

# AVON BTO REGION



## *News*

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

**December 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.

What a year it's been so far! Our world has changed, and so much of the Spring survey work just wasn't possible. However, being outside is now being recognised as by far the healthy option: it's good for you physically and mentally, and you're less likely to catch COVID-19. Appreciation of nature is surely an inherent part of being a BTO supporter, so we were all well aware of the benefits of watching birds.

### **Membership**

BTO Membership in Avon currently stands at 331 members with the total number of members and non members making up the BTO Avon community standing at 903. Hopefully 2021 will see an increase in membership and volunteers as we try to raise the profile of the BTO in the region. 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](http://www.bto.org/how-you-can-help/join-bto)

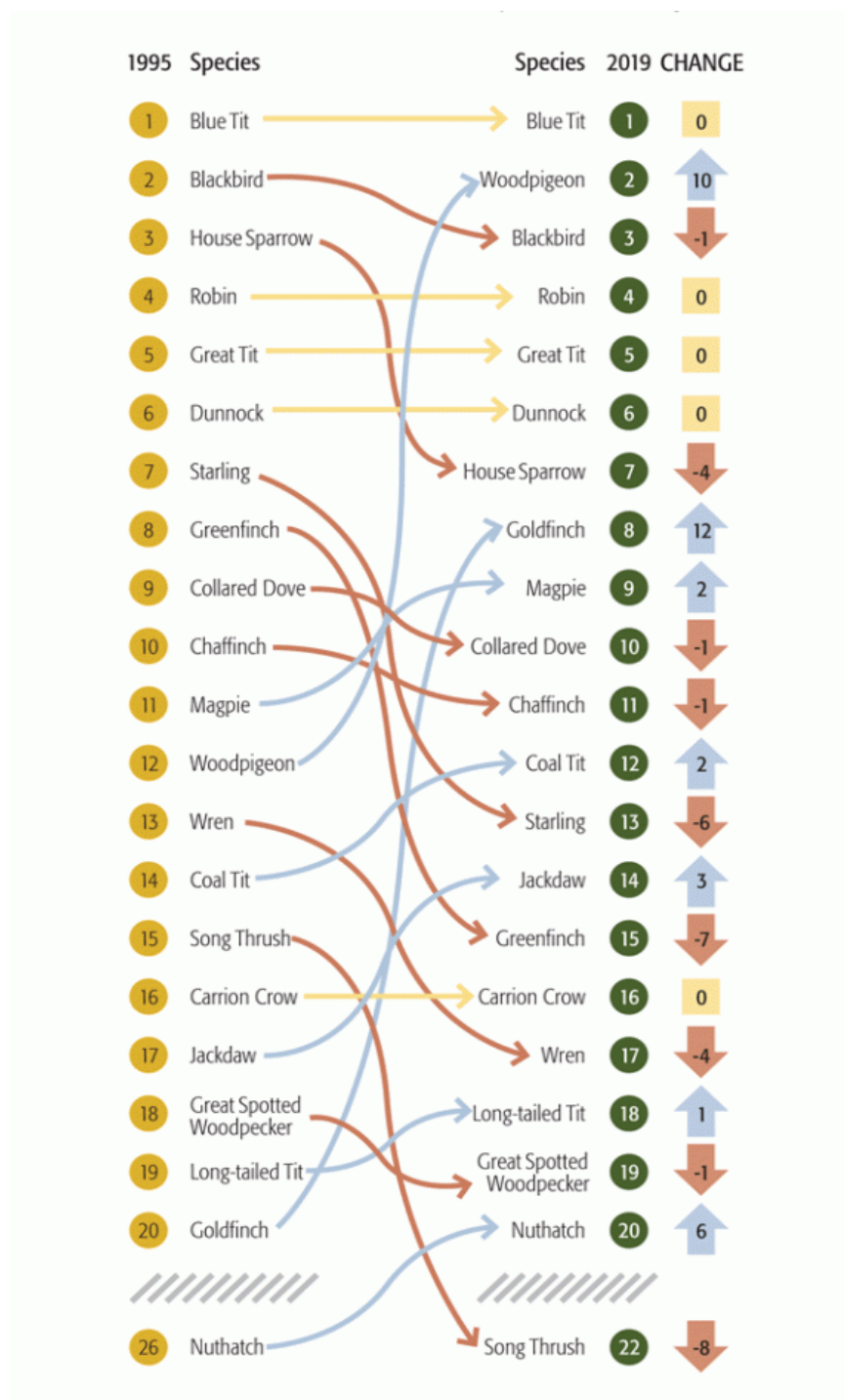
## **Garden BirdWatch**

The BTO's year-round survey of garden birds has always been very successful and 2020 has seen a surge in membership, helped by the offer a free membership (less Bird Table magazine). If you're one of those new 2020 members, then welcome! Regardless of how many years you've been involved in Garden BirdWatch, we do thank you for all your data, and we do hope you've had great pleasure in watching your garden birds. I've certainly found it a great help during the restrictions this year.



The birds that we see in our gardens are the species that most of us encounter daily, and provide the majority of our wildlife experiences. They are a uniquely adaptable community, and are also exposed to the rapid changes that are occurring in human environments as a result of societal and technological changes; a combination of factors that make them valuable to study. For 25 years, our dedicated Garden BirdWatch community has methodically recorded weekly data on their garden wildlife, as well as supporting the project financially. These records have taught us a lot about the effects of feeding birds, the management of gardens for wildlife and the changing fortunes of common garden species.

