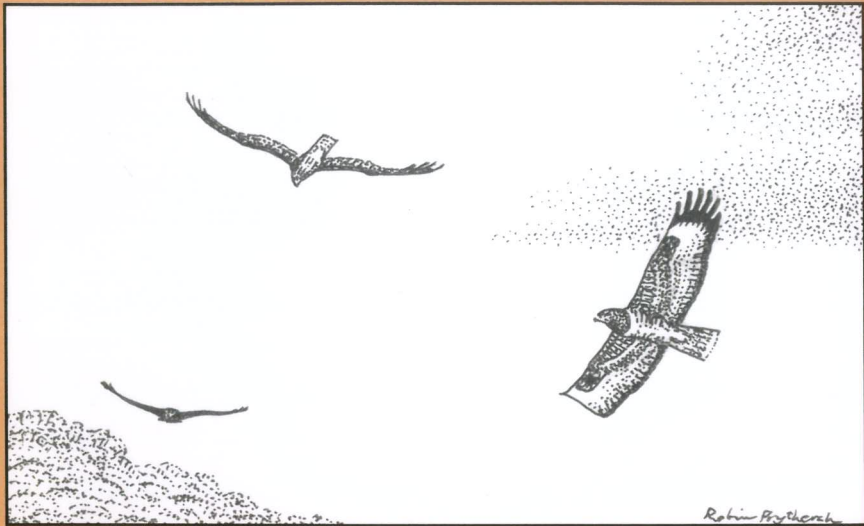


BRISTOL ORNITHOLOGY

THE JOURNAL OF THE BRISTOL ORNITHOLOGICAL CLUB



NUMBER 31, 2012

Blaise Woods - John Tully's thirty-three year Common Birds Census
The Dispersal of Common Buzzards ringed in North Somerset
A Survey of Common Buzzards in ST66 south of Keynsham
Obituary - John Tully

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Cover: Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* encounter (RJP).

Preface

To compensate for the very large previous issue, this one contains just three papers and an obituary of John Tully who died in 2012. The first 25 years' results of John Tully's study on the breeding birds of Blaise Woods were published in our 2004 issue (number 27). He continued with the study until his death. Fortunately, Richard Bland managed to recover from John's impeccably kept files all the data needed to complete the latest eight years of the study. This is presented here and includes a summary of the complete 33 years of data.

Jeff Holmes' study of breeding Common Buzzards south of Keynsham covered ten years, 1995-2004. He monitored all the pairs of a growing population in a 60 sq.km study area. With between 32 and 66 pairs to watch this was a dedicated and time consuming pursuit.

Between 1984 and 2004 Lyndon Roberts and Robin Prytherch (with help from others) ringed nestling Common Buzzards in the latter's study area in North Somerset. Sufficient time has now passed to look at how these birds have dispersed; information gleaned from the recovery of ringed birds which have died. Since the oldest birds can live to well over 20 years there is still time for some of them to be recovered. If so, we hope to report on these in a future issue.

Jane Cumming, Lyndon Roberts and Robin Prytherch
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Blaise Woods - John Tully's thirty-three year Common Birds Census

Richard Bland

Introduction

In 2004 John Tully published a summary of 25 years of Common Birds Census recording in Blaise Woods, 1979-2003, using the British Trust for Ornithology's methodology (Tully 2004). He maintained the study through to the end of 2011 despite his illness. His records were meticulous and Beryl, his wife, kindly gave me access to them so that the full record could be published. The full details of the site are outlined in the 2004 report, and little of significance has happened since to the habitat. The weather details 2004-11 are outlined in Table 1 below. In particular the long run of warm winters since 1996 came to an end in 2008, and this caused a decline in some species.

Table 1 Mean maximum centigrade figures in 2004-2011 for winter, spring and summer and whole year.

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Winter	8.3	8.3	7.1	9	9.1	6.8	5.7	6.8
Spring	13.5	13.1	12.7	14.9	13.3	14.8	14.3	16.1
Summer	20.6	20.9	22.4	19.4	19.4	21.4	21.6	20
Annual	14.3	14.3	14.6	14.5	13.7	14.6	13.7	15.5

John maintained a careful record of the number of visits he made, and the time he took but he did not publish it in 2004 so Table 2 shows the full details. He managed to maintain a constant effort despite both weather conditions and his own deteriorating health.

Table 2 Total number of visits and hours spent in the field, 2004-2011.

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Visits	47	57	48	44	37	46	51	41
Hours	89	104	80	72	54	73	87	64

I have followed the pattern of the 2004 report (Tully 2004), including using the former BOU order to enable easy comparisons, and for most species I have given the totals of territories for the period 2004-11, which was not published in 2004.

I have included all species that held territories during the 2004-11 period, tabulating those that were recorded every year. Furthermore, I give totals of all territories held during the complete 33-year period, 1979-2011 (Fig. 1).

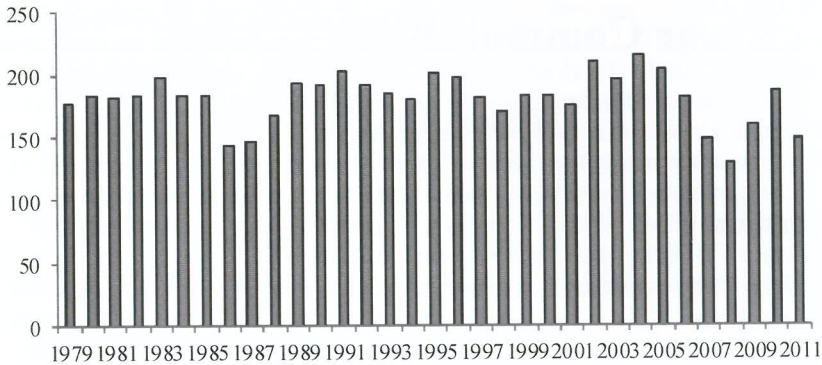


Fig. 1 Annual totals for all species at Blaise Woods, 1979-2011.

CBC densities are usually quoted in terms of breeding pairs per square kilometre, abbreviated to bp/km² for convenience. This means multiplying the numbers recorded in the eight hectare plot by 12.5 to produce a figure for 100 hectares, which involves a degree of exaggeration. But it is important when making population estimates to understand the very high densities that some species can achieve in ideal habitat. In general, mature woodland will hold ten times the number of pairs that can be found on farmland.

Species Accounts

SPARROWHAWK *Accipiter nisus* There was a single territory in every year from 1980 to 1997, and then in 2008. However, the last successful breeding was in 1997 when three young fledged. The BBS survey shows no evidence of change in the local population, but since a pair of Sparrowhawks require a territory of about four sq. km to be successful, another pair probably bred elsewhere in the Blaise estate.

BUZZARD *Buteo buteo* A pair first bred in the Blaise estate in 2004, where John's patch was part of the wider territory and they bred again in 2005, 2010 and 2011. Their population in the U.K. has expanded rapidly in the past twenty years, and they now breed in most of the wooded areas surrounding Bristol.

KESTREL *Falco tinnunculus* Kestrels held territory annually between 1997 and 2005, but not subsequently. It is probable that subtle changes in the habitat

both of the woodland and the northern grassland outside John's area caused this loss, as there has been no evidence of wider population change.

STOCK DOVE *Columba oena* The average number of territories in John's patch up to 2003 was five, giving an exceptional density of 63bp/km², compared with a normal woodland average of ten pairs. In 2009 there were eight pairs, in 2010 ten and in 2011 eleven. The mean in the last eight years increased to 6.6 pairs. The cause of this increase is unclear as the local BBS records suggest a stable population.

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Stock Dove	5	3	6	5	5	8	10	11

WOODPIGEON *Columba palumbus* The number of territories increased from eight in 1979 to 24 in 1990, and there followed a period of stability with a mean of 18 territories up to 2003. There was an abrupt increase in 2004, followed by a decline to 2007 and then an increase to 2010. These changes do not correlate with the BBS figures for Avon.

