

AVON BTO REGION



News

**The newsletter for BTO members and volunteers
in The Avon Region**

February 2020

Welcome to the BTO Avon Newsletter. This newsletter is aimed at providing local communication between the BTO and its members and volunteers in our county covering a variety of topics including gaps in surveys, what's happening nationally as well as locally .

Gordon Youdale :- Regional Representative BTO Avon

Membership.

BTO Membership in Avon currently stands at 318 members with the total number of members and non members making up the BTO Avon community standing at 557. Hopefully 2020 will see an increase in membership and volunteers as we try to raise the profile of the BTO in the county. Good communication from BTO nationally but most importantly BTO Avon locally is essential to increase membership as we begin to try to encourage a few more people to join. Those people that are already members will know that as part of their subscription they receive BTO News four times a year covering a variety of BTO topics and an Annual Review.

There is also a 15% reduction in the cost of a BTO Training Course to improve your identification, fieldcraft and survey skills and enrich your birdwatching. Sounds like several good reasons to join .

More information can be found here - www.bto.org/how-you-can-help/join-bto

Surveys and monitoring

[Participating in surveys](#) is both rewarding and educational. If you haven't been involved before, it will give you a different perspective on birding and help you develop new skills, such as counting individual birds and using maps to plot their locations. At the same time, you will be helping to gather valuable data to help us understand how our birds are faring and what can be done to help them. Taking part in a survey can seem daunting at first but it soon becomes second nature.

The following provides a summary of the surveys and monitoring run by the BTO that you can be involved with:

Winter Bird Survey 2018- 2019

Last winter we ran the Avon Winter Bird Survey alongside the BTO's English Winter Bird Survey (EWBS) which had only been finally confirmed a month before the Avon Survey was due to commence. As funding from Natural England was not available until late in the day this had the knock on effect of delaying the development of the computer system for those squares that were linked into EWBS. I appreciate that this did all cause some confusion and frustration. However, you rose magnificently to the occasion and we covered an excellent 148 squares, compared to 141 the previous winter, and recorded 99,705 birds on a total of 442 visits.

The BTO is extremely grateful for your contributions to EWBS. In the long term BTO have an ambition to run an annual Winter Survey similar to BBS but no funding is available for such a project at present. In the meantime we will continue the Avon Winter Bird Survey and your data is making a major contribution to our knowledge of our local winter bird populations

A total of 148 squares were surveyed compared to 141 squares in 2017-18. The area surveyed represents approximately 9.2% of the Region. Surveyed squares are spread reasonably evenly across the Region, but further coverage particularly in the Somerset section would be welcome. A total of 99,705 birds of 101 species were recorded in the 148 squares at the rate of 164 birds per hour. As noted above it was possible to make up to four visits in the Survey and many observers took advantage of this with an average of three visits per square. Visits were well spread throughout the period but with 57% in the core January-February period

Percentage changes in species recorded in AWBS in the BTO Avon Region in the winter of 2018-19 (December to February) compared to the winter of 2017-18 (November to February)

Species	% Change 17/18 - 18/19	Species	% Change 17/18 - 18/19
Mallard	37%	Long-tailed Tit	-5%
Pheasant	-28%	Goldcrest	-26%
Black-headed Gull	24%	Wren	28%
Common Gull	120%	Starling	44%
Herring Gull	37%	Blackbird	-10%
Feral Pigeon	-11%	Fieldfare	-39%
Wood Pigeon	-23%	Redwing	0%
Magpie	27%	Robin	15%
Jackdaw	10%	House Sparrow	14%
Rook	-33%	Dunnock	10%
Carrion Crow	1%	Chaffinch	4%
Blue Tit	34%	Linnet	18%
Great Tit	38%	Goldfinch	-9%

Species recorded in the Survey ranked by abundance

The table below lists the 20 commonest species recorded in the Survey during the period December to February, ranked in order of abundance, and their comparable positions in AWBS 2017-18, BBS in 2018 and in the March section of the Survey.

Winter 18-19 Rank (Dec-Feb)	Species	Winter Survey Total Count (Dec-Feb)	AWBS 17-18 Rank	2018 BBS Rank	March 2019 Rank	March 2019 Count
1	Starling	12405	2	12	19	255
2	Woodpigeon	9201	1	1	1	2475
3	Jackdaw	6947	3	2	2	1935
4	Carrion Crow	4354	6	4	3	1295
5	Black-headed Gull	4169	7	-	-	37
6	Redwing	4157	4	-	15	327
7	Blue Tit	3366	9	9	6	719
8	House Sparrow	3096	12	5	4	884
9	Robin	2680	10	7	5	767
10	Blackbird	2600	8	3	9	572
11	Great Tit	2205	17	11	8	582
12	Fieldfare	2145	5	-	-	26
13	Herring Gull	2059	14	Joint 16	12	509
14	Rook	1963	11	10	11	548

