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NORTH WALES BREEDING BIRD ATLAS NEWSLETTER

AUTUMN 2009

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Greetings from the Atlas Co-ordinators

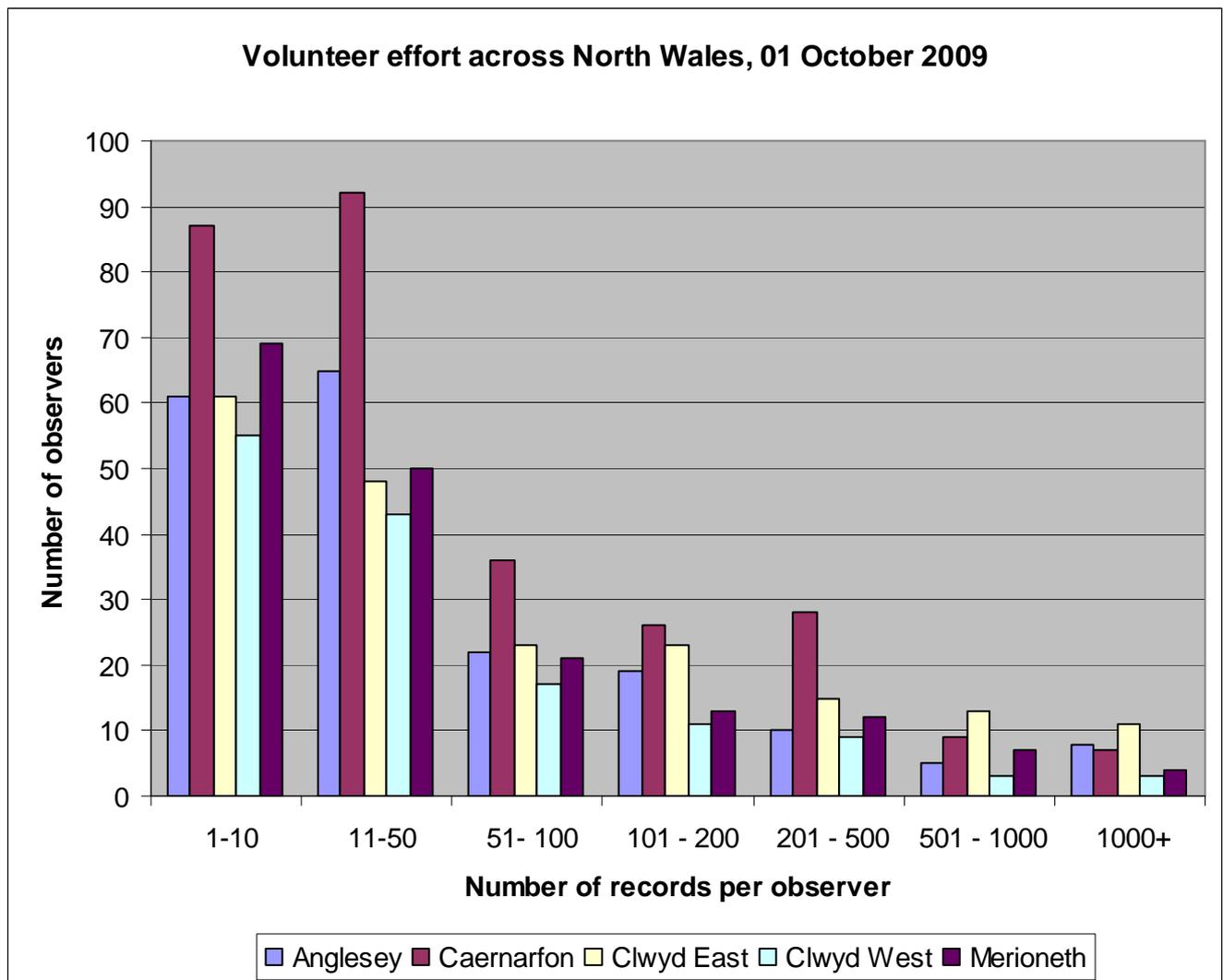
Well, we are at the halfway mark with our project and progress looks fairly good although we know that there are still a few outstanding records for 2009 yet to come in. Volunteers, it seems, love to do the fieldwork but getting those data online does take a bit of mental effort and, with no apologies, often requires several emails or phone calls from Atlas organisers.

Both the national and local Atlas work has fired the interest of many birdwatchers from both within and outside the North Wales area over the past two years. However, although the number of volunteers contributing to the project continues to increase (now over 600 individuals) this is not as much as we would hope. Much more volunteer effort is needed to get the coverage needed and the table below shows how reliant we are on the concerted efforts of a few dedicated people. In the next two years we will continue to recruit new volunteers and ensure a reasonable geographic spread wherever possible. In a period of recession and increasing awareness of our personal carbon footprints, we would like to find more local birdwatchers, who can provide us with valuable records. Please spread the word to friends and family if you can.

The 2009 data will not be made available for downloading to our Data Manager until the end of November so we cannot provide details of the situation at the halfway mark but we will be providing this information in the Spring newsletter and at any meetings held later in the winter. This will identify the gaps in coverage and show yet more provisional maps for key species. However, current indications are that the main gaps are in the more remote parts of the area as you would expect but also in much of Denbighshire and east Conwy. We are actively seeking more volunteers for these areas but may require existing volunteers to offer to travel to these parts in the final year of the project if coverage after the 2010 season continues to be low. Remember that some provisional maps from the 2008 season are available on the North Wales Bird Atlas website. If you have internet access you can view the up-to-date results for your own locality by registering with the BTO Atlas website and then clicking on 'Any Square Summary'. In this way you can target some of your effort in 2010.

We wish you all the best for the coming season.

Anne Brenchley and Geoff Gibbs





Nocturnal Species and early breeding

Records are slowly coming in for nightjar, woodcock and owls – thank you all - but we still need more breeding evidence so please make a mental note to keep on with the nocturnal surveying in 2010!

Owls: please record hooting Tawny owls at any time of year, even in October, as this is when most territories are set up. Long-eared owls hoot from February to early May, for a couple of hours from dusk onwards. The 'hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo' sound may be heard up to 1km away. The best places to check are small patches of woodland amongst open country, including wet heath or marsh. This is where they hunt. We must have some of these elusive birds in North Wales! In Caernarfon, the country west of the Penygroes – Tremadoc road looks promising. Any offers?

NILNOCT: this is an Atlas code which you can enter for a tetrad (with date) if you make a dusk/night-time visit but draw a blank.

Some species start their breeding season before the official start date of atlasing on 1 April. Please record resident birds setting up territory in March (singing males) and then plan to return to the area later in the season to confirm breeding. March records are very valuable and will be counted for our local Atlas.

Volunteer Experiences

Some you win – some you lose



Photo: Spotted Flycatcher Hugh Linn

My alarm clock, capable of adjustment, has been made redundant by the seemingly unadjustable August wailing of young Buzzards at 5.00a.m. 25 years ago this would have been noteworthy, even exciting, whereas in those days watching Spotted Flycatchers from the bedroom window was unremarkable. The Rectory in Eccleston was then home to the Linns and 3 of the many pairs of the village's Spotted Flycatchers. Now there are none. The missing brick where young hatched year after year still contains the sad dusty remains of a long disused nest. Also long gone are Hawfinches which drew birders

by the bus load. Now, after ten years over the border, in the 5 tetrads I cover in Clwyd East it is almost impossible to avoid Buzzards, but, despite dogged persistence, I have drawn a blank with Spotted Flycatchers. Not far away, Rossett churchyard is still occupied and three broods were reared in Pulford. (For the purposes of the Atlas Pulford is Welsh!) As House Martin numbers have wobbled recently it is good to know they appreciate encouragement. In Burton a small colony fared well this summer, partly due to the provision of artificial nest boxes. Two pairs used boxes and five others built their own nests. Between them nine broods were reared to independence. I hope the site will be occupied for many years to come. There is good local precedent; the colony on Rossett Mill may be 300 years old.

The Revd Hugh Linn - Sleepless in Stonewalls! (Clwyd East)

BTO Bird Atlas monitoring in and around Harlech



Photo- Swallows Jim Clark 2009

At the start of the Atlas survey, I signed up to do the four tetrads nearest my home. As I monitor a Breeding Bird square every year, I also agreed to survey the tetrad in which it occurs. So I had five tetrads to begin with in 2007-08 and this year, I added one in the Nantcol valley. Being used to the BBS methodology, it was not difficult to follow the instructions and I found the on-line entry very easy-though I did have to go back and enter details relating to the likelihood of breeding. One does get brain fag from data entry but not from field- work!

