

Avon News



The newsletter for BTO members in Avon

Autumn 2016

Welcome to the Avon Newsletter and may I thank you for your continued support in our work over the year, without your committed support the trust could not manage to continue its important work.

Breeding Bird Survey in Avon 2016 (a brief summary)

The Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) is the main scheme for monitoring the population changes of the UK's common and widespread breeding birds and was first set up by the BTO in 1994. Within the BTO's Avon Region (which includes much of the Western Mendips and the area around Cheddar) we also have a 'Local' BBS scheme set up on similar principles to the BTO's National scheme which enables us to get more comprehensive data for our local area. Together the National and Local schemes now cover about 14% of the BTO Avon Region.

In 2016 a total of 223 squares were surveyed with 73708 birds counted. This is the highest number of squares that we have covered, the previous best being 216 in 2006 while the total birds recorded is the best since the 77832 of 2006 and the 77160 of 2007.

The main purpose of BBS is to assess changes from year to year, particularly for the more widely recorded birds. There seems to have been some improvement this year for a number of species after a succession of rather disappointing seasons, with for example Skylark recording an increase of 8% and Yellowhammer 17%. However, Greenfinch which in 2006 was the 9th most commonly recorded bird in the Survey in Avon but now ranks 30th, recorded a further decline of 22%. While one year change figures must be treated with caution a difference of over 5% does indicate a genuine change.

BBS in 2017

We have a selection of National BBS squares that are unallocated for 2017. The Survey is based on walking two transects (lines) across a one kilometre grid square twice during the breeding season. If you are interested in participating in the BBS in 2017 please contact Dave at dave.stoddard@tiscali.co.uk (tel. 0117 9246968). The commitment is just two early morning visits to our square in April-June (each taking about one and a half to two hours) plus an extra visit in your first year to check the route. The skill level is simply to be able to recognise the common breeding birds by sight and sound. Your participation will be welcome and valuable.

Also please do not forget our local Avon BBS scheme. You can pick your own square whether it is around your home or any area where you enjoy birding as long as it is not already being surveyed. Any habitat is suitable including urban/suburban and in fact suburban squares often produce very impressive counts. The scheme operates on the same basis as the National scheme but is a little simpler as there is no requirement to record habitat or distance.

A local training day is to be arranged as previous years, the date has yet to be finalised , but if are interested contact Dave whose address is below.

If you have any queries about the Breeding Bird Survey, whether the National BTO scheme or the local Avon scheme please don't hesitate to contact Dave at dave.stoddard@tiscali.co.uk (tel. 0117 9246968).

AVON WINTER BIRDS SURVEY

This new Survey (AWBS) aims to provide a better understanding of the overwintering bird populations of the Avon BTO Region (the old County of Avon plus the western Mendips and the area around Cheddar) and to look at the changing fortunes of the commoner species. We have attracted over sixty volunteers for the first year of the Survey and are hopeful that we will survey a hundred squares - an excellent start,

The Survey is similar in methodology to the Breeding Bird Survey and is based on walking two transects (lines) across a one kilometre grid square, once during November/December and once during January/February. If you are interested in participating in AWBS please contact Dave at dave.stoddard@tiscali.co.uk (tel. 0117 9246968).

Chew Valley Ringing Station

Chew Valley Ringing Station (CVRS) sits close to the southern shore of Chew Valley Lake, not too far from Herriotts Bridge. 2016 marks the 53rd year of bird ringing at the lake, and at the time of writing, a little under 3900 birds have been ringed by CVRS this year. Reed Warbler make up over a quarter of this total, with a continued and extensive programme of pulli (birds that have yet to leave the nest) ringing for this species contributing 401 birds. Three of these youngsters have so far been recaptured away from Chew. Each ringed in June and recaptured in August, one on the East Sussex coast, one on the Dorset coast, and the third at a gravel pit near Northampton.

Attempts to capture and ring ducks sometimes brings results, with Mallard and Teal being the species most likely, but never in large numbers. So perhaps the surprise ringing recovery of 2016 was that of a Teal ringed in December 2015 as a female that had hatched that year, and hunted, presumed shot, near Bayeux, northern France in October.

Each summer we organise a Canada Goose round-up. Chew Valley Lake offers relative safety for the geese when they become flightless during their post-breeding moult. A moulting flock can be herded to the shore using small boats, and kept in a pen whilst waiting to be ringed. 153 Canada Geese and 1 Greylag were ringed this year. Ringing data shows a movement between Chew, North Somerset, Somerset and Devon.

Bird ringing at CVRS produces many stories of the birds that spend all or part of their lives at Chew Valley Lake, as well as feeding data to the BTO that contributes to establishing national and regional trends in bird populations and productivity.