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Woodpigeon	23	21	20	11	14	17	21	20

TAWNY OWL *Strix aluco* John's patch was usually part of a Tawny Owl territory, but successful breeding only occurred in eight of the 33 years, the last in 2005. In 2004 John suggested that success was related to the thinning of the woodland, and hence access to small mammals, and the management of the grassland to the north may also have been significant.

GREEN WOODPECKER *Picus viridis* The figures suggest that there was a peak of four territories between 1996 and 2004, and around two before and since. The overall mean 1979-2003 was 2.7 territories, and for the full 33 years 2.6. John kept a careful note of the direction in which nests faced, and NW, N and NE facing nests accounted for 19 out of 34 nests.

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Green W'pecker	4	3	3	2	1	2	2	2

GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER *Dendrocopus major* There were consistently either one or two territories recorded every year, with a mean of 1.6.

It might be thought that in mature woodland the density would be higher, but it is actually greater than the woodland density of 10bp/km² recorded by other woodland CBCs in the 1980s.

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
G S W'pecker	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2

WREN *Troglodytes troglodytes* Throughout the period there were between 14 and 28 territories every year, with a mean of 20. Low winter temperature may have caused population falls, but there is a very poor correlation over 33 years between territories and winter temperature. Indeed the highest total, 28 territories, came after the 2009/10 winter which, with an average of 5.7°C, was the coldest since 1979 (5.5°C). The lowest total, 14 territories in 1982 came after the severe 1981/2 winter, with an average of 6.5°C and a cold wet spring in 1981. There were only 15 territories after the 1985/6 winter (6.2°C). On the other hand in 1996 there were 20 territories following a warm dry spring in 1995, and despite the cold 1995/6 winter (5.9°C). The run of very warm winters from 1998-2005 did not lead to a steady increase. Clearly the habitat could not support more than 28, which is a density of 356bp/km², and summer breeding success depends on subtler habitat variables than simply rain and temperature.

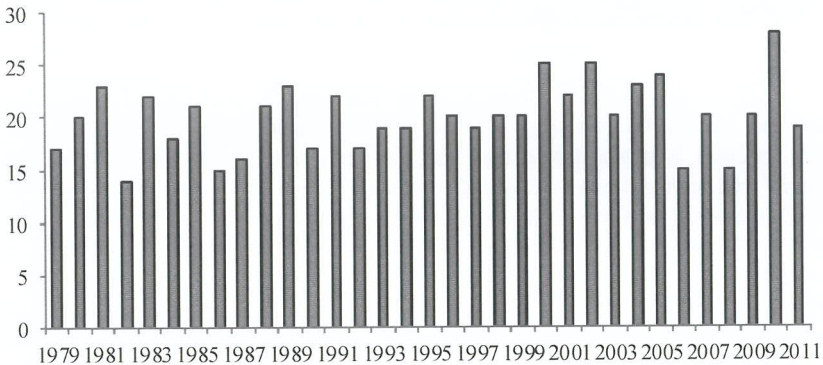


Fig. 2 Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* territories at Blaise Woods, 1979-2011.

DUNNOCK *Prunella modularis* The decline that John noted in 2003, which he suggested was caused by the density of the woodland cover, continued. There were no territories in 2005, 2008, 2009, or 2011. The mean number was 2.0 over the full period, a density of 24bp/km².

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Dunnoch	2	0	2	1	0	0	1	0

ROBIN *Ericathus rubecula* There was an increasing trend in Robin territories from 1979, and they peaked in 1996 at 26. Subsequently the lowest total was 18 in 2008, the same as the overall mean, a density of 216 bp/km². Robin numbers do not seem to be affected at all by winter temperatures.

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Robin	22	22	19	20	18	21	20	20

BLACKBIRD *Turdus merula* John recorded a declining number of territories with a peak of 28 in 1979 and a nadir of 12 in 2000. From 2004 to 2011 the mean was 15.6, well below the mean of 20 over the first 25 years. This pattern is very different from the one shown by the Avon BBS since 1994, which saw a steady increase of about 50% 1994 to 2002 followed by a fall of 30% to 2011. The mean density of 220bp/km² is exceptionally high.

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Blackbird	15	17	16	17	13	17	17	13

SONG THRUSH *Turdus philomelos* Over the full period there have been between zero and five territories, with a mean of 2.6. The maximum number in 2001 and 2002 came after a run of five exceptionally warm winters, but the cold December of 2010, locally the coldest since 1916, did not seem to lead to a fall as there were three territories in 2011. The ratio of Song Thrush to Blackbird territories is 7.5, and there has been a very long-term change in this ratio over the past century. In 1900 there were probably far more Song Thrush than Blackbird, but this had probably reached a 1:1 ratio by 1950, as suggested by the evidence of early ringing returns, and since then Song Thrush numbers have fallen much further, especially in the period of cold winters from 1979-1986.

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Song Thrush	3	3	3	2	1	1	2	3

MISTLE THRUSH *Turdus viscivorus* At least one territory was recorded in 15 of the first twenty years of the survey, but in the last 13 year there has only been one territory in 2004. This change is in line with a process of more or less continual decline recorded by BBS locally since 1994, which amounts to a halving of the population in that period. As the Blaise territory appears to offer everything a Mistle Thrush could need this unexplained change is disturbing.

BLACKCAP *Sylvia atricapilla* The number of territories has fluctuated between two and 11, and appears to be cyclic, which John suggested was related to Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.) cover. Locally and nationally since 1994 Blackcap have been expanding but there is clearly a limit in any particular habitat, and the average of 6.7 territories represents a density of 80bp/km², almost double the local woodland CBC average in the 1980s.

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Blackcap	8	8	5	5	2	6	9	4

CHIFFCHAFF *Phylloscopus collybita* The number of territories has varied from two to eight with an average of 4.5, and a gently falling trend. Locally the BBS has recorded population falls in 1999 and 2004 and 2005, followed by recoveries, which may be related to problems on the wintering grounds and these are in part reflected in the Blaise results. The full chart is given below.

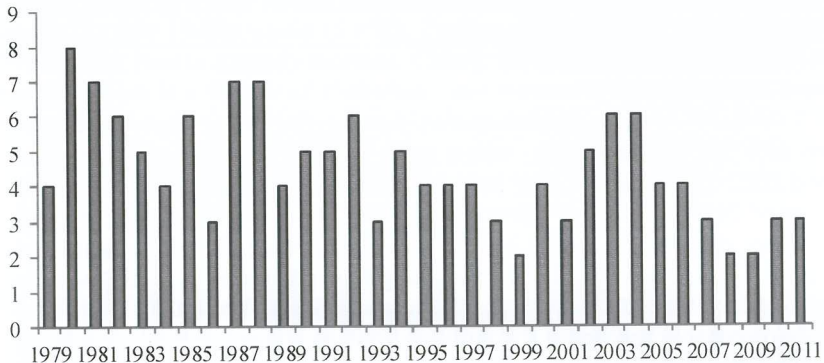


Fig. 3 Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* territories at Blaise Woods, 1979-2011.

GOLDCREST *Regulus regulus* In 2004 and 2005 Goldcrest territories reached their former 1995 peak of 9, and this followed a run of warm winters. However there was then a very sharp drop to just two in 2007 and one in 2008 prior to the three cold winters of 2009, 2010 and 2011. For the first time none were recorded in 2010. This species is well known for population crashes after severe weather, and for its capacity to recover.

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Goldcrest	9	9	5	2	1	4	0	1

LONG-TAILED TIT *Aegithalos caudatus* There have only been six years when there were no territories, and the maximum was four in 1994. The species

has been doing well locally, but there is no trend to the numbers recorded in Blaise, and perhaps not enough Bramble which is its preferred nesting habitat. The mean density is 1.3 territories, or 16bp/km², which is close to the CBC woodland average for the region.

