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NORTH WALES BREEDING BIRD ATLAS NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2010

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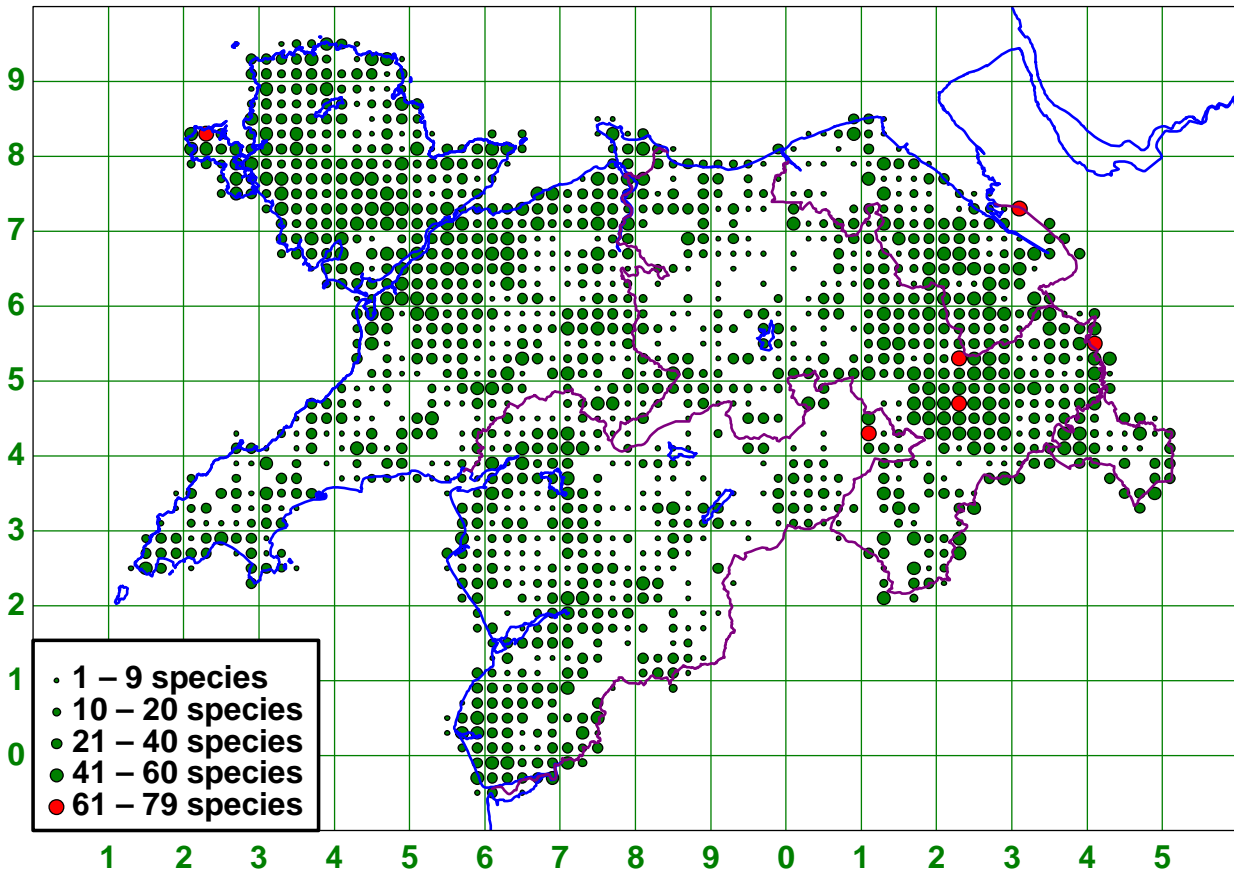
Despite the wintry weather lingering longer than we have been used to in recent years, spring is only just round the corner. We have two more years of breeding season fieldwork to do and about half of North Wales still to survey. The effort gone into producing the results so far has been tremendous and now that most of the required Timed Tetrad Visits (TTVs) have been done for the national Atlas we hope that you can all concentrate on Roving Records and filling in the gaps. We are one of around 40 regional areas around the UK who are doing a local Atlas. Many English counties are doing combined Winter and Breeding Atlases mirroring the national Atlas by recording abundance via TTVs for all tetrads. We knew that we did not have the volunteer workforce to do this here in North Wales and to illustrate the differences, one of the Hampshire coordinators told us that they had on average 4 surveyors per tetrad. Here in North Wales we have 3 tetrads per volunteer and in reality this is more like 9 tetrads per regular volunteer (those contributing over 50 records per person). One advantage of many local Atlases being done between 2007 and 2011 is that all the Local Atlas Coordinators have a regular get-together at the BTO HQ in Thetford. Here we can exchange information and pick up some good ideas. For example we have borrowed some of ideas from the Sussex Atlas newsletter for targeting effort in 2010.

Anne Brenchley and Geoff Gibbs

Update on progress

We are very pleased at the increase in records during Year 2 of the project (an increase of just under 30,000 records). However, the map below shows that there are some key gaps in geographic coverage such as much of Denbighshire including Clocaenog Forest and some of the more remote parts of Snowdonia and the Lleyn Peninsula.

Numbers of species records with a breeding code, 2008-2009



There are some other concerns – the number of records sent in at the 10 km level has continued to increase despite our pleas for observers to record at the tetrad level. We know that many of these 10 km level records have confirmed breeding codes so would be very welcome at the tetrad level. If you know you have entered one of these records, please edit it and resend it to the BTO at tetrad level. Then, both the BTO and our local atlas can use the records!

Table 1 Total numbers of records received

| | 2008 | | 2008-2009 | |
|--------------------------------|--------|-------|-----------|-------|
| | n | % | n | % |
| Records at 10 km level | 1658 | 3.25 | 5409 | 4.85 |
| Tetrads with NO breeding codes | 21,599 | 42.28 | 38,755 | 34.77 |
| Tetrads with breeding codes | 27,832 | 54.48 | 67,307 | 60.38 |
| 'Feral' species | | | 719 | 0.65 |

It is pleasing to see that the proportion of tetrad records with no breeding codes has decreased. We know that many of these records have come from TTVs. It should be possible to provide a Possible breeding code, as a minimum, for most birds encountered so if you are doing TTVs in 2010 please bear this in mind and record breeding evidence wherever possible. If you were able to amend any records that have already been submitted then this would be very much appreciated. The next table indicates just how much we need more observations with breeding codes.

Table 2 Summary of species records at tetrad level

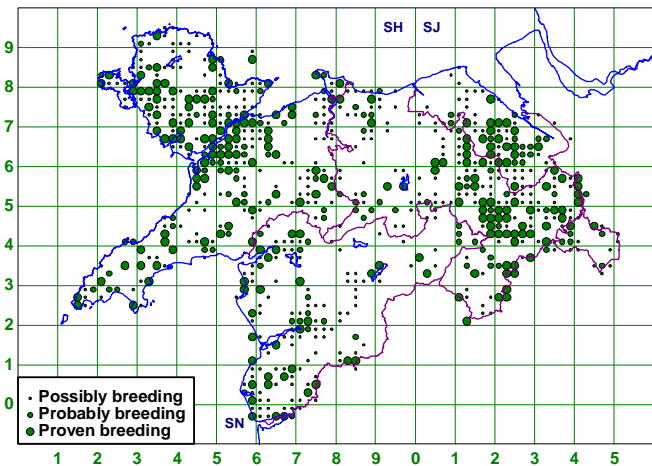
| | 2008-2009 |
|---|-----------|
| Tetrads with 0 species recorded with breeding codes | 410 |
| Tetrads with 1-9 species with breeding codes | 381 |
| Tetrads with 10-20 species with breeding codes | 304 |
| Tetrads with 21-40 species with breeding codes | 526 |
| Tetrads with 41-60 species with breeding codes | 199 |
| Tetrads with 61-79 species with breeding codes | 6 |
| Total of tetrads | 1826 |

We have 519 tetrads that have just one species recorded, at the most. Hence, there are the large areas of white or with very small dots in the map, below. We urgently need observers to visit these tetrads to provide species lists for them, **with breeding codes!** We need to ensure that not all observers rush to just one or two empty tetrads – please liaise with your local coordinator so that he or she knows who is going where!.