A key focus of our work has been to understand the impact of garden bird feeding on bird populations and communities in and around our gardens. Thanks in part to the generous support of Garden BirdWatchers, this work has shown that practices of garden bird feeding have changed radically over the last 40 years, leading to significant changes in the bird communities that visit our gardens, and even contributing to national-scale population changes.



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 .

Explore the Garden Birdwatch results at [www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/gbw/results](http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/gbw/results) or contact GWB Ambassador, Jane Cumming at [kittiwake@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:kittiwake@yahoo.co.uk)

## 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.

Just to let you know that we updated our Covid-19 statement on the BTO homepage on 13 November: <https://www.bto.org/community/news/202010-bto-and-covid-19> Updated statements also appear on individual survey pages.

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

### Avon Winter Bird Survey 2019–20

This Survey was completed at the end of February 2020 and so was thankfully unaffected by the pandemic!

This was the fourth season of the Survey (including 2018–19 when results were combined with the BTO's English Winter Bird Survey of that season).

It was another successful season with some 145 squares surveyed (compared to 113 in the first season 2016–17). A total of 60,647 birds of 96 species were recorded. This has provided valuable data on the changing fortunes of the common breeding birds of our area.

The table below lists the 20 commonest species recorded in the Survey, ranked in order of abundance, and their comparable positions in AWBS 2018–19 and BBS in Avon in 2019. Of course for species like Wren the change in status between the seasons is largely because they are more difficult to detect in the winter rather than because of any change in numbers while other 'ranked' birds in BBS are predominantly or exclusively summer visitors. This is the first year that Woodpigeon has been demoted from the top spot thanks particularly to some good flocks in Somerset and North Somerset.

AWBS 19–20 Rank	Species	AWBS Count	AWBS 18–19 Rank	2019 BBS Rank
1	Starling	8819	2	11
2	Woodpigeon	7671	1	1