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Long-tailed Tit	1	0	1	2	2	1	1	0

MARSH TIT *Parus palustris* They are an elusive but very sedentary species, and perhaps because of this were recorded spasmodically, holding territory in 12 of the 33 years. This seems to imply that they may well be less sedentary than ringing returns suggest, as John is unlikely to have missed them. In this period he recorded them in 2004 and 2006.

COAL TIT *Parus ater* There were between one and five territories throughout the period, with no obvious trend. The mean was 2.7. They generally prefer coniferous trees, but this density is close to the CBC average for woodland in the region.

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Coal Tit	5	3	2	1	2	2	2	1



BLUE TIT *Parus caeruleus* Between 1979 and 2006 the number of territories varied between 22 and 34, with a mean of 28. This represented a density of 350bp/km², compared with the local CBC woodland average of 140bp/km². Numbers then fell to 15 in 2008, a fall that was paralleled by the figures from the local BBS. There was recovery to 24 in 2009, but there were only 20 in 2010 and 2011. It seems probable that poor breeding seasons were a significant factor, though the very cold weather of December 2010 may have played a part.

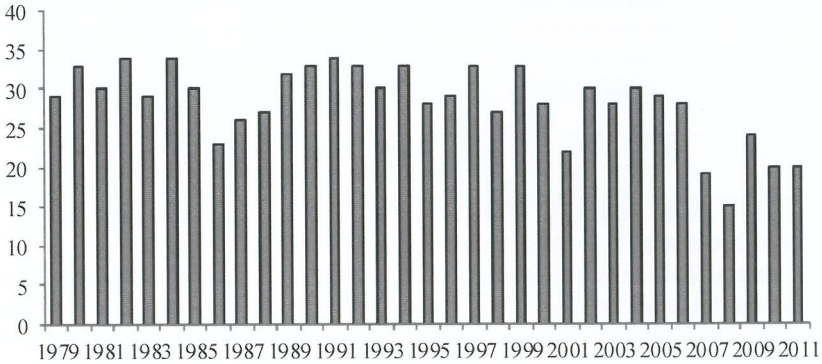


Fig. 4. Blue tit *Parus caeruleus* territories at Blaise Woods, 1979-2011.

GREAT TIT *Parus major* The pattern of territories is roughly cyclic, with a maximum of 22 in 2010 and a minimum of nine in 1988. The mean is 15.1, a ratio to Blue Tit of almost 1:2. There is little correlation between good and bad years for each species, though they shared poor years in 1986 and 2007 and good ones in 1991, 1993, 2002 and 2003.

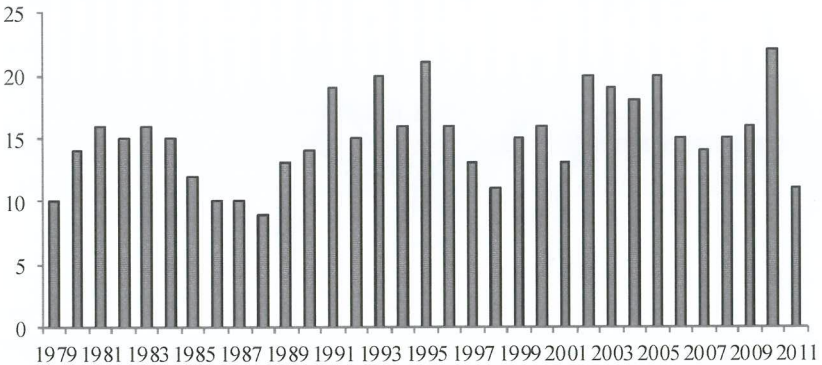


Fig. 5 Great tit *Parus major* territories at Blaise Woods, 1979-2011.

NUTHATCH *Sitta europaea* Throughout the period there were between two and five (in 2004) territories with a mean of 3.0.

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Nuthatch	5	3	3	2	2	2	3	3

TREECREEPER *Certhia familiaris* Over the whole period there were only eight years without a Treecreeper territory, and in 1990 and 2010 there were three pairs.

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Treecreeper	1	1	0	2	0	0	3	0

JAY *Garrulus glandarius* There were between one and four Jay territories, with a mean of 2.2, and peaks in 1983 and 1995. This stability is also a feature of the results of the local BBS since 1994.

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Jay	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2

MAGPIE *Pica pica* The number of territories increased from one in 1979 to five in 1998, representing a density of 60bp/km², and nine times as many as local farmland CBCs in the 1980s. The mean is 3.0, and in the past decade numbers have been roughly stable.

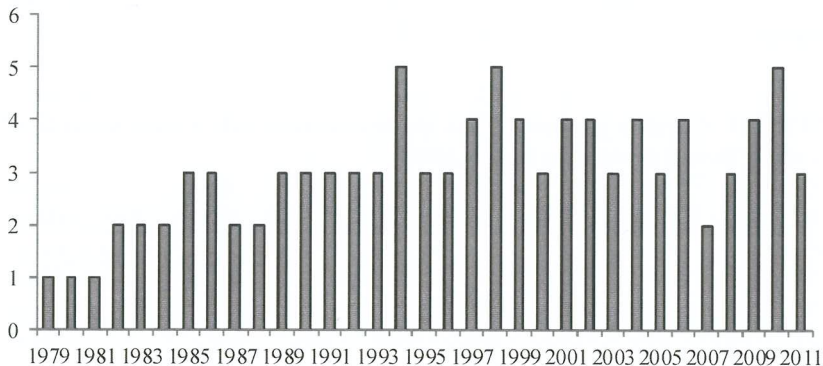


Fig. 6 Magpie *Pica pica* territories at Blaise Woods, 1979-2011.

JACKDAW *Corvus monedula* The number of territories increased fairly steadily from 1979 to 2005, from five pairs to 21, but since then there has been a decline. There has been no alteration in the number of appropriate nest sites to account for this change.

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Jackdaw	18	21	19	12	11	7	14	9

CARRION CROW *Corvus corone* Crows have held a territory within the patch in 20 of the 33 years and in 1993 and 2003 there were three territories. They require a minimum of 14 hectares for a territory, and there are usually a number of non-breeders around.

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Carrion Crow	3	2	1	2	2	1	0	1

RAVEN *Corvus Corax* The first bird to land on the plot was in 2005, and in 2009 a pair nested for the first time on Castle Hill just across the Trym from the plot, producing two young that year, three in 2010 and two in 2011.

CHAFFINCH *Fringilla coelebs* This species prefers open woodland, and, though it has nested in all but three years, the mean number of territories is 2.8 with a maximum of seven in 1980. Locally the BBS has recorded a fairly steady decline since 1994, and this may have been made worse by the *trichomonosis* outbreak since 2006.

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Chaffinch	3	3	5	1	1	1	0	0

BULLFINCH *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* This species has only held a territory in 13 of the 33 years, though there were two in 2004.

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Bullfinch	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0

Summary

24 species have bred in the Blaise Woods survey area since 2004 and there have been between 124 and 210 territories in total, with a mean of 165. This represents a density of over 2000 bp/km² (Table 3). The numbers are dominated by seven species: Woodpigeon, Wren, Robin, Blackbird, Blue Tit, Great Tit, and Jackdaw, which between them accounted for between 69% and 83% of the territories.

However in terms of avian biomass the Woodpigeons account for 44% of the average total, Jackdaws for 16%, and Stock Dove for 14%. Blackbirds account

for 7% and Crows for 4%. All other species together, account for 15% (Table 4).

Table 3 The table below lists all the breeding species in Blaise Woods 2004-2011 giving the territories held, with an overall total and the density per square kilometre that that represents.