Provisional Maps

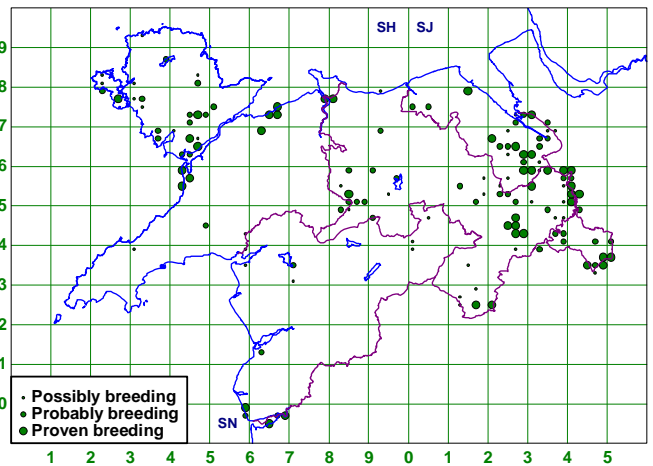
Here are just two examples of species maps at the halfway stage. Song Thrush should be fairly widespread across North Wales and so the map probably reflects the gaps in overall coverage. The picture for Lapwing may be quite realistic but if you can discover breeding birds in other areas then do send in those Roving Records. Maps for most of the protected species (except those where the information is too sensitive) and Biodiversity Action Plan species have been placed on the website so do look at those. Maps for all but the most sensitive species will be available on request (from Ian Spence) after 1 April, so if you want to target any of your favourite birds, you can use these maps to help create more dots on the map.

Song Thrush 2008-2009



Juvenile Song Thrush by Mike Hammett

Lapwing 2008-2009



Lapwing, by Steve Culley

6 Ways to target Atlas fieldwork efficiently this spring: some ideas

1 Target under-recorded tetrads Use the species records map on page 2 to identify tetrads with less than 10 species recorded. Aim to spend a few hours birdwatching in a particular tetrad this spring/summer, spreading your time over two or more visits so that you can record residents, summer visitors at both the beginning of the season and later on when evidence of probable/confirmed breeding may be easier to collect. You do not have to book a tetrad on the online system if you are just doing Roving Records but we would recommend that you tell your local Atlas Coordinator that you have decided to target a particular tetrad because we do maintain local lists for allocated tetrads and this avoids duplication of effort. If you did TTVs in 2008 or 2009 you may wish to revisit your tetrads to pick up further species and gather breeding evidence.

2 Champion your favourite species Choose a particular species and use the preliminary distribution map for that species (available on the website or from Ian Spence) to target areas where the gaps are but where you feel the species might occur. Using the map for a widespread but elusive species such as Bullfinch, or Treecreeper could be a good way to target tetrads where more recording effort is needed: spend long enough in a suitable tetrad and your effort is likely to be rewarded. Some species have short windows: Pied Flycatcher and Wood Warbler arrive in the second half of April, have one brood and depart in June; also continue fieldwork in July because Spotted Flycatcher families can be very conspicuous then and Reed Bunting and Yellowhammer are still singing. Many resident species start breeding in March so you can start recording now. All records with valid breeding codes from March through to October will be used for the Atlas.

3 Focus on a particular habitat You might choose to target some recording along rivers, or along sea cliffs, in local farmland or even in urban town centres. This might be a good option if your identification skills are limited to certain groups of birds or if you are particularly good at identifying a certain group.

4 Be responsible for your local patch Look up the current species list, using the 'Any square summary' option on your online Atlas homepage, for the tetrad covering your village, your local patch, your workplace or any place that you visit regularly and see whether you can add to the list. If you are not sure which tetrad your local patch is in, look under the menu 'taking part' at the top of the Atlas webpages and choose 'Atlas Tools'. Here you can type in any four-figure or six-figure grid reference and obtain the tetrad grid reference. Then simply transfer this grid reference to the 'Any square summary' page to get your list of all the species that have so far been recorded in that tetrad.

5 Be nocturnal Recording of owls is always likely to be incomplete but we can try our best. Go out locally at dusk or after dark and listen out for owls. Listening from your car at a strategic spot is a good way to do this, or even listen from your own open window at home. Even better, you could make an evening of it and make a car journey around several tetrads. Take a friend. You can always visit a local hostelry to celebrate your efforts!

6 Enlist your friends Please give Roving Record forms to your friends, family and neighbours and ask them to record the birds that they see in their local area. There are gaps in coverage even for common birds and please stress the need for records of specific dated observations with breeding codes. You could fill in the tetrad grid reference before giving the form to someone to record birds in their local patch if you think this would help. We can supply tetrad maps for observers so please just ask. When completed the forms should be returned to the local Atlas Coordinator or direct to the BTO.

Roving Records - Find the tetrad – name that tetrad

We know that calculating the correct tetrad for Roving Records can cause some of you a little difficulty. If you are able to work out either 4-fig or 6-fig grid references, these can easily be converted into tetrads by using the useful tool on the Atlas pages of the BTO website (www.bto.org/atlas). If you click on the 'Taking part' section and then 'Atlas tools' you can input your grid reference into the tetrad calculator. If you need a reminder about how to identify the correct grid reference, then again there is a useful guide named 'correct grid reference'. If you possess a hand held Global Positioning System (GPS – available on some mobile phones) then ascertaining grid references is very easy and doesn't rely on your map reading skills. **Please note!** When you do submit Roving Records, you will be asked to provide a location name. You will avoid receiving validation queries from your local Atlas Coordinator if you provide a name that can be found on the Ordnance Survey maps from **within your tetrad**. Giving the name of a nearby village or town will only make the validator suspect that the wrong tetrad letter has been provided.