Most of the birds I saw were familiar species, but some were unexpected. My BBS monad is near Trawsfynydd and is around 260 metres high. The habitat is uniform upland semi natural grassland with heather and wet flushes. At the two spring /early summer surveys, the usual birds are Skylarks, Meadow Pipits and Wheatears with the odd Buzzard, Crows and once, a male Hen Harrier. As I had to survey beyond its boundaries, I was pleased to see a singing Tree Pipit in some clearfell just in front of the nearby forestry plantation and also a Whinchat. A male Reed Bunting was sounding off perilously perched on a stem of rush only a hundred metres outside the BBS square. On the edge of the monad is a derelict old cottage, which must have been on the drovers' route, judging by the three pine trees beside it. On one visit a male Redstart perched on one of the trees in the cottage garden was feeding a young one as I watched.

During one of my winter walks, I saw 120 Lapwing in a field just outside one of my tetrads. I entered them as roving records and one can also use BTO Birdtrack, which is an excellent way of keeping one's records all year round.

Helen Bantock (Meirionydd)

Atlas counts on Anglesey



Photo: Llyn Alaw, Jim Clark 2009



Photo: Male House Sparrow Jim Clark2009

This is my kind of bird watching: a casual walk close to my home with a note book and pair of binoculars recording not just birds but anything else of interest. Not this frantic dash pumping out CO² to twitch a lost bird or an unnecessary trip to a honey pot reserve to rubberneck in a crowd.

So far for the BTO Atlas I've covered eight tetrads summer and winter and submitted numerous other records, either complete counts or roving records to Bird Track or the atlas. I hope to cover at least another ten BTO Atlas tetrads in the next two years and continue with Bird Track and roving records.

My BTO tetrads were all on Anglesey (SH37, 38, 47) mostly covering farmland with scattered villages but including parts of some of the major lakes, a dune system and RAF Valley. For a serious count I like to be up at dawn, have breakfast and get on with the count whilst its quiet. Bird Track and roving records are from anywhere and anytime.

Some of the highs were Sand Martins, large colonies at Llyn Alaw and Gwalchmai Quarry, with several smaller coastal colonies; these were scarce nesters on Anglesey until recently. House Sparrows, unlike other areas these seem to be holding their own with every village and farmstead producing a chorus of cheep cheep. A Green Woodpecker calling at Llyn Cefni. Short-eared Owls one flushed in May 2008 at Llyn Alaw and another at Llyn Traffwll in April 2009 flew a few feet over my head at dusk whilst I was testing my new bat detector. The lows include the total loss of Cuckoo, Grey Partridge and Lapwing to large areas of Anglesey, the decline of Barn Owls to the same areas and the almost total lack of any wildlife to the increasing areas of Green Desert, just the odd gull or corvid and perhaps a few hawking Swallows.

In all though, most of the tetrads produced a good variety of birds and plenty of them. It's vitally important that we continue with this type of recording along with other surveys, the North Wales Atlas gives us a chance to record how our birds are doing during the atlas period. In twenty years time there could be major changes, look at Common Buzzard and Little Egret. Forget your trip to South Stack, Conwy or twitching some rarity do a count to an uncovered tetrad instead, you owe it to the birds you love and the generations that follow us and you never know you may find your own rarity.

Jim Clark (Anglesey)

Atlas work in SH34 (Lleyn Peninsula)



Photo: Buzzard Hugh Linn 2009

Taking on two tetrads for the Atlas survey in 2009 was a big step for me, mainly because I was only just back in the good books with my wife after my last foray into atlas survey work. That was our old home county atlas and maybe I did a little too much that time, this time I am pacing myself. So two tetrads was it for this year and a couple each year until the end of the surveying in 2011. It is quite amazing just how much being focused on a small area can teach you about what dwells within, it's just too easy to skirt over all that common stuff, when actually it's the common stuff that I probably know least about.

How often I have come home and reached for the textbooks to learn about the oddity, but how often do I do it for Linnet or Goldfinch. There are huge holes in my knowledge and being focused for a while is, frankly, good for me!

My tetrads for 2009 were adjoining each other but very different in habitats, "R" ranged from 375m down to 130m and is mainly sheep walk, heather, gorse and towards the lower end, walled pasture fields but still on thin hill soil. Whereas "Q" at 140m down to 85m has more trees, bushes, scrub and also more "improved" farmland and a lovely peaceful river valley.

What have I learned? Well the Wren, *Troglodytes troglodytes*, didn't get its Latin name for nothing, it loves boulder scree and stonewalls and can over-winter in its tiny caves when other birds have fled the hills. In February there were twice as many Wrens in the upper tetrad than in the lower one (by summer the upland wrens outnumbered the lowland by 3:1)

the opposite being true for Robins, though they were still there in respectable numbers in both tetrads.

I have felt rather disorientated since my arrival, as previously I had lived and worked within a square mile for almost 24hrs a day for 30 years and felt at one with that area. Now after the first four tetrad visits and many other walks around the area, I am beginning to feel at one with the land and its creatures here too. Other encounters have been with Adder, Grass Snake, Slowworm, Common Lizard and insects and plants too numerous to list, but many new to me, all in all an enriching experience.

Peter Hall (recently moved from Cheshire to Llithfaen).

In Clwyd East

Black lark on Anglesey, Stilt Sandpiper at Conwy, Long-billed Dowitcher at IMF and Black Stork at Alaw Estuary! Headline grabbing stuff, but believe it or not I think that I have gained as big a birding buzz from recent Atlas excursions as chasing the afore mentioned rarities.

Let me explain: I am sure like me in addition to your allocated TTV tetrad you will have been adding Roving Reports during your travels. I was aware that a short distance from home there was a disused sand pit marked on the OS map. This same disused pit has been suggested by Flintshire County Council as a possible land fill site. I decided to see what it had to offer in terms of birdlife. I found it contained a sand martin colony, which as far as I can make out is not mentioned in the North-East Wales Bird Report. Many subsequent visits have provided other observations of note, such as a pair of Shelduck investigating an old rabbit burrow as a possible nest site, a Lapwing feigning injury when I approached too close to its nest site and the noisy Canada Geese who had set up home at the receding water's edge. Several other 'ticks' have been added to my home tetrad thanks to this old sand pit.

As well as trying to demonstrate what can be found on one's doorstep via an Atlas visit or two it has brought home to me a couple of other points. Firstly, it has highlighted to me how our records could be put to conservation use when CCW, RSPB or the BTO are asked to comment on a change of land use and the subsequent impact on local birdlife. A few months ago it was just an old sand pit that was being talked of as a possible new land fill site and now I know it as an area that is home for two or three 'Amber List' birds. Secondly, referring back to the birds I mentioned at the start of this brief article; my chances of finding a 'first' are pretty slim. However, I have located an interesting local birding site, which will get me a mention in dispatches! Just for the record, below are record shots of a couple of the birds mentioned:



Sand Martin Colony.

Shelduck.

Canada Goose.

Malcolm Down – Rhydymwyn.

Successful Training to date....



Thanks to Awards for All Wales, we have been able to run several volunteer events this year. Back in March a very successful open day/training day was held at Oriel Mon in Llangefni on Anglesey. This was organised by the Anglesey Regional Representative Tony White with assistance from Karin White the Assistant Regional Representative and Peter Stuttard a long standing volunteer for the BTO who is also assisting with the Atlas Project on Anglesey and the North Wales Atlas Project.

Many volunteers met up for a chat and refreshments which had been organised by the Café at the Oriel. It was an opportunity to meet fellow surveyors and for the BTO representatives a chance to meet surveyors, some for the first time. Geoff Gibbs gave an update on the Atlas work to date (shown in the picture above) with Peter updating attendees on the progress of the first ever North Wales Atlas. A question and answer session also proved useful for volunteers to learn about situations that other surveyors had come across whilst surveying tetrads. As the event was also open to the public many of the visitors to the Oriel popped in to learn about the BTO's work, take away leaflets and information, some of which would be used in school projects. Feedback from the day was very positive with many volunteers suggesting that a further event of a similar nature would be useful towards the end of the Atlas project.

The centre of the island still has areas that need surveying so if you have a few hours to spare then your time would be greatly appreciated.

Tony and Karin White, Anglesey

A more intensive day of training was organised in April by Dave Anning in Bala and below Dave outlines how the day went.

Bird Surveying Course Bala April 2009 - Cold, wet weather greeted the participants of the Bala bird surveying course on 25 April. As we filed into the wardens Centre at Bala Lake we all hoped that the afternoon would be dry enough to go out and see some birds.

The morning session was taken up with presentations giving an introduction to bird surveying and highlighting the importance of these surveys to conservation; Brief lectures were delivered on 'Birds of Snowdonia', 'Bird Surveying', 'The Bird Atlas' and 'The Breeding Bird Survey'.

By the time we embarked on our field trips to the surrounding countryside the rain had cleared and we were greeted by a beautiful afternoon, full of spring bird song. Dafydd Roberts led a group to survey an area of mixed habitats farmland and woodland close to Llandrillo, another group headed around to the rocky east side of Arenig Fawr with Rob Strachan. I decided to go around the west side of Arenig Fawr to attempt to spot some upland birds.

We were well rewarded as a steady trickle of species was added to our list as we walked from the village of Arenig, including a redstart that gave excellent views. We left the road

and continued along a rough track, as we approached a small quarry, I was about to say that ring ouzels are usually seen on the other side of the mountain when one flew from the quarry and perched on a rowan giving good but brief views! However, the best was yet to come, as a few minutes later a female merlin flew past. By the end of the afternoon 26 species had been seen by my group.

Many thanks go to Dafydd Roberts, Rob Strachan and Kate Williamson for their help on the course.

Dave Anning - Meirionydd Regional Representative

Volunteer Events – come and meet other Atlas addicts

Many of you have asked whether we plan to organise any get-togethers of volunteers so that you can share experiences and ask the coordinators any of those awkward or burning questions. We now know that over 600 people have so far contributed to the Atlas project and so we thought we should try and bring as many of you together as we can practically manage. Thanks to the Awards for All Wales monies we have two events organised:

North-west Wales - Saturday 14 November, Prenteg (Glaslyn Valley). Meeting starts at 11am, includes lunch and will finish at 2pm. To book your place, contact Geoff Gibbs.

North-east Wales – Saturday 16 January 2010, venue yet to be confirmed but is likely to be in the Mold/Wrexham area. The same format as above will apply. To book your place, please contact Anne Brenchley.

County Bird Reports 2008 – available soon



Photo: Cuckoo Jim Clark 2008

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 will be available before Christmas) contact:

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

Geoff Gibbs – Cambrian contact (01248 681936) geoffkate.gibbs@care4free.net

STOP PRESS – the 2008 North-East Wales bird report is available NOW

Publishing Group – Volunteers Wanted

As we're a small group of people, volunteers with either experience of publishing and/or a bit of time and commitment are still needed to assist the Atlas Working Group work towards the publication of the North Wales Breeding Bird Atlas. We need people with editorial skills, proof-reading skills, writing skills and just time to chivvy along authors, locate suitable photographs etc. If you feel you can help do get in touch with one of the local organisers.

We are slowly starting to build up a library of excellent photographs but could do with lots more, obviously full acknowledgement will be given so please take your camera out with you when you're out and about!

Corporate Species Sponsorship

Over the summer months we have started to approach several organisations for corporate sponsorship of species to help raise monies for the final publication. This is ongoing work but so far we have to thank North East Wales Wildlife, First Hydro (**Chough**) and Magnox North Ltd (Trawsfynydd – **Little Ringed Plover**) for their support.

In the spring we will open this up to individuals to sponsor a species of their choice. As some species will be more popular than others we do plan to have a species auction but will be setting the base at quite a reasonable sum so that maybe most avid Atlas volunteers can sponsor a species and see their name in print on the species page of the final publication. More of this in the spring.

North Wales Bird Race 22/23 May 2010

One of our fund raising projects for 2010 will be a Bird Race. This will be run according to the usual rules and exact details and entry forms will be supplied in the spring but do put the date(s) in your diary. Incidentally **22 May is International Day of Biodiversity** so all the more reason to do something for conservation on that day. The Bird Race will be for teams of two to four people and we are planning to have different categories for teams prepared to travel across the project area or for teams that concentrate on one 10km square or even a single tetrad. Whilst the main idea is to raise monies for our final publication we will of course have prizes for each category. Of course, it is expected that all the records received that day are entered as Roving Records on the Atlas website.

Results of Map Competition Spring 2009

We had a good response and thanks to all who entered; there were 3 correct entries (Simon Hughston-Roberts, Rhion Pritchard and Dave Lamacraft) which identified **Meadow Pipit** and **Dave Lamacraft** was drawn as the lucky person to win the book token. Many entrants guessed the species to be either Raven, Stonechat or Wheatear and the provisional maps for these species were put on the website to show the comparison with Meadow Pipit. We will be running another competition in spring 2010 once the 2009 data has been downloaded so we hope to receive even more entries.

Awards for All Wales – thanks for support

The monies provided from Awards for All Wales have been put to good use over the past few months. We have been able to buy a laptop for data management, fund more training and volunteer events and buy some display boards that can be used to promote the project at various conferences and events such as the Welsh Ornithological Society/BTO Conference at Llanrwst on 7 November.

Local BTO Reps/Atlas Organisers

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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
Environment Agency Wales
Flintshire County Council
Forestry Commission

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Anne Brenchley
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