



BTO – AVON

December 2017

Welcome to the Autumn 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.

Excellent news:

There will be a BTO South-west Conference on Sunday 18th March 2018. This is a joint effort between Avon, Gloucestershire, Somerset and Wiltshire BTO regions. There's an exciting line-up of speakers from the regions and from BTO. You can browse the range of supplier stalls and there will be plenty of time to chat. Please book your place, come along, bring your friends and take part in this fascinating day. Book online at www.bto.org/news-events/events or phone 01842 750 050. Full details on the poster at the end of this newsletter.

Breeding Bird Survey

The Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) is the main scheme for monitoring the population changes of the UK's common breeding birds and the results are used widely to set priorities and inform conservation action.

With almost all the data now received for the 2017 season the Avon BTO Region has had another record breaking year. A total of 152 National BBS squares was surveyed (compared to 140 in 2016) and in addition another 84 squares were surveyed for the local Avon BBS. That means that taking the National and Local schemes together we have covered some 14% of the Avon BTO Region. Of the 236 squares covered, 191 were also surveyed in 2016 and that will enable us to calculate trends for many of our local breeding species by comparing results for squares which were surveyed by the same observer in both seasons. A big thank you to all the observers who have made the time to survey a square and submit their results.

The next season in 2018 will be the 25th anniversary of this important Survey and we will make a big effort to maintain and, I hope to improve our coverage.

To take part in BBS you do not have to be a great ornithological expert to help – you just need the ability to identify common birds by sight and sound – if you can recognise the songs and calls of the likes of Wren, Robin, Dunnock, Blackcap then you will probably be fine. In the case of the National scheme the squares to be surveyed are randomly selected by the BTO and a few squares are still available. There are two early morning visits per season plus an extra visit in the first year to check the route and record habitat. Most visits will be completed in two to two and a half hours. If you are interested in taking part in the Survey, or have any queries about BBS, then please contact the Avon Regional Organiser, Dave (dave.stoddard@tiscali.co.uk tel 01179246968) who will be pleased to help.

Please also do not forget the local Avon BBS scheme. You can pick your own square whether it is around your home or any area where you enjoy birding. The scheme operates on the same basis as the National scheme, and makes a valuable contribution to our knowledge of the birds of the Region, but is a little simpler as there is no requirement to record habitat or distance. Please just contact Dave (details above) to check that your proposed square doesn't duplicate one already being surveyed.

AVON WINTER BIRDS SURVEY

The winter of 2016 - 2017 was the first season of the new Avon Winter Birds Survey (AWBS). The BTO's Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), with additional local coverage, has been well established in the Avon BTO Region since 1994. This has also provided valuable data on the changing fortunes of the common breeding birds of our area. However, it was clear that we did not have the same level of knowledge of our overwintering bird populations. There is at present no National winter survey equivalent to BBS and this new Survey is intended to fill that gap in the Avon Region.

In due course as data is built up it is hoped that we will be able to monitor changes in the populations of our common winter birds with a reasonable degree of confidence as we are able to do for our breeding birds with BBS.

The first season was very successful with a total of 113 squares surveyed by 58 observers. A total of 51,368 birds of 91 species were recorded at the rate of 171 birds per hour. In addition to total numbers a record was also made of distinct flocks (of 50 or more individuals) of individual species. 2016-17 was a mild winter and there were no obvious influxes recorded in the Survey - it will be interesting to see what changes occur in future years. If you would like a copy of the Report on the first season of AWBS again, please contact Dave (contact details below).

The Survey is simple and straightforward (the emphasis is on our commoner species). The survey consists of walking two one-kilometre transects across a grid square with the first visit being in November-December and the second visit about a month or so later and in January-February. All birds seen or heard are counted - most visits will take around two hours.

While most of the squares that have been surveyed so far are existing BBS squares the Survey is open to anyone who is interested and can identify our commoner wintering species. If you have not taken part in an organised Survey before this may be a very good introduction. Squares can be selected by the observer subject to them not already being allocated and all habitats are of interest including suburban/urban squares. If you are interested in helping or have any queries about the Survey, please contact Dave (dave.stoddard@tiscali.co.uk tel 01179246968).

Planning for the 2017-18 season is now well under way and at the time of writing 73 observers had signed up for a total of 138 squares.

Chew Valley Ringing Station for 2017 - a brief report

Ringing and projects at CVRS followed in what has now become a regular pattern. From January, February and into March we mainly concentrated of catching birds at two feeding stations, operating several duck traps and training.

In the spring the focus turned to pulli ringing with 219 nest records of 30 species being sent to the BTO. These were mostly open nests including 80 Reed Warblers.

From May through to August we ran our two Constant Effort Sites, managing to fit in all 12 visits.

The Canada Goose roundup this year was on July 4th. Fortunately, it was a lovely fine, sunny day although the geese were rather scattered around the lake and the catch was lower than usual (52 ringed and 18 retraps).

Our other annual event, the ringing course, ran from Thursday 27th – Sunday 30th July. Overall 713 birds of 28 species were processed including 9 Water Rail and 314 Reed Warblers. A hirundine roost on the first night provided 73 Swallows and 2 Sand Martins.

During the summer we were able to help two university students. One by providing a long run of CVRS data for analysis. The second with collecting faecal samples from warblers to be used for an analysis of their diet.