15	Magpie	1946	16	14	13	494
16	Chaffinch	1829	15	15	14	373
17	Goldfinch	1764	13	8	7	600
18	Lapwing	1695	-	-	-	-
19	Golden Plover	1393	-	-	-	-
20	Feral Pigeon	1363	18	19	20	236
-	Mallard	972	19	-	-	142
-	Long-tailed Tit	904	20	-	-	99
-	Wren	881	-	6	10	557
-	Duncock	837	-	18	17	272
-	Lesser Black-backed Gull	454	-	13	16	289
-	Pheasant	450	-	-	18	271
-	Chiffchaff	18	-	20	-	181
-	Swallow	-	-	Joint 16	-	9

Comparison of results for squares surveyed by both AWBS and BBS

Species	Best Count in AWBS 2018-2019 (Dec-Feb)	Best Count in BBS 2018	Difference AWBS Compared to BBS 2018
Mallard	483	310	+56%
Pheasant	315	430	-27%
Herring Gull	1266	442	+186%
Lesser Black-back Gull	273	743	-63%
Feral Pigeon	418	365	+15%
Woodpigeon	4596	3258	+41%
Collared Dove	218	295	-26%

Magpie	814	606	+34%
Jackdaw	3531	2198	+61%
Rook	1354	1332	+2%
Carrion Crow	2138	2039	+5%
Blue Tit	1601	1061	+51%
Great Tit	1089	879	+24%
Skylark	265	346	-23%
Long-tailed Tit	575	188	+206%
Wren	487	1375	-65%
Starling	7981	709	+1026%
Blackbird	1341	1847	-27%
Song Thrush	219	335	-35%
Robin	1273	1098	+16%
House Sparrow	1364	1430	-5%
Duncock	489	534	-8%
Chaffinch	1193	686	+74%
Linnet	612	315	+94%
Goldfinch	1038	1055	-2%
Yellowhammer	117	158	-26%

As in 2017-18 Collared Dove, a resident and apparently sedentary species shows a large reduction (26%) compared to the Avon BBS counts. This is a relatively conspicuous species but one which has declined in Avon BBS by some 27% over the ten years to 2018. Again as in the previous winter the resident and sedentary Blue Tit, Great Tit and Long-tailed Tit were recorded in significantly higher numbers in the winter which would imply another successful breeding season. Starling shows the greatest increase over Avon BBS with ten times as many recorded as in BBS. While the local breeding population has seen a very significant decline of 56% in the ten years to 2018 the migrant winter population still seems to be healthy and the AWBS figures show a 44% increase over 2017-18. Both Chaffinch (74%) and Linnet (94%) both show very significant increases over BBS and in the case of Chaffinch this will be related to the influx of winter migrants. The cause of the increase in the more sedentary Linnet is less clear but this is a species that can be

encountered in flocks on suitable arable land and indeed there were three records of flocks of over 100 individuals, all noted in December 2018.

If anyone would like a copy of the full survey report or would like to get involved please contact David Stoddard or myself.

BREEDING BIRD SURVEY 2020

Request for Volunteers Knowing to what extent bird populations are increasing or decreasing is fundamental to bird conservation. The Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) is a national scheme organised by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and is the main scheme for monitoring the population changes of the UK's common and widespread breeding birds. In 2019 we surveyed 232 squares in the Region. The Survey consists of two visits in the breeding season to a one kilometre square counting all birds seen or heard. Comparing these annual bird counts enables us to monitor population changes locally and in the case of the National BTO squares, also contribute to the national picture. 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. The time commitment is very limited - three mornings in the first year (one to check the route/habitat) and then two in subsequent years. Visits normally take between one and a half and two hours. Returns can be made online

. A Training session or sessions will also be held on **Sunday 28th March 2020** meeting outside Westbury-on-Trym, Library, Bristol for anyone taking on a square or just interested in what the Survey involves. [Please let Dave know if you are interested in attending.](#)

We have some National squares available in the following areas :- [Bath and North East Somerset](#) , [North Somerset](#) , [City of Bristol](#) , [South Gloucestershire](#) , and [Somerset \(but in Avon BTO region\)](#)

Please contact Dave Stoddard (dave.stoddard@tiscali.co.uk Tel 0117 9246968) if you would like to take on a square in any of these areas.

Many thanks for your help which has helped to make the Survey the success that it is today. The National BBS is a vital conservation tool, measuring the changes in our breeding bird populations, particularly the commoner birds of town and countryside. We are also able to gain a much better understanding of our own local bird populations, producing trends for 36 species in Avon in 2018.