Species	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Woodpigeon	23	21	20	11	14	17	21	20
Stock Dove	5	3	6	5	5	8	10	11
Green W'pecker	4	3	3	2	1	2	2	2
G.S. W'pecker	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2
Wren	23	24	15	20	15	20	28	19
Dunnock	2	0	2	1	0	0	1	0
Robin	22	22	19	20	18	21	20	20
Blackbird	15	17	16	17	13	17	17	13
Song Thrush	3	3	3	2	1	1	2	3
Blackcap	8	8	5	5	2	6	9	4
Chiffchaff	6	4	4	3	2	2	3	3
Goldcrest	9	9	5	2	1	4	0	1
Long-tailed Tit	1	0	1	2	2	1	1	0
Marsh Tit	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Coal Tit	5	3	2	1	2	2	2	1
Blue Tit	30	29	28	19	15	24	20	20
Great Tit	18	20	15	14	15	16	22	11
Nuthatch	5	3	3	2	2	2	3	3
Treecreeper	1	1	0	2	0	0	3	0
Jay	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2
Magpie	4	3	4	2	3	4	5	3
Jackdaw	18	21	19	12	11	7	14	9
Carrion Crow	3	2	1	2	2	1	0	1
Chaffinch	3	3	5	1	1	1	0	0
Bullfinch	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Total	215	204	182	148	129	159	187	148
Density/km ²	2688	2550	2275	1850	1613	1988	2338	1850



Table 4 Blaise CBC average number of territories 1979-2011, showing numerical percentage structure, and the species biomass in kilograms, and its percentage structure.

Species	Average Territories	% of Total Territories	Biomass kg	Biomass %
Woodpigeon	17	9	17.7	44
Stock Dove	5	3	4.8	12
Green Woodpecker	3	1	0.8	2
G.S. Woodpecker	2	1	0.2	1
Wren	20	11	0.4	1
Dunnock	2	1	0.1	0
Robin	18	10	0.7	2
Blackbird	18	10	3.5	9
Song Thrush	3	1	0.3	1
Blackcap	7	4	0.3	1
Chiffchaff	4	2	0.2	0
Goldcrest	4	2	0.1	0
Long-tailed Tit	1	1	0.0	0
Marsh Tit	0	0	0.0	0
Coal Tit	3	1	0.1	0
Blue Tit	28	16	0.7	2
Great Tit	15	8	0.6	1
Nuthatch	3	2	0.1	0
Treecreeper	1	1	0.0	0
Jay	2	1	0.8	2
Magpie	3	2	1.4	4
Jackdaw	12	7	5.8	15
Carrion Crow	1	0	1.0	3
Chaffinch	3	2	0.1	0
Bullfinch	0	0	0.0	0
Starling	2	1	0.0	0
Total	181		39.8	

Reference:

Tully, J. 2004. Blaise Woods, Bristol - 25 years of the Common Birds Census. *Bristol Orn.* 27: 3-33.

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The dispersal of Common Buzzards ringed between 1984 and 2004 in North Somerset

Robin Prytherch and Lyndon Roberts

Introduction

This paper examines the results from ringing 'recoveries' of Common Buzzard (simply Buzzard hereafter) *Buteo buteo* nestlings ringed in North Somerset between 1984 and 2004. The main focus of the paper is what the ringing recoveries tell us about the dispersal of Buzzards from natal sites during their lives. But as nearly all the recoveries (listed in the Appendix) involve birds found dead or dying, this article also provides some insight into the hazards that Buzzards face as they eke out an existence in the wider countryside.

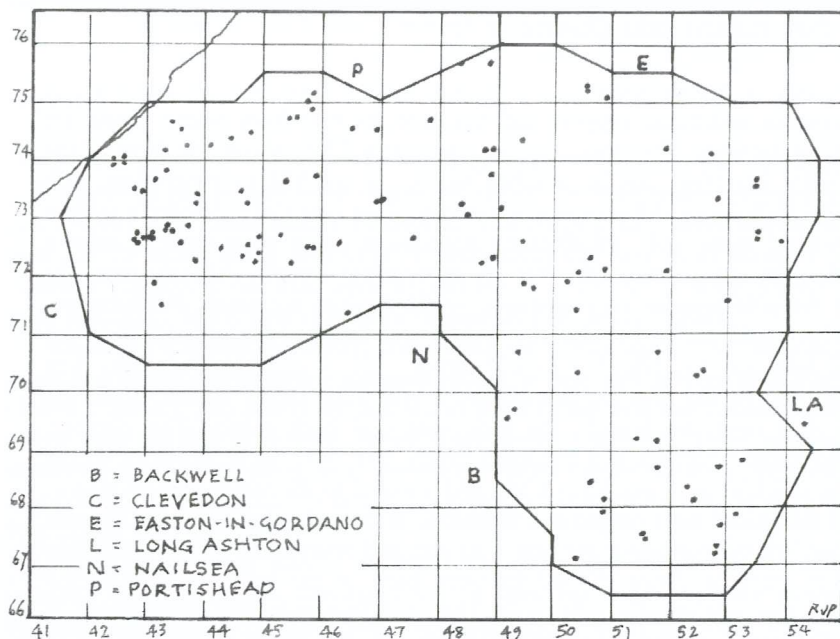


Fig. 1 An outline map of the 75sq.km study area in North Somerset on a 1km grid. The dots indicate the locations of nests where Buzzard *Buteo buteo* chicks were ringed. Many (75%) of the recoveries were also from within this area.

Background

The ringing of Buzzards (described below) formed part of a wider study undertaken by RJP that was started in 1982. His long-term aim was to monitor the breeding population in a 75 sq.km study area in Avon (as it was then) (Fig. 1), which was increasing slowly until it stabilised at saturation point. This meant looking closely at the species' social behaviour in order to identify pairs and to avoid confusion with the immature (up to two/three years old) birds that are also typically present within the population. Established breeding pairs are resident and evict all but their own offspring from their territories (Prytherch 2009). There were 13 pairs in 1982, increasing to 105 in 2012. Territories varied in size from a mean of c.130ha in the early years to 62ha in 2006/7. The consequence of the declining territory size was that breeding performance declined from a mean of c.1.6 chicks per pair in the late 80s to 0.61 in 2007 (Prytherch 2013). This is a clear example of density dependence.

Methods

Buzzards nest high in trees in North Somerset. A variety of tree species are used, from massive oaks *Quercus* or larches *Larix* down to relatively small Holly *Ilex aquifolium* or Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, although the latter is rarely used. A tree shrouded in Ivy *Hedera helix* is especially attractive as the Ivy provides additional support and can hide the nest from below. Nests are usually at between 12m and 18m (exceptionally 23m) above the base of the tree. Very few trees can be climbed easily, so we had to experiment with climbing techniques. After several experiments we eventually devised a system that worked quite well. Interlocking aluminium poles were used to raise a weight, with string attached, over an appropriate branch. Above about 36' (11m) the pole became very unstable, which limited our reach. Furthermore, ivy twigs could easily dislodge the weight and frustrate our efforts. Once the weight was over the branch it would rapidly fall. A climbing rope was then attached and pulled over the branch and a wire rope ladder added. When the ladder was over the branch, the rope was tied back safely. The climber, wearing a small harness and trailing a safety line, went up to the nest. At the nest the chick(s) were placed in a bag and lowered to the ringer waiting below. Whilst the chicks were ringed and biometric information gathered, the climber recorded information about the nest – its size and orientation, as well as noting any prey remains. Once the chicks were back in the nest, removal of the climbing gear was usually quite rapid. The adult Buzzards were often absent or quiet, only rarely calling to indicate their concern. See Plates 1-8 (pp. 19-22).

The main period of ringing activity was during June and July. Our aim was to ring the chicks when they were at least four weeks old (just over half grown) in order to take biometrics that would enable us to sex them. The basic ringing information was forwarded to the BTO in the usual way. Other information was used to sex most of the chicks and a paper on this aspect is in preparation.

Table 1 Summary of ringing effort over the study period and recoveries reported for each annual cohort. Actual recovery dates are listed in Table 3.

Year	Broods	Chicks	Recs	Year	Broods	Chicks	Recs
1984	7	12	1	1995	18	36	2
1985	-	-	-	1996	16	28	5
1986	2	4	-	1997	19	40	5
1987	4	10	-	1998	15	27	2
1988	3	7	-	1999	21	34	1
1989	-	-	-	2000	23	31	4
1990	-	-	-	2001	16	27	-
1991	-	-	-	2002	12	16	-
1992	-	-	-	2003	5	8	2
1993	10	21	2	2004	3	6	-
1994	10	17	-				
				Total	322	183	24

The information on nest tree species and heights, as well as nest size and prey remains, are yet to be analysed.

Results

During the period of ringing, 322 nestlings from 182 broods (an average of 1.77 nestlings per brood) were ringed, of which 24 individuals (representing just 7.45%) were subsequently recovered. The ringing sites were well spread over the 75 sq.km study area (Fig. 1) indicating that few nests escaped our attention (usually those that were impossible to climb to or were placed on dead branches). Many nest sites were repeatedly over several years.

We found it useful to classify the recoveries by the age of the birds (sub-adult and adult) and recovery distance (10km or less and greater than 10km) (Table 2 below). Sub-adults are defined as birds in the first two calendar years of life from the date of ringing. While 10km seems a sensible (albeit arbitrary) threshold for distinguishing local movements from longer distance 'dispersal', it is notable that there were in fact no recoveries of sub-adults at all in the range 5 to 22km.

The mean distance moved by the North Somerset Buzzards was 26km (median 5km). Of those moving 10km or less, the mean distance covered between ringing and recovery was 2km (maximum 4km) for those found as sub-adults and 6km (maximum 9km) for those found as adults. The mean direction of the short distance (local) movements was SW (median N) and SE (median E) for sub-adults and adults respectively. Of those moving more than 10km, the mean distance covered between ringing and recovery was

Table 2 Summary of ringing recovery data

Age/distance categories	n	Mean distance (km)	Maximum distance (km)	Mean direction (degrees)	Mean duration (days)	
Sub-adult	≤10km	9	2	4	259 (SW)	327
	>10km	6	81	117	118 (SE)	278
Adult	≤10km	7	6	9	149 (SE)	2,439
	>10km	2	37	46	66 (NE)	3,418

81km (maximum 117km) for those found as sub-adults and 37km (maximum 46km) for those found as adults. The mean direction of the longer distance movements was SE (median E) and NE for sub-adults and adults respectively.

Longer distance recoveries were widely spread (Fig.1), birds being found at the following locations (Table 3): Weston-s-Mare (North Somerset); Tintern (Gwent); Hawkeridge (Wiltshire); Kemply (Herefordshire & Worcestershire); Lechdale (Gloucestershire); Newbury (Berkshire); Ideford (Devon) and Milton Common (Oxfordshire). The maximum distance covered was 117km.

The maximum time elapsed between ringing and recovery was 5,056 days or 13.9 years. GJ28677 was recovered (in Wiltshire) 46km from its nest site near Walton in Gordano and was, almost certainly, a bird that had dispersed and set up a new (distant) breeding territory. Fourteen is a good age for a Buzzard, but falls well short of the maximum recorded age for the species, which currently stands at 25.5 years (BTO, 2013).

An interesting insight provided by the recovery data is how Buzzards meet their end, as nearly all of the recoveries of our Buzzards involved the discovery of dead birds. By far the most common (identifiable) cause of death was ‘collision’, with cars (25%, n= 6), power lines (2) and trains (1). There were also single instances of poisoning, drowning (in a water trough), decapitation, entanglement (in a fence) and persecution (shooting). Seven of the freshly dead or not long dead birds were sub-adults and the other three were adults. Birds that hit power lines, the one found near a railway line and the shot bird were also sub-adults. Three of the road casualties were sub-adult and the other two were adults. The other three (drowned, sick and poisoned) were also adults.

Discussion

Buzzards are described as ‘essentially sedentary’ in Britain and Ireland (Wernham *et al.* 2002), compared with those in Fennoscandia and eastern Europe which mostly migrate in winter in response to adverse weather and low food availability. The median distance moved by Buzzards (derived from c.500 ringing recoveries) is 15km and only three movements to/from the European



Plate 1 Part of the study area near Weston-in-Gordano, with Weston Moor in the foreground. Woodland on the ridge beyond provides good nesting habitat for Common Buzzards *Buteo buteo*. (Photo: Robin Prytherch)

Plate 2 RJP descending the wire rope ladder from a nest whilst Andrew Beattie steadies the ladder. (Photo: Lyndon Roberts)



Plate 3 A brood of three Buzzard chicks. They were lowered from the nest in the bag. After ringing they were raised back up to the nest. (Photo: Lyndon Roberts)



Plate 4 Trainee ringer Emma Smith holds a Buzzard chick which she has just ringed. (Photo: Lyndon Roberts)



Plate 5 *LR holds a Buzzard chick just after ringing and processing it. LR ringed over one third of the 322 Buzzard chicks ringed during the study. (Photo: Emma Smith)*



Plate 6 *A ringed Buzzard chick ready to be returned to the nest. (Photo: Lyndon Roberts)*



Plate 7 Ringed Buzzard chicks safely returned to their nest. (Photo: Lyndon Roberts)



Plate 8 An adult female Buzzard in her territory in the study area, on 8 October, 2008. She is ringed on her right leg – a ring almost certainly fitted as part of our study. She was first seen – and named ‘Fran’ – in the territory on 10 March, 1997. She could have been ringed three or four years earlier in 1993/4, and is still in the territory in early 2013. She could, therefore, be 19 years old now. (Photo: Robin Prytherch)

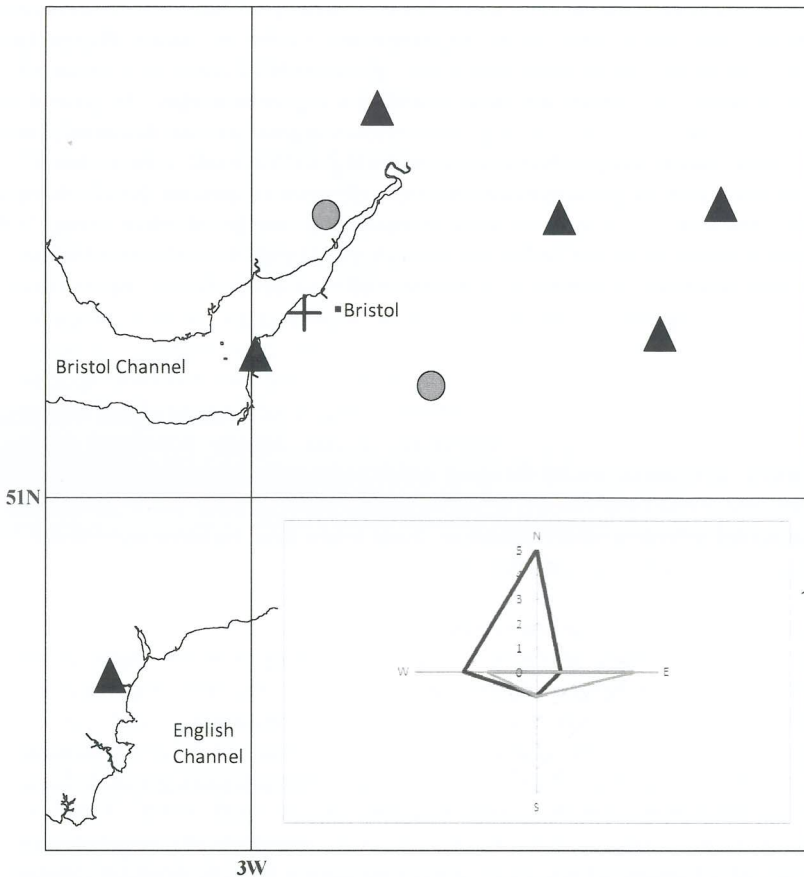


Fig. 2 Distribution of Common Buzzards *Buteo buteo* recoveries. The centre of the study (ringing) area (see Fig. 1) to the west of Bristol is denoted by a plus (+) sign. Sub-adult (first and second year) recoveries over 10 km are denoted as black triangles and adult recoveries as grey circles. The radar diagram (inset) shows the frequency of local recoveries (movements of less than 10 km) for each of the main cardinal points: N (316-45°), E (46-135°), S (136-229°) and W (230-315°); black = sub adult and grey = adults. The map shows that long-distance recoveries (over 10 km) favour an easterly direction although the sample of eight birds is rather small. The radar diagram is based on a sample of 10 sub-adults and seven adults. This indicates a disparity between the age classes for these short distance recoveries, but even here there is a hint that adults favour an easterly direction (four out of the seven recoveries) and is therefore consistent with the main direction taken by long distance recoveries.

mainland have been recorded. It should be noted that there is an inherent bias in ringing recovery data, which arises because nearly all recoveries involve dead birds. The result may be to overstate the extent to which Buzzards disperse, as birds that do so generally settle (temporarily or for the longer term) in suboptimal habitats which are likely to inflict a higher mortality. In general, however, the pattern from ringing recoveries suggests initial dispersal (in autumn) with most birds subsequently returning to the natal area to breed. During a period of range expansion in recent decades (Clements 2000), there has been a tendency for immature birds to move east, into uncolonised areas.

Juvenile dispersal is one of the key factors explaining the stability of avian populations. Without dispersal, colonisation of new areas would never take place and the long-term viability of species populations (across a range of geographical scales) would be threatened. Even for the most sedentary of birds, some element of dispersal is necessary, by virtue of the fact that most species are territorial. As Buzzards are relatively long-lived, young birds must, therefore, seek out unoccupied 'territories' in less densely populated areas further afield in order to secure foraging and breeding opportunities.

According to radio-tracking studies (Walls *et al.* 1999), most juveniles disperse initially over a short distance. Such birds tend to have a relatively large and fragmented range (perhaps reflecting a somewhat nomadic lifestyle) in their first autumn and winter. These birds are so-called 'exiles', destined to wander the local area until an opportunity arises to occupy an existing territory, when an older bird dies, or carve out a new territory. Contrastingly, birds which disperse over a longer distance tend to have a restricted range and are more likely to settle. These are the so-called 'entrepreneurs'. But not all entrepreneurs are successful. Dispersal across unfamiliar terrain involves risks as well as benefits and there is evidence that many entrepreneurs gravitate back towards the natal area when they reach breeding age.

From a 3-year study of radio-tracked juvenile Buzzards in Dorset it was found that 39% foraged within 1 km of the nest during their first winter (Walls & Kenward 1995), although a significant number of these birds were also recorded making brief excursions in August and September before settling again in the natal area. What is apparent from these results is that 'stay at home' birds are generally tolerated by their parents, at least through the first winter period. Of those that do disperse, there is no significant difference between the sexes, although females tend to disperse further than males. Also, Buzzards that disperse earlier tend to settle significantly further from their nests than birds that disperse later (Walls & Kenward 1995).

Further radio-tracking of Dorset Buzzards in early life found that natal dispersal occurs in two waves, the first in autumn and the second in the following spring. Of 73 Buzzards that dispersed in their first autumn, 96% settled within 100 km of their natal nest and movements were more often to the east than to the west (Walls & Kenward 1998). In general, British Buzzards move less between birthplace and breeding place than their conspecifics in mainland Europe (Newton 1979).

Returning to our own study, it should be noted that many of the earlier local recoveries of sub-adult birds occurred at a time when there was still space for them to settle, even if briefly. By contrast, it is evident that in the last few years of the study there was little room for sub-adult birds to establish themselves, due to the very high density of settled adults in the study area, with territory sizes as small as 0.71 sq.km per pair.

To summarise, the results of the North Somerset ringing project generally support what is already known (from other studies) about Buzzard dispersal. Most birds were found to be relatively sedentary, with sixteen of the 24 recoveries being from within the study area itself. Nevertheless, some dispersal is also evident and there was a wide scatter of six birds (four sub-adults and two adults) dispersing up to a distance of 117km from the natal area (Fig.2).

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Antony Gibbs, Avon Wildlife Trust, The Forestry Commission, Lord Wraxall, The National Trust, Stuart Plant, The Miles Estate and other organisations and individuals, especially farmers, who allowed us access over their land. Many ringers and other helpers assisted us during the ringing activities, including: Alistair Gibbs, Andrew Waygood, Bob Coombs, David Warden, Dorian Buffery, Emma Smith, Robin Atkins, Ron Clevely, Warwick White and Wyn Lewis.

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Appendix: details of ringing recoveries.

Dates and ring no.	Place of ringing and recovery and finding circumstance	Dis	Dir	Dur
19/06/84	51:24N 02:39W Barrow Gurney	102	82	88
15/09/84	51:24N 01:19W Newbury, Berkshire			
HW87171	Badly decomposed at roadside			
13/06/93	51:27N 02:49W Wraxall	8	103	3011
10/09/01	51:26N 02:38W Ashton, Bristol			
GF27413	Destroyed: found sick (severe ataxia)			
19/06/93	51:27N 02:41W Abbots Leigh	0	360	165
01/12/93	51:27N 02:41W Abbots Leigh			
GF27419	Dead: road casualty			
19/06/95	51:27N 02:45W Portbury	2	328	650
30/03/97	51:28N 02:46W Clapton in Gordano			
GF54416	Dead: not fresh - bird found			
21/06/95	51:24N 02:43W Flax Bourton	6	23	2152
12/05/01	51:27N 02:41W Lower Failand			
GF54420	Dead: not fresh - bird found			
12/06/96	51:27N 02:49W Walton in Gordano	9	65	1092
09/06/99	51:29N 02:42W M5, nr Portbury			
GF54433	Destroyed: road casualty			
13/06/96	51:27N 02:49W Walton in Gordano	2	360	386
04/07/97	51:28N 02:49W Weston in Gordano			
GF54440	Freshly dead: poor condition			
14/06/96	51:27N 02:43W Failand	58	16	305
15/04/97	51:57N 02:29W Kemply, Hereford & Worcs			
GF54442	Dead: not fresh - road casualty			
14/06/96	51:27N 02:41W Abbots Leigh	117	213	437
25/08/97	50:34N 03:35W Ideford, Devon			
GF54441	Dead: hit power lines			
14/06/96	51:27N 02:43W Failand	5	270	4593
10/01/09	51:27N 02:47W Portbury			
GF54443	Freshly dead - road casualty			
13/06/97	51:24N 02:43W Flax Bourton	2	360	254
22/02/98	51:25N 02:43W Long Ashton			
GJ28668	Freshly dead: hit power lines			
17/06/97	51:27N 02:49W Walton in Gordano	2	32	271

15/03/98 GJ28678	51:28N 02:48W Dead: not fresh	Portishead			
17/06/97	51:27N 02:50W	Walton in Gordano	46	117	5056
21/04/11 GJ28677	51:16N 02:15W Dead: not fresh - bird found	Hawkeridge, Wiltshire			
18/06/97	51:26N 02:41W	Long Ashton	3	231	106
02/10/97 GJ28680	51:25N 02:43W Dead: bird found - nr railway line	Flax Bourton			
20/06/97	51:27N 02:49W	Walton in Gordano	1	270	523
25/11/98 GJ28686	51:27N 02:50W Dead: not fresh - bird found	Walton in Gordano			
19/06/98	51:28N 02:49W	Weston in Gordano	9	101	1426
15/05/02 GF37233	51:27N 02:41W Dead: bird found - tangled in fence	Wraxall			
25/06/98	51:27N 02:46W	Clapton in Gordano	3	212	3075
25/11/06 GF37242	51:26N 02:47W Dead (drowned) - water trough	Nailsea			
22/06/99	51:27N 02:41W	Abbots Leigh	71	68	81
11/09/99 GN08525	51:41N 01:44W Freshly dead: shot	Lechdale, Gloucestershire			
24/06/00	51:27N 02:49W	Portbury	2	270	1164
01/09/03 GN25915	51:28N 02:46W Freshly dead: bird found	Portishead			
01/07/00	51:26N 02:44W	Wraxall	3	90	571
23/01/02 GN25923	51:26N 02:41W Freshly dead: decapitated	Failand			
01/07/00	51:24N 02:41W	Barrow Gurney	23	256	208
25/01/01 GN25926	51:21N 02:59W Freshly dead: bird found	Weston-super-Mare			
03/07/00	51:24N 02:39W	Barrow Gurney	117	73	547
01/01/02 GN25930	51:43N 01:04W Dead: road casualty	Milton Common, Oxon			
21/06/03	51:27N 02:47W	Weston in Gordano	27	15	1779
04/05/08 GN25996	51:41N 02:41W Not fresh: bird found	Tintern, Gwent			
26/06/03	51:27N 02:47W	Weston in Gordano	4	299	14
10/07/03 GN25997	51:28N 02:50W Freshly dead: bird found	Portishead			

A survey of Common Buzzards in ST66 south of Keynsham

Jeff Holmes

Introduction

I have been visiting ST66 regularly since the early 1970s. At that time Common Buzzards *Buteo buteo* were few in numbers, but during the 1980's I noticed some pairs had become established and had started to breed successfully. So, in 1985 I decided to start a detailed study in the southern 60 sq.km section of ST66 to determine the number of territories and breeding success. The study area is centred on Wansdyke District in the Unitary Authority of Bath & North-east Somerset (formerly Avon).

Habitat

The area is predominantly mixed farmland with a few old woods and plenty of small copses and stands of trees, which provide good nesting sites. The land is undulating, free draining, and mainly consists of alkaline and neutral soils. Several established game bird and rough shoots are in the area. Villages of varying sizes are found throughout. Altitude varies from about 10 to just over 200 metres.

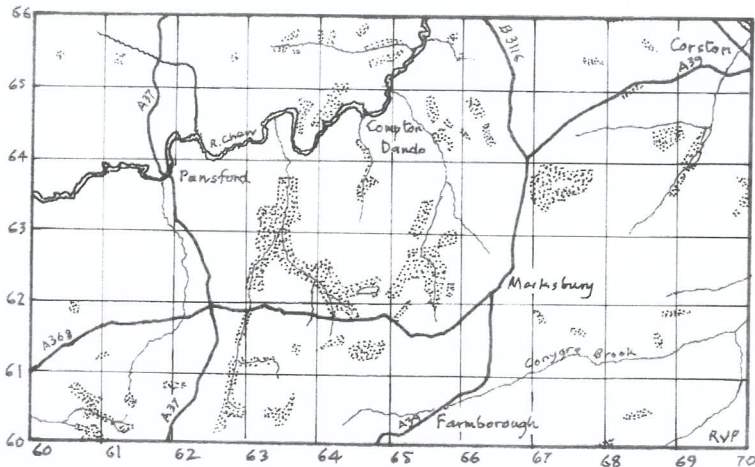


Fig. 1 The 60 sq.km. study area in the southern part of ST66 on a 1km grid. Only the major roads are shown, plus rivers and streams. The stippled areas indicate woodland.

Methods

Pairs occupying territories were searched for during January to April and breeding success checked during July to August. Buzzards were territorial all year and defended their patch vigorously. Bright breezy weather stimulated birds to display and any intruding birds entering an occupied territory were pushed out. From such skirmishes a picture soon builds up of the territory size of individual pairs and these were drawn on a map on a yearly basis.

Successful breeding was established by visiting the territory on at least three occasions when I would try to see or hear young. Although fledged young can be very vocal, it must be stressed that this method of detection is time consuming and it is possible that some young were missed.

Results

The number of territories in the 60 sq.km rose from 32 in 1995 to 56 in 2004 (Fig. 1), the density increasing from 1.9 to 1.07 pairs per sq.km (or 53-93 pairs per 100 sq.km). During the first five years (1995-1999) all territories were checked for breeding results. Successful pairs varied from 17 (out of 32) or 53.1% in 1995 to 24 (out of 34) or 70.6% in 1998. Over the five years the success rate was 61.2% which is very close to the rate of 59.5% recorded in North Somerset (Prytherch 2013). The number of young fledged varied annually between 1.3 (1999) and 1.95 (1997). The average over the five years was 1.5 young fledged per successful pair. Relating this to all pairs (i.e. including those that failed) the average was 0.92 young fledged per pair over the five years (Fig. 1).

During the next five years (2000-2004) a sample of 24 territories were checked each year. Successful pairs varied from 14 (58.3%) in 2000 to 18 (75%) in 2001 and 2004. The number of young fledged varied from 1 in 2003 to 1.67 in 2004 with an average of 1.3 over the five years (figures shown in italics, Table 1).

Discussion

The study clearly showed that the number of territories occupied increased substantially during the ten year period. New territories appeared as some birds moved into previously unoccupied areas (e.g. close to human habitation) or through existing territories becoming smaller. Territory boundaries would often change when a dominant bird in an established pair disappeared, allowing a more marginal pair to expand their own territory.

It is possible that reduced direct persecution and the birds growing tolerance of human disturbance have been major factors contributing to the increase in numbers. It would appear that the maximum density in the study area may have been reached.

Table 1 Number of territories and the breeding results of Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* in a 60 sq. km. study area in ST66 south of Keynsham. Figures in italics are based on a sample of just 24 pairs.

Year	Prs	Density		Breeding results			
		Km ² /pr	Prs/100 km ²	Succ. prs.(%)	Yg. flg.	Yg/pr.	
1995	32	1.90	53	17	(53.1)	25	1.47
1996	32	1.90	53	19	(59.4)	24	1.26
1997	32	1.90	53	21	(65.6)	41	1.95
1997	34	1.77	57	24	(70.6)	36	1.50
1999	40	1.50	67	23	(57.5)	30	1.30
2000	44	1.36	73	14	-	17	1.21
2001	47	1.28	78	18	-	25	1.39
2002	51	1.18	85	15	-	18	1.20
2003	56	1.07	93	17	-	17	1.00
2004	56	1.07	93	18	-	30	1.67

Many individual pairs have been very successful breeders, producing young in every year. It appears that as the population has increased, the productivity has decreased. This could be attributed to the smaller territories providing less food and the occupying pair having to spend more time and energy defending their territory.

I feel that the outlook for Buzzards in the study area is bright at the present time. Many local people and farmers have told me that they enjoy the sight of Buzzards wheeling and calling in the skies above their land.

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Obituary – John Tully 1938-2012

John started his bird watching in 1963, the year in which he married Beryl and they set up home in Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire. Birds were attracted to their balcony with food and thus grew his familiarity with our common garden/woodland species. His profession was teaching, primarily mathematics, but he also enjoyed sports. This interest in numbers was to be of great use to him in his ornithological studies. But first and foremost John was a good teacher – I knew this from the way he talked about his pupils on the long journeys along the motorways to BTO (British Trust for Ornithology) conferences. Ultimately he was an ornithologist (never a twitcher) – a man who wanted to understand the processes at work in the world of birds.



John at Bryneglwys Quarry in June 2004

On moving to Bristol with his family in 1978, he joined the Club (BOC) and in 1979 began one of his finest studies, the Common Birds Census (CBC) of

Blaise Woods. CBC surveys are demanding - ten visits with a map in the breeding season, starting early, mapping everything you see or hear, and deriving from that a knowledge of the territories of every species. It was then the BTO's prime research tool to monitor the process of change. He wrote about it in 1984 and in 1987 examined the trends from five other woodlands and sought to relate them to the weather. His maths came in handy. He loved graphs, as I do, as it allowed so much information to be conveyed so vividly in so little space. He wrote up the first 25 years' of the study in 2004 (*Bristol Orn.* 27: 3-33), and subsequently completed it up to 2011. I have prepared the final eight years' results which are published elsewhere in this issue. This also contains a summary of the full 33 year run of the study (see page 3). There are few, if any, other CBCs that have run for so long.

He naturally became involved with the BTO's National Breeding Atlas for 1988-91 (BTO 1993), during which almost every one of the 400 tetrads of the Avon area was surveyed. He and I prepared a report on that survey; I wrote the text, he created the complex series of maps that we published in 1992 (*Atlas of Breeding Birds in Avon*). From 1991 to 1996 he was Treasurer of the BOC.

During the Atlas work breeding Peregrines returned to the Avon Gorge for the first time since 1947. John at once became involved in trying to ensure their success by baiting an area about 1500m from the eyrie with grain, which attracted flocks of Feral Pigeons. The object was to prevent the Peregrines hunting the birds belonging to Pigeon fanciers in south Bristol who for good reason were unhappy about the Peregrines in the gorge. He was involved in the daily watch on the nest that the BOC maintained for several years, and he began the process of monitoring the prey (*Bristol Orn.* 22: 3-15). This has since led to some startling discoveries about the diet of urban Peregrines and their use of a city's lights to attack migrants after dark.

Bristol's Feral Pigeons then became the focus of his attention. They are the world's most widespread and familiar species, and as a result few serious bird watchers or ornithologists had ever bothered to study them. Coverage in the BTO's 1988-91 Atlas was abysmal, and there was little knowledge of their numbers or what controlled them. John demonstrated that, at least in this region, it took 52 people to support one Feral Pigeon (*Avon Bird Report* 1998: 139-144). He then followed this up in 2005 with a marvellous study of dovecotes in the region, and the remarkable conclusion that in 1780 the population of Feral Pigeons which existed in dovecotes was only slightly larger than that which exist in towns today (*Avon Bird Report* 2005: 171-175). The former, of course, were 'farmed' as a source of food.

Shortly after the Atlas was finished the BTO decided to try a new monitoring system for common birds, the Breeding Birds Survey (BBS), and John took this up with enthusiasm. It was much simpler than CBC, and, crucially, randomised. This created the opportunity for precise measurement of change, rather than of population density as such. From 1994 he built up support for the scheme in the region so that since then we have counted a million birds, and cover annually over 10% of the surface area of the region. He summarised

the annual results every year in October and circulated them to all observers and to the local authorities concerned. He ran an annual training morning to keep the supply of observers growing. As an offshoot in 2001 when the countryside was closed by Foot and Mouth, we sought to do a total BBS of the 113 squares in the city of Bristol, and this was finally published in 2010 (*Bristol Orn.* 30: 3-59).

In 1996 the BTO launched the new Garden Bird Watch (GBW) scheme - which asks observers to pay £15 a year to help administer the scheme. The uptake exceeded everyone's expectation so that there are now as many members of GBW as there are in the BTO. The scheme however, did not ask about birds nesting in gardens and John thought that urban bird populations were far greater than was believed at the time. So he got a BTO grant to print cards that were sent to some 5000 members of GBW asking about the birds that bred in their gardens. He and I ploughed through these, worked out all the details, and concluded, in an article in *Bird Study*, which received massive help from the then Director of the BTO, Jeremy Greenwood, that urban areas held far greater breeding populations than previously thought.

During this time John joined the Regional Network Committee of the BTO - a body meeting annually to look at the problems that regional representatives were having, and he later became its chairman. This involved on occasion some delicate handling of personalities, at which John was naturally very adept. In 2005 John was awarded the BTO's Jubilee medal for "Committed devotion to the Trust"

Urban birds led naturally to House Sparrows and the great declines that had been noticed. John carried out two excellently detailed surveys of one kilometre squares close to his home, demonstrating the extraordinary differences in population between areas that were physically very close. He knew the individual address of each sparrow pair, and this must have meant hours of early morning walking the streets, notebook in hand (*Avon Bird Report* 2000: 181-182, 2001: 153). Ken Livingstone, no less, took up the cudgels on behalf of the humble 'spadger' and hosted a conference in London, to which were summoned all the sparrow experts in the land. That led to an international structure of Sparrow research, with which John kept in touch.

Thus John played a huge role not just in local ornithology, but on a wider scale. He gave freely of his advice and knowledge to any who asked, and he was someone whom everyone who met him grew to love and admire. Working closely with John, as I have done for over twenty years, has been a joy and an inspiration. In particular his courage in the past two years living with cancer, but refusing to give up or be sorry for himself, has been an example to all those who know him. We have all been enhanced by what he did and what he was.

Richard Bland

Club Activities 2011 and 2012

Now in its 47th year the Club continues into 2013 following the pattern set by its founders with a full programme of field trips, weekends and holidays and a winter series of indoor meetings with a wide range of speakers and subjects. It was the pattern for the period under review here. A full committee with additional seconded members worked hard to ensure that the programme was planned and delivered and that the monthly production of *Bird News* continued. The club is rightfully proud that it still publishes a monthly magazine including a comprehensive list of bird sightings. The work put in by contributors and the committee members who edit, proof read, format and distribute it is greatly appreciated. The programme of field visits and holidays relies on volunteers to lead them. They give their time and expertise freely which is greatly appreciated by everyone.

The club and its members are not immune to the financial situation in the country where prices are rising and incomes generally flat. The number of members has held up very well seeing only a small decline to around 620 today. Inevitably the subscription had to be increased in 2012 but it is planned to hold it at this level for several years. Postal charges increased significantly in 2012 but more members are receiving *Bird News* electronically which has helped to control the costs of its distribution. Programme planning has taken into account rising petrol costs which meant a focus on sites nearer to home. Foreign holidays have become more expensive and harder to fill but UK holidays and weekends away attracted good support. A new innovation was one night away weekend breaks which are suitable for working people and enabled visits to be made to sites which are just too far away for a one day field visit or which justify spending more time.

2011 was the last year of the field work for the BTO Atlas Project in which a good number of club members were involved. The atlas is due to be published in August 2013. A club member, Richard Bland, produced a Bird Atlas covering Avon in 2012. Members also participated in other surveys including the Breeding Birds Survey which was organised locally by club member John Tully who died in April 2012 and is sadly missed (see page 31). The BTO launched a winter Thrushes survey in autumn 2012 in which club members are participating.

The club ran Peregrine watches in June, both years, to advertise the club and show this iconic species to the public on the Clifton Downs. The Avon Gorge pair continues to be very successful fledging five young in 2011 and three in 2012. Ed Drewitt colour ringed the chicks both years enabling their progress to be monitored. Ed gained a national audience with his appearances on the BBC *Springwatch* series with pieces on the Peregrines nesting on St. John's Church in Bath. Charles Stapleton did a stalwart job organising the Peregrine watch and they would not work without the mass of volunteers who are greatly appreciated. Other public events which the Club attended were the LCE spring fair at Chew

Valley Lake and the Bristol Festival of Nature which is the largest natural history event in the south west.

The regular Tuesday walks form an important part of the programme, being especially suitable for people who are retired or who work shifts. The programme continued every week throughout the period under review. It takes really bad weather to deter the stalwarts from venturing out but as the latter half of 2012 was exceptionally wet there were challenges to the programme delivery. Peter Holbrