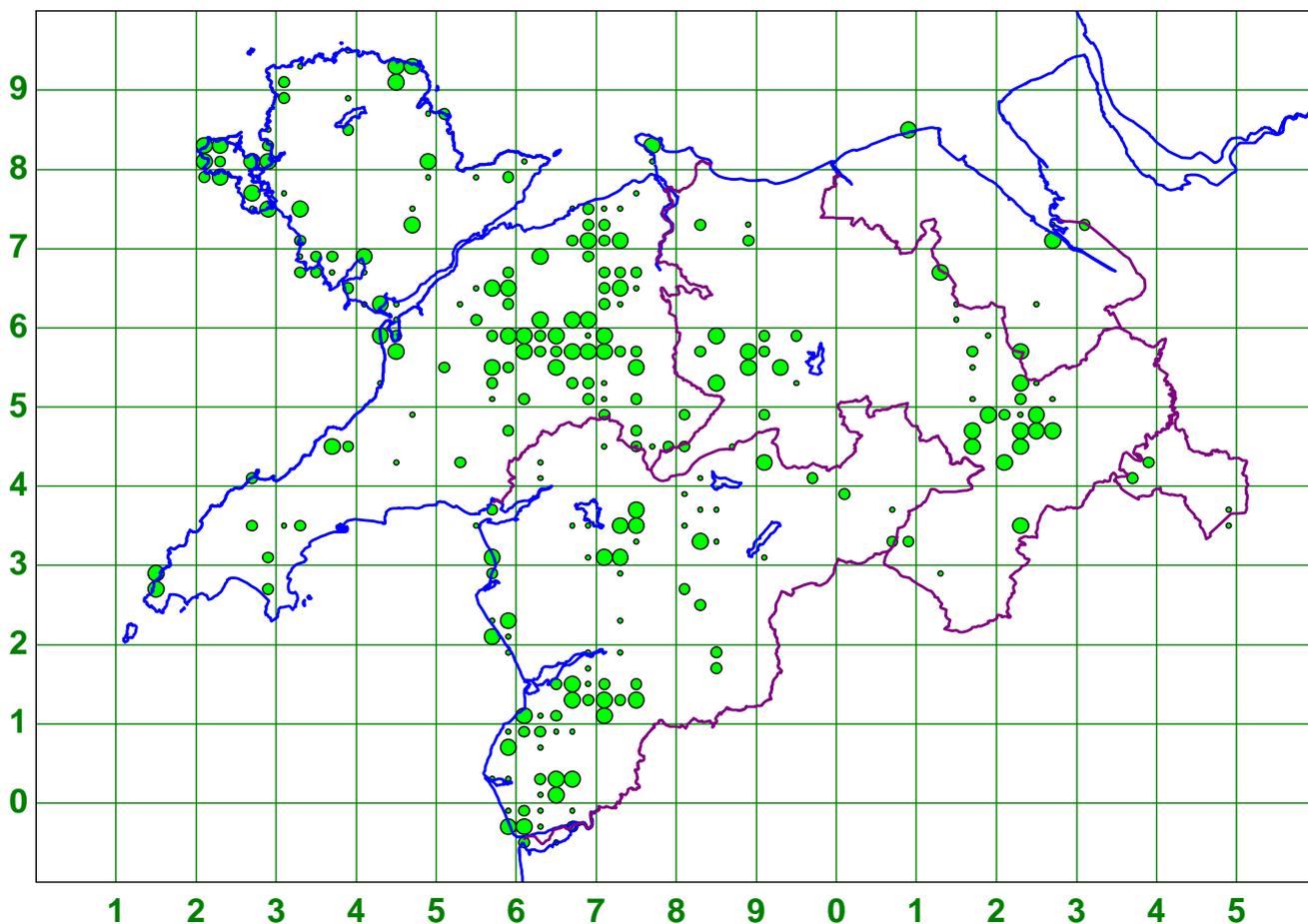
We want our final publication to look very attractive and we are looking for good quality **photographs** and **drawings** to help illustrate the book. Pictures of any of our breeding birds, taken in the recording area and preferably in the atlas period (2008-2011) would be much appreciated. Full acknowledgment will of course be given. So take your camera on all tour trips from now on. If you know of any local bird artists or you are one yourself, some line drawings would also enliven our book. Do get in touch with the local organisers to show us your work.

Also now that we have monies from Awards for All Wales, we need to spend more time promoting the project and supporting both new and existing volunteers. If you would be interested in helping with writing any articles for the local papers, writing Press Releases or helping out at events and training courses do please get in contact.

Guess the Species? Prize to be won

A £10 book token will be awarded to the first person drawn from the hat on the closing date, who has correctly identified the species mapped below. Entries must be submitted by post or email by 1 April 2009 to Anne Brenchley. Good luck.

Which species is this? 2008 data



Local BTO Reps/Atlas Organisers

North Wales BTO Regional Representatives:

Tony White, Anglesey:	wylfor@treg5360.freeseve.co.uk
Geoff Gibbs, Caernarfon;	geoffkate.gibbs@care4free.net
Mel ab Owain, Clwyd West	melabowain@btinternet.com
Anne Brenchley, Clwyd East	anne.brenchley@btinternet.com
Dave Anning, Merioneth	davidanning@freeuk.com

BTO Regional Representatives bordering North Wales:

Charles Hull, South Cheshire	edleston@yahoo.co.uk
Paul Miller, Wirral and mid Cheshire	paulemiller@tiscali.co.uk
Allan Dawes, Shropshire	allandawes@btinternet.com
Jane Kelsall, Montgomeryshire	janekelsall@phonecoop.coop
Moira Convery, Cardiganshire	moira.convery@dsl.pipex.com

County Bird Recorders

Anglesey: Steve Culley, 22 Cae Dedwydd, Cemaes Bay, Anglesey LL67 0LP (01407 710542)
SteCul10@aol.com

Caernarfon: John Barnes, Fach Goch, Waunfawr, Caernarfon, Gwynedd LL55 4YS
Email records to rhion678pritchard@btinternet.com

Clwyd: Ian M Spence, 43 Blackbrook, Sychdyn, Mold, Flintshire CH7 6LT (01352 750118)
ianspence.cr@btinternet.com

Meirionnydd: Jim Dustow, Afallon, 7 Glan y Don, Rhiwbryfdir, Blaenau Ffestioniog, Gwynedd LL41 3LW
(01766 830976)
Jim.Dustow@rspb.org.uk

Partners/Supporters Valuable support for the Atlas has been received from the following people and organizations.

Anglesey County Council
Chester Zoo
Cofnod
Conwy County Council
Countryside Council for Wales
Denbighshire County Council
Flintshire County Council
Forestry Commission
Gwynedd County Council
National Trust
North Wales Wildlife Trust
RSPB
Snowdonia National Park
Thelma Sykes for designing our logo
The maps were produced using DMAP by Dr Alan J Morton

Many thanks to Jane Hemming for her help with preparing this newsletter.

Anne Brenchley
43 Blackbrook, Sychdyn, Mold, Flintshire, CH7 6LT