Local “Avon” Breeding Bird Survey

As mentioned above we also use the basic BBS methodology to survey additional squares in the Avon Region in order to get a more complete picture of our local bird populations. Unlike the BTO's National Scheme you may choose any square of your choice though please check with me to avoid duplication. You might like to consider doing the kilometre square around your home – additional urban/suburban squares would provide particularly valuable additional data as the habitat is rather under-recorded though bird numbers are often quite high. Squares in Bristol would be particularly appreciated.

For further information contact Dave Stoddard

AVON ROOKERY SURVEY 2020

Rooks in Avon have been subject to significant declines in the past twenty years but as a colonial species it is not well covered by the methodology of the Breeding Bird Survey. Since 1975 a Rookery survey has been conducted in the Avon region every five years and this was last undertaken in 2015. For many years this was organised by the late Richard Bland. This year we will once again attempt to locate all active rookeries in the region in order to help us better understand the status of this species in Avon. If you are interested in helping with this Survey please contact Dave Stoddard (dave.stoddard@tiscali.co.uk Tel 0117 9246968).

The following 10km squares are still available –

- ST36 Weston-super -Mare up to Clevedon and west of Kingston Seymour/Puxton.
- ST65 - S of Timsbury - Paulton, Radstock and Midsomer Norton (BaNES portion only - c. 57 Sq km)
- ST69 - Area of South Glos north of Thornbury - South Glos area only.
- ST76 - Bath area south from Charmy Down to share coverage with another observer.

WeBS (Wetland Bird Survey)



National waterbird monitoring in the UK began 70 years ago with National Wildfowl Counts in 1947. Today, thousands of WeBS counters contribute waterbird counts to the scheme each month. WeBS covers a variety of habitats, from important estuarine areas to very small lakes. Many people think that BTO only want counts from the large lakes and reservoirs, but this is not the case. BTO are just as interested and keen to receive counts from small lakes and ponds, it all contributes to a national picture. We have a few sites within Avon that we would like to cover which are;-

Butlers Close to Bee's Tea room St.Annes : Bristol ST629723

Backwell Lake: Nailsea ST476694

Horton Pool : Chipping Sodbury ST760836

Kennet and Avon canal - Dundas Aqueduct to Governor Bridge : Bath , ST786649

River Avon – Conham River Park to Hanham Lock near Keynsham , ST636705

St.Georges Park Lake : Bristol ST621738

Victoria Park – Bath , ST739653

Monkswood Reservoir -south of Marshfield , ST5777111

If you would like to volunteer to take part in the WeBS survey please contact www.bto.org/websvacant-sites

Ringling



Chew Valley Ringling Station.

In November we held the first ringling theory course - an idea that arose out of our main summer courses in which various talks and practical sessions are given on two of the afternoons. These are always well received and it was suggested that we could offer a theory course to 'local' ringlingers as a trial, rather than advertise it nationally. The day was split into 6 x 1 hour sessions including a 10 minute break, allowing for drinks and the tutors to get ready for the next talk. The feedback forms from the participants were very positive and we hope to provide another one in the future.

Summary ringling recoveries for 2019

Some fairly local recoveries of Kestrel and Magpie as road casualties and a bit further away a Reed Bunting from 2018 was retrapped at Llangorse Lake. Singleton Sedge Warblers to Haxton Down, Wiltshire and from Icklesham. Reed Warblers to Corsham, Portland Bill and Titchfield Haven with a control from Gironde France and a late report of Z677699 (ringed 2016) to Beja, Portugal (2017). However, by far the most noteworthy sightings, with rings being read in the field, of Black-headed Gulls from Finland (2), Norway (1) and Poland (4) and one of ours EZ04570 from 10/11/2016 being seen twice in Copenhagen, Denmark, all clearly showing the Scandinavian origin of our wintering BhGs. Also a Mediterranean Gull ringed as a nestling in Saxony, Germany this year and noted at CVL on 29th July.

We now have 275,000 records on the CVRS database going back until 1976. Nearly 100,000 are of retraps which can be the most interesting for analysis.

Mike Bailey

Garden BirdWatch



Help track the changing fortunes of our garden birds alongside 12,000 other Garden BirdWatchers

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 (and 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 for further information go to www.bto.org

We had a very successful event at last years Festival of Nature in Bristol linked to BBC Springwatch Garden Bird Surveys which was well attended and many thanks to those of you that came along and met our BTO team there.

Explore the Garden BirdWatch results at www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/gbw/results or contact GWB Ambassador , Jane Cumming at kittiwake@yahoo.co.uk

Heronries Census



We did well in 2018 with good coverage of most sites, and were able to include Little Egret, Great White Egret, Cattle Egret and Cormorant in our data returns; excellent!

There are two sites that need coverage (these are long-term sites where the surveyor is no longer able to continue): 1 East Wood, Brislington and The Folly, Pill, Ham Green

Hérons are likely to have an early start this year, so please contact me if you're able to survey either of these sites. Work continues on checking "ancient" sites to see if they are still in existence. These currently have volunteers checking, but if more become available I'll be in touch with those who lives nearby.

Regional Organiser Eve Tigwell, 01373 451630; eve.tigwell@zen.co.uk

The Summary Report for the 2019 Heronries Census was published last week (<https://www.bto.org/sites/default/files/heronries-census-summary-2019.pdf>)

Breeding Waders of Wet Meadows (Avon)



The purpose of this survey is to assess the importance of both existing and new wet grassland and also other breeding wader habitats in England (as provided by agri-environment schemes) for declining breeding birds such as Curlew, Lapwing, Redshank and Snipe. The survey will re-visit sites from the 1982 and 2002 surveys, including sites from the 2009-10 RSPB targeted areas, as well as other new sites since 2002.

The BWWM webpage is now live: (<https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/breeding-waders-wet-meadows>), and all survey documentation and recording forms will be available to access and download after 26th February, from the **Resources page**. This survey is entirely online and surveyors are expected to download their own survey documents and recording forms, with data also being entered online. However, paper forms can be provided to non-online surveyors who should return their data sheets to BTO HQ for inputting.

Key survey points

- Surveyors **must** seek permission entering private land before survey work commences – we can help with identifying landowners and may be able to provide contact details, if available.
- All Waders (and other birds) need to be recorded at the field level.
- Habitat details need to be recorded for every field within the site on the first visit, and any **changes** to habitat or ground conditions need to be recorded on all subsequent visits.
- It is important that survey timings are adhered to and evening Snipe visits are carried out within the specified time of day.

Avon sites are listed below please contact me asap if you can help out on this important survey

Clevedon Sea Wall 3 - Severn	ST372671	ST36
Kenn Moor	ST433686	ST46
Walton-In-Gordano	ST438733	ST47
Nailsea Moor - Kenn	ST445702	ST47
Tickenham Moor	ST447710	ST47
AES Fields B_2889	ST764690	ST76
Bathampton	ST781659	ST76
Claverton - Avon Kennet & Avon Canal	ST789641	ST76
Wick Warth - Yeo Estuary	ST360662	ST36
Yeo Lox - Lox River	ST390574	ST35
South Of Cheddar Reservoir - Axe	ST438530	ST45
Cheddar Moor - Axe	ST454514	ST45
AES Fields B_2645	ST478525	ST45
Meadows Adjacent (Sw) To Barrow		
Gurney Resvs	ST540673	ST56
Environs Of Chew Valley Lake - Chew	ST561590	ST55
Northwick / Pilning	ST584847	ST58
Pensford - Chew Magna	ST598634	ST56
Lapwing Plot L_1183	ST645636	ST66
AES Fields B_2827	ST715601	ST76
AES Fields B_2890	ST755714	ST77
Lapwing Plot L_78	ST759899	ST78

Watch bird identification videos

Seeking out videos of particular species you find challenging can be incredibly useful. This is especially true if they highlight behaviours or characteristics that can help you to confirm an identification.

[BTO Bird ID videos](#) cover most of the commonly -encountered confusion species / groups, and several rarer ones, too. They incorporate video footage, photographs, sound recordings and expert commentary to help you pick out and learn the key identification feature

Training Day Courses

We run a wide range of courses each year around the country in a variety of venues and habitats, for beginner birders, developing surveyors and conservation professionals. Contact training@bto.org to discuss your specific needs.

Spring bird ID (1-day, Somerset Levels)

Wed 22nd Apr 2020
Meadow Lane Walton
BA16 9LA Street

Wetland bird ID and WeBS (1-day, WWT Slimbridge)

Tue 19th May 2020
Bowditch Slimbridge
GL2 7BT Gloucester

Bristol Ornithological Club

Your local bird club Bristol Ornithological Club (BOC) provides the opportunity to pursue your hobby and find enjoyment in birds with like-minded people through assistance in the field and at indoor meetings.

For further details visit www.bristolornithology.co.uk



**Do you have an email address or recently changed address ?
Please email membership@bto.org or update your details at 'My
BTO' on the BTO website (www.bto.org).**

Contact details:

Regional Representative: Gordon Youdale E-mail: gordon.youdale@blueyonder.co.uk Tel: 01454881690

Regional Ambassador: Dave Stoddard E-mail: dave.stoddard@tiscali.co.uk Tel: 0117 9246968

WeBS: Inland sites: Rupert Higgins E-mail: rupert@wessexeco.co.uk,

WeBS: Severn Estuary: Harvey Rose Email: H.E.Rose@bristol.ac.uk

GBW Ambassadors: Jane Cumming E-mail: kittiwake@yahoo.co.uk

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