Our website – your comments needed

Have you looked at our local Atlas website? We are always trying to improve this but your comments would be appreciated. There is a useful section 'How can I help' and here for example is a map of Anglesey showing in more detail those tetrads that have less than 20 species recorded. We hope to have similar maps of the other North Wales BTO regions over the next few weeks. Also if you have any pictures that could help to make the website more attractive then please do get in touch.

Breeding Birds and the Law

At the risk of teaching our 'grandparents to suck eggs' can we just remind everyone that even though we are keen to have records of confirmed breeding where possible, it is illegal under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to 'take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built' so therefore please continue to exercise extreme caution when surveying!

Some of our rarer birds (protected under Schedule 1 of the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act) can be concentrated in protected sites known as Special Protection Areas (SPAs) or Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). If you know that you might be visiting a sensitive area such as open moorland where birds of prey or waders may be breeding do take extra care. Stick to obvious paths and do not stay in any places where birds may appear agitated by your presence. The Berwyn Mountains SPA is one such area where we are keen to restrict access and leave the surveying to a few volunteers.

If you do come across any breeding evidence of our rarer species do not be surprised if your record is queried or you are asked to provide further details to the County Bird

Recorder. You may even be asked to provide a description of the bird. This is just for validation purposes. County Recorders are requested to provide details of rare breeding birds to the national Rare Breeding Birds Panel (RBBP) for annual monitoring purposes.

Volunteer Events

We held two very successful volunteer events this winter, the first at Prenteg (Glaslyn Valley) in the west on 14 November and the second at Alyn Waters Country Park Visitor Centre near Wrexham on 16 January. Around 25 volunteers turned up at each venue and enjoyed a morning of talks, information exchange and an opportunity to meet other enthusiastic Atlas volunteers. Lunch was provided and everyone seemed to agree that the events were very valuable. We will be repeating these events next winter and hope that even more people will come along so that we can show our volunteers how much we appreciate their efforts to make the North Wales Breeding Bird Atlas a successful project.

Publishing Group – Volunteers Needed

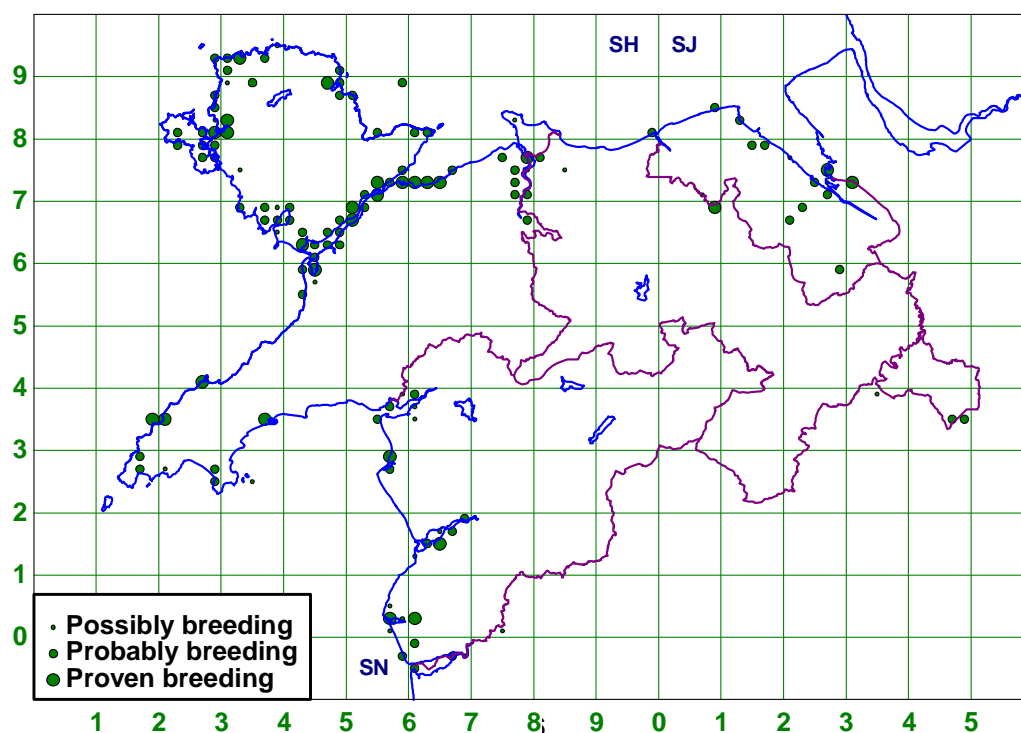
As we're a small group of people, volunteers with either experience of publishing and/or a bit of time and commitment are still needed to assist the Atlas Working Group work towards the publication of the North Wales Breeding Bird Atlas. We need people with editorial skills, proof-reading skills, writing 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.

Guess the Species Competition? Prize to be won

A little bit of knowledge and detective work should enable you all to have a go at identifying the species whose distribution from 2008-2009 data is shown below. £10 Amazon token will be awarded to the person who correctly identifies the mystery species, first drawn from the hat on the closing date. Entries must be submitted by post or email to Anne Brenchley.

Closing date - 1 April 2010. Good luck.

Mystery species 2008-2009



Fundraising – plans for publication

It may seem a long way off but we do aim to publish a book, highlighting the results of all your efforts and doing some initial analysis of breeding bird distribution, no later than 2013. Unlike other parts of the UK, here in North Wales we are not fortunate to have one single bird club that covers the whole of the Atlas area and none of the existing clubs are in the position to underwrite the costs of publication as is the case in most English counties. We probably need to raise £20,000 to print around 1000 copies of a highly attractive and informative book, which we hope the majority of you will buy, provided the cost can be kept to something reasonable.

We have begun to receive some corporate species sponsorship. Since the autumn newsletter we have received monies from the Welsh Raptor Study Group (NE Wales) to sponsor Hen Harrier, North East Wales Wildlife to sponsor Bullfinch, First Hydro to sponsor Chough, Magnox North to sponsor Little Ringed Plover and the Snowdonia National Park Authority to sponsor Twite. We have further promises of sponsorship for Sandwich Tern, Osprey and Tree Sparrow. We will continue to pursue this means of funding over the next few months. We are actively looking at appropriate form of grant-aid and later in the year be holding some fundraising events and open out species sponsorship to individuals.

North Wales Bird Race 22/23 May 2010

The first of our fund-raising projects for 2010 will be a Bird Race. This is your chance to have a bit of fun, do some targeted atlasing and help us raise funds. To give you that little incentive to take part, we are offering some small prizes for a range of categories. The bird race will be run according to the usual rules and exact details are to found attached to this newsletter. Incidentally **22 May is International Day of Biodiversity** so all the more reason to do something for conservation on that day. It is expected that all the records received that day are entered as Roving Records on the Atlas website.

For Sale – 2-CD set of British Bird sounds

For those of you that would like to improve your knowledge of bird sounds and don't already have access to any good quality CDs, Geoff Gibbs has a set for sale at the amazing price of £15. It is first come, first served so please get in touch with Geoff Gibbs if you are interested in purchasing this bargain.

Awards for All Wales – thanks for support

Our funding from Awards for All Wales has now come to an end and we are seeking further grants to ensure that we can operate successfully until the fieldwork is complete in 2011. These monies have helped us in a variety of ways and we are pleased to report that we were able to put on 9 training courses (75 attendees) and 2 volunteer 'thank-you' events (50 attendees) over the past year.

Photographs wanted!

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! We do need habitat shots as well as pictures of birds and of course, we do expect that all photographs are taken in North Wales.

Atlas Organisers – contact details

North Wales Breeding Bird Atlas Working Group

Anne Brenchley - Chair and Coordinator for North East Wales

Geoff Gibbs – Coordinator for North West Wales

Peter Stuttard – produces notes from the meetings and manages the Project Plan

Kelvin Jones – Website Manager

Andrew Dale – Partner Relationship Coordinator

Ian Spence – Data Manager

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BTO Regional Representatives bordering North Wales:

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Jane Kelsall, Montgomeryshire

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Moira Convery, Cardiganshire

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County Bird Recorders

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Email records to rhion678pritchard@btinternet.com

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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

Gwynedd County Council

National Trust

North Wales Wildlife Trust

RSPB

Snowdonia National Park

Thelma Sykes for designing our logo

Wrexham Borough Council

The maps were produced using DMAP by Dr Alan J Morton

Thanks to Jane Hemming for her help and to the Countryside Council for Wales for printing this newsletter.

Anne Brenchley
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