<b>3</b>	<b>Jackdaw</b>	<b>5074</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Carrion Crow</b>	<b>4151</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Black-headed Gull</b>	<b>3423</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Redwing</b>	<b>2517</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>House Sparrow</b>	<b>2224</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Blue Tit</b>	<b>2141</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Herring Gull</b>	<b>1970</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>Blackbird</b>	<b>1844</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>Fieldfare</b>	<b>1821</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>Robin</b>	<b>1763</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>Feral Pigeon</b>	<b>1667</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>Rook</b>	<b>1503</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>15</b>	<b>Magpie</b>	<b>1489</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>16</b>	<b>Mallard</b>	<b>1196</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>17</b>	<b>Goldfinch</b>	<b>1184</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>18</b>	<b>Great Tit</b>	<b>1136</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>19</b>	<b>Chaffinch</b>	<b>889</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>20</b>	<b>Long-tailed Tit</b>	<b>792</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>-</b>	<b>Blackcap</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>-</b>	<b>Wren</b>	<b>531</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>-</b>	<b>Lesser Black-backed Gull</b>	<b>449</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>-</b>	<b>Swallow</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>-</b>	<b>Chiffchaff</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>20</b>

If you would like a copy of the full Report on the fourth season of AWBS when it is published please contact Dave ([dave.stoddard@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:dave.stoddard@tiscali.co.uk) tel ; -0117 9246968).

## **Avon Winter Bird Survey (AWBS) 2020–21**

We have now commenced the fifth season of AWBS and the first results have been coming in.

The Survey is simple and straightforward (the emphasis is on our commoner species). The survey consists of making a minimum of two visits to an allocated grid square in the Avon BTO Region, walking two one-kilometre transects across the square. All birds seen or heard are counted - most visits will take around two hours. If you are interested in helping or have any queries about the Survey, please contact Dave Stoddard ([dave.stoddard@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:dave.stoddard@tiscali.co.uk) tel;- 01179246968).



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.

## **Breeding Bird Survey 2020**

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. At one stage it looked unlikely that we would be able to achieve any significant coverage in the Survey in 2020. However, following the relaxation of the Lockdown in May observers were keen to get back into the field and in the end we did get some very useful results.



**A total of 159 squares (compared to 232 in 2019) were surveyed in the Avon BTO region with a total of 33,715 birds recorded. Of those squares (including the three Waterways Breeding Bird Survey routes) 104 were National BTO squares with the balance covered by the 'Local' Avon BBS scheme.** This means that about 10% of the Avon BTO Region was covered in 2020. In the circumstances it is unsurprising that most of the squares (124) received only the one 'late' visit, rather than the customary two, but as most observers managed to make their visits on dates within a week of their 2019 visits BTO (and ourselves in Avon) are able to make some reasonable comparisons between the years to give some indication of the changes in populations.

A very big thank you is due to all the BBS observers who rallied round to rescue what seemed like a helpless situation.



## **Breeding Bird Survey 2021**

The BBS season commences on 1st April and it is hoped that by then we will be back to a position where the survey can be conducted as normal (I'm an optimist!).

**To take part in BBS** you do not have to be a great ornithological expert – 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 number of squares are still available throughout the Region particularly in the Somerset section of our Region (western Mendips, Midsomer Norton and the Levels near Axbridge). 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 Stoddard ([dave.stoddard@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:dave.stoddard@tiscali.co.uk) tel;- 0117 9246968) who will be pleased to help.

You can read more about taking part, and view a map online here:

<https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/bbs/taking-part>

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. Squares in our section of the Mendips would be particularly welcome. The scheme operates on the same basis as the National scheme, and makes a very valuable contribution to our knowledge of the birds of the Region, but is a little simpler as there is no requirement to record habitat. Please just contact Dave (details above) to check that your proposed square doesn't duplicate one already being surveyed.

## **AVON Rookery Survey 2021**

As many of you will know we attempted to conduct the five yearly Rookery Survey in Avon this year. Unfortunately the fieldwork season coincided neatly with the first Lockdown and so most sites were not covered. We will make another attempt in 2021 and I will write to all those who had previously volunteered and then seek volunteers for any unallocated areas.



## **WeBS (Wetland Bird Survey)**



Counters are the lifeblood of WeBS. Without the dedication of the volunteers who go out in all weathers to monitor the UK's waterbirds, WeBS just wouldn't be able to function.

### **What type of counts are carried out?**

There are two main counts which make up WeBS, the Core Counts and Low Tide Counts.