On October 1st we began a wintering Chiffchaff project which involves collecting feathers for mitochondrial DNA analysis (MtDNA) by Aberdeen University. The aim is to ascertain the proportion of the three-subspecies occurring at CVL.

Our winter and autumn workdays have concentrated on habitat management and painting the ringing station.

Past Surveys

Peregrine and Winter Thrushes Surveys Papers presenting the results from these surveys have been submitted to Bird Study. Hopefully they will be available to read soon.

House Martins The data from the 2015 House Martin survey has been analysed and is in the process of being written up as a paper. The data from the 2016 & 2017 Nest Study is being prepared for analysis in the New Year.

Heronries Census The 90th anniversary of the Census is in 2018 so the Census will be publicised more widely. There will also be a full survey of all recently occupied sites for the first time since 2003. Let's make sure we get every Heronry in Avon counted in 2018. For those of you who have felt challenged by the online system; there will be some amendments ahead of next year's survey. If you haven't yet entered online or sent in your 2017 Heronries date, please do so now; thank you!

Project Owl It's fair to say that we don't know enough about our owls! However, with some funding and great surveys, that could be due to change. Shortly you'll receive an appeal leaflet for Project Owl; or you will see details in one of the e-newsletters. Information will be up on the BTO website shortly too. There are six main objectives, but what can be achieved over the next couple of years depends very much on the success of the appeal.

Garden BirdWatch (GBW)

Garden BirdWatch monitors the changing fortunes of birds and other garden wildlife through its network of 'citizen scientists'. Observations collected by BTO Garden Birdwatchers are analysed by BTO researchers and published in leading journals. BTO Garden Birdwatchers have charted the decline of the House Sparrow, the rise of the Woodpigeon, have discovered that urban birds get up later than their rural counterparts and have alerted conservationists to the impact of an emerging disease in Greenfinches.

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.

Understand and connect with your garden's rhythms and annual cycles, and contribute your sightings to our ongoing research on garden wildlife.

The project is funded through an annual subscription of £17.

Join today and receive a free copy of the acclaimed 220-page '[Garden Birds and other wildlife](#)' (RRP £14.99), which will help you identify and understand your garden visitors.

You'll also receive [Bird Table](#) magazine four times a year, and get expert advice from the BTO to help you identify, understand and look after the wildlife in your garden.

Upcoming Training Events

We will be holding a BBS training session in Westbury-on-Trym probably in late March. Practical fieldwork will be followed by coffee and discussion. Please contact Dave Stoddard (dave.stoddard@tiscali.co.uk tel 01179246968). if you are interested. You are welcome to attend even if you have not yet decided to take on a square but simply want to know more about what is involved.

Wed 04th Apr 2018

Bird ID: Bird identification by sight and sound (1-day, Slimbridge WWT)

Slimbridge Wetland Centre

Learn to identify ducks, waders and early migrants at this flagship WWT reserve

Presented By:

Ed Drewitt

This course will cost £60 and includes all teaching and materials, as well as tea and coffee. Please bring a packed lunch. **Booking contact details:** anne.cotton@bto.org 01786 466 570

BTO South-west conference

Focusing on the birdlife of Avon, Gloucestershire, Somerset & Wiltshire

Sunday 18th March 2018, 09:30 – 17:00, Wiltshire Music Centre, Bradford-on-Avon, BA15 1DZ

Tickets £20.00 per person, including refreshments and a buffet lunch.

Book online at www.bto.org/news-events/events, phone 01842 750050, or ask your local bird club for a form.

Chair **Stephen Moss**, naturalist, writer, TV producer and broadcaster

Kate Risely (BTO) - *Garden bird feeding; why do we do it and what impact does it have?*

Kate leads the BTO's garden ecology team. The Garden Birdwatch scheme has enabled researchers to find out more about some of our common birds than might ever have been imagined.

Damon Bridge & Alison Morgan (Great Crane Project leader and ringer)
Cranes and Herons on the Somerset Levels

A summary of current progress of the GCP, and the new colonising species on the Somerset Levels and Moors.

Bob Medland - *The ringing year at Chew Valley Ringing Station*

A summary of a typical year's activities at the ringing station which has been operating for 50+ years.





Paul Castle - *Birds of Salisbury Plain*

Peter Rock - *Oh No! Urban Gulls!*

The number of their colonies has more than doubled since 2000, but urban gulls are not popular and are not well studied – except by Peter.

monitor and conserve them.

Paul will illustrate the special birds of this ancient landscape and the projects that

Edward Mayer - *Swift Conservation*

Edward runs “Swift Conservation”, a web-based advice service, helping to save Swifts and their habitats.



Ian Henderson (BTO) - *Migration and the Whinchats of Salisbury Plain*

Ian is a senior research ecologist at BTO. This local Whinchat population has been well studied using traditional and modern tracking methods. What do we know about this migrant?

Gavin Siriwardena (BTO)

Farmland birds: problem solved after 15 years of agri-environment?

Gavin leads the BTO’s land-use research team. Farmland birds have suffered steep declines, which have been well-documented by the BTO’s programme of regular bird surveying. What have we learned?

Enjoy your Winter birding and the Christmas season; there’s such a lot out there to enjoy!



Regards

Gordon Youdale

BTO Regional Rep. (Avon)