More information on CVRS can be found at www.chewvalleyringingstation.co.uk with regular tweets @CVRSNews. Observed or found ringed birds can be reported via the BTO website.

House Martins

Thanks to all the volunteers that have taken part in the Nest Study over the last two years.

In the 2015 survey we had 34 volunteers who contributed records 46 colonies and in 2016 so far 22 volunteers have recorded 109 active nests.

Ian Woodward will be contacting all volunteers in the next couple of weeks, to thank them and encourage them to submit outstanding information.

ACTION: We will be running the Nest Survey again in 2017. It was a cold spring, and House Martins were late returning to nest sites in many areas. We're keen to continue for another year to increase the sample size.

If you have nesting House Martins or know of any nesting birds, **PLEASE** go to the BTO website and register for this survey, full instructions and tutorial video is there to help you.

Heronries

The 2015 data for Heronries has now been processed and will feed into the next Bird Trends report, due to be published in November. The 2015 UK estimate is 11,124 apparently occupied nests.

15th April 2016: 28 nests, at least 22 occupied with loafing adults nearby.

If you know of any other Heronries and could help please let me know.

Peregrines

I just pulled out the Peregrine returns we had for Avon from the 2014 survey. We had records for 15 occupied sites, 14 of which were occupied by a pair and 1 by a single bird. Breeding outcomes for the 14 pairs are 6 successful, 5 unsuccessful, and 3 unknown. The successful pairs fledged a minimum of 15 chicks.

My thanks to all who contributed.

Wetland Bird Survey: Inland Water Sites

Coverage was again excellent during the 2015/16 sites and thanks to our hard working volunteers all major sites were counted in each month. On a sad note, Keith Fox was forced by ill health to retire as a counter after many years of sterling effort; I am grateful to Sean Davies for stepping so readily in at Barrow Gurney. Coverage of some of the smaller sites tends to be erratic, which is a shame since counts of even small pools is important in monitoring dispersed species such as mallard and moorhen. Anyone taking on what may appear to be an unpromising site can make a contribution

without committing hours of their time. I am therefore pleased that counts at Newton St Loe and Henleaze Swimming Lake have been resurrected; on a recce of the latter we were told by an angler that common sandpiper regularly winters here, confirmation of this would be a nice outcome since it remains a scarce bird outside the passage periods. I remain keen to see better coverage of the non-tidal stretches of the River Avon (or other rivers) and it would also be nice to receive counts from Bristol Zoo, a major site for moorhen.

At the other end of the scale, our two major sites continue to be interesting. At Blagdon the team counted 942 Wigeon, 433 Gadwall and 690 Shoveler in October. The Shoveler count makes me grind my teeth ever so slightly, as I'd rather they were at Chew Valley Lake, my WeBS site. However, over 3,000 each of Coot and Teal and over 2,500 Tufted duck have kept me busy enough and have contributed to the best numbers here since 2010. Pochard has been the focus of much concern recently as population virtually throughout north-western Europe are in steep decline. It is interesting in this context that numbers at our lakes, and Cheddar, have remained high.

I'd like to thank everyone who has contributed to WeBS over the last year: here's to another twelve months of happy counting!

For further information on WeBS go to www.bto.org

Rupert Higgins

Garden BirdWatch

Many birdwatchers and householders already keep simple records of the birds that they see using their gardens throughout the year. The collection of such information is incredibly useful and, if carried out in a systematic manner, these weekly observations of birds (or indeed other garden wildlife) can prove very valuable for researchers.

BTO Garden BirdWatch enables you to collect this information in a standardised way alongside similar information from many thousands of other garden birdwatchers. In effect, you are a 'citizen scientist' working in partnership with BTO researchers to answer important questions about how, why and when birds use gardens and the resources they contain.

Garden BirdWatch is funded through the annual subscription paid by its participants and we are extremely grateful for the support that they provided. If you'd like to join Garden BirdWatch then you can do this online at gbw@bto.org

Dates for your Diary 2017

Chew Valley Bird Fair

Friday April 22nd and April 23rd 2017

Held near to the Chew Valley tea shop

BTO will be having a stand there so come along and say hello.

Bristol Festival of Nature 2017

June 17th and 18th 2017

BTO will be attending 2017 festival again in Bristol and also the event in Bath. Help will be needed at these events so if you can come along and support us please let me know.

Bird ID Training Course

Friday May 5th 2017

RSPB Nagshead , Parkend, Forest of Dean.

Leader Matt Collis

Bird ID & Wetland Bird Survey

Tuesday August 8th 2017

Slimbridge WWT

Led by Ed.Drewitt

For further information on these courses contact anne.cotton@bto.org



Gordon Youdale
BTO Regional Rep. (Avon)