### **What is required?**

The survey involves visiting a local wetland site once a month throughout the winter and count the waterbirds there. We do welcome counts from all months of the year but the main period we ask our counters to concentrate on from September through to March.

### **What skills are required?**

Anyone can take part, even beginners to birdwatching. Unlike many bird surveys, you don't have to know bird songs or calls to carry out WeBS Counts - just the ability to identify common waterbirds.

### **Where are the survey sites?**

A WeBS site can be any wetland area, be it an estuary, lake or reservoir to a river, stream or even your local village duck pond. Many of the larger sites are regularly counted, but high priority vacant count areas do appear from time to time. However, even counts from small waterbodies are important - explore the vacant sites map to find sites near you where we need assistance; more information on using the tool can be found in:

See <https://app.bto.org/websonline/sites/vacant/vacant-sites.jsp>



So far this year we have counted 106 species from 28 locations during our counts at wetland sites

If you wish to count a completely new site, please contact the WeBS Office or your Local Organiser to discuss.

## **BirdTrack**

BirdTrack is a free and convenient way of storing your bird records online. BirdTrack lets you keep up to date with what others are seeing, view the latest trends, and contribute your data to BTO science.

Taking part in BirdTrack is easy and fun. You simply provide some information about yourself, the sites where you go birdwatching, when you go birdwatching and most importantly, the birds you identify! BirdTrack allows you to store all of your bird records in a safe, easily accessible and interactive format.

Record on the go with BirdTrack Apps Log your bird sightings anywhere in the world

For more information go to [www.birdtrack.net](http://www.birdtrack.net)

## **Ringling**

Chew Valley Ringing Station in 2020

As for many organisations the effect of the pandemic has been totally disruptive for all CVRS's major activities. No nest recording, No Constant Effort Site ringing and we were unable to offer the summer Ringing Course. In order to comply with the social distancing rules a few ringers have operated alone and set up working stations with a table near the nets. It has been particularly frustrating for our trainees who were not able to take part.

Nevertheless by the middle of November we had ringed just over 1,000 birds plus 500 retraps. There was a steady run of Chiffchaffs, Reed Warblers and Sedge Warblers. That we also ringed 36 new Cetti's Warblers indicates that they must have had a good breeding season. Less usual birds this autumn included Bearded Tit, Firecrest, Lesser Redpoll (3) and Stonechat (2).

Our hopes are very much for a return to normality sometime next year so maybe you can keep an eye on the general situation and contact us when things improve.

For more information visit  
<http://www.chewvalleyringingstation.co.uk/>

Mike Bailey



## Interesting recent Ringing recovery

A recent recovery from the BTO regarding a Lesser Black-backed Gull ringed by myself, Gordon Youdale, on Denny Island in the Bristol Channel on the 28<sup>th</sup> June 1986 was found dead in Highbridge on the 7<sup>th</sup> May 2020 making it 34 years old, this I think sets a new longevity record for the UK (previous record was 26 years 8 months 8 days).

## Heronries Census



The surveying year starts with Heronries; so much easier to see those Apparently Occupied Nests when there aren't so many leaves on the trees. Whilst not all heronries could be checked this year, numbers on those that were visited didn't show any great changes. All the "ancient" sites have been checked; they were all uninhabited. Therefore, they will be removed from the list and map shown on the website. This reduces any confusion over the availability of sites.

Two very important heronries have become available, as the long term volunteer is retiring. These are **Denny Island, Chew Valley Lake** (21 nests in 2019) and **Brockley Wood / Cleeve Wood** (just above the garden centre: 31 nests in 2019). The current volunteer is very willing to show you the ropes, and how to access the sites. If you would like to take on one or both of these sites, please do contact me. Don't forget, this survey includes all species of Herons, Egrets and Bitterns; all colony data are welcomed!

**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>)

## **House Martin Nest Study**



House Martin numbers in the UK have declined by 39% over a 25 year period, but it is unclear why. This small hirundine is a summer visitor that spends the winter months in an unknown part of sub Saharan Africa, returning to build their cup shaped nests under the eaves of buildings during April and May. In the 2016 and 2017 breeding seasons, BTO ran the House Martin Nest Study which involved members of the public monitoring the breeding behaviour of House Martins nesting close to where they lived. You can find a summary here (<https://www.bto.org/our-science/publications/peer-reviewed-papers/using-citizen-science-assess-drivers-common-house>),

## **Breeding Waders of Wet Meadows 2020 (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.

Following the latest Government Covid-19 policy, which came into effect on 24<sup>th</sup> March, Natural England have informed us that the 2020 Breeding Waders of Wet Meadows Survey was cancelled.



This is unfortunate, but it was essential that every measure is taken to help reduce the spread of Covid-19 in these exceptional circumstances.

We will be looking at the possibility of rescheduling the survey for 2021 and will keep you informed as and when there is any update.

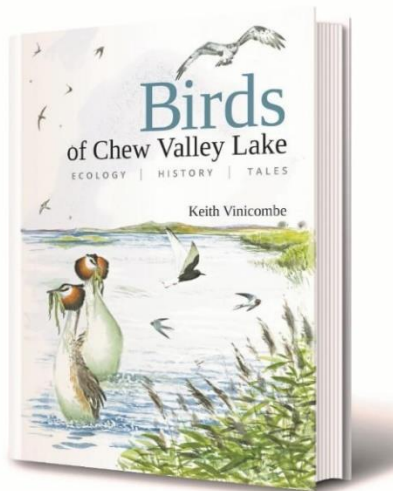
## **Training Day Courses**

Due to the Covid 19 situation training courses have been put on hold locally, but you can always visit the BTO website for their online courses and 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. Go to <https://www.bto.org/develop-your-skills/bird-identification/videos>.

## *Birds of Chew Valley Lake*



The book is a beautifully produced hardback of 450 pages, with over 300 illustrations that include photographs of birds and the lake itself, 26 commissioned original paintings from Ray Scally and over 70 drawings from the late Laurel Tucker, many of which are published for the first time.

Discounted price (20% off): £19.95 + £5 p + p

Copies can be ordered from the following link:

<https://tinyurl.com/ChewBirds>

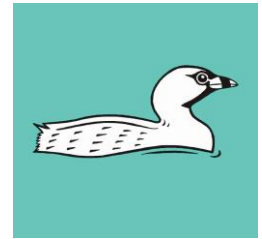


*Many thanks for your support during this difficult year  
I hope you have a  
Happy Christmas and New Year*





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](http://www.bristolornithology.co.uk)



There are also excellent local birding websites to keep you up to date with what is going on:

Avon Birds <https://avonbirding.blogspot.com/>

Birds of South Gloucestershire <http://www.thebirdsofsouthgloucestershire.co.uk/>

Severnside Birds <http://www.severnsidebirds.co.uk/>

Blagdon Lake Birds <http://blagdonlakebirds.com/>

Newton St.Low Birding <https://newton-st-loe-birding.blogspot.com/>

Oldbury Power Station <http://www.opsbirding.co.uk/>

## Contact details:

**Regional Representative:** Gordon Youdale E-mail: [gordon.youdale@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:gordon.youdale@blueyonder.co.uk) Tel: 01454881690

**Regional Ambassador:** Dave Stoddard E-mail: [dave.stoddard@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:dave.stoddard@tiscali.co.uk) Tel: 0117 9246968

**WeBS:** Inland sites: Rupert Higgins E-mail: [rupert@wessexeco.co.uk](mailto:rupert@wessexeco.co.uk),

**WeBS:** Severn Estuary: Harvey Rose Email: [H.E.Rose@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:H.E.Rose@bristol.ac.uk)

**GBW Ambassador:** Jane Cumming E-mail: [kittiwake@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:kittiwake@yahoo.co.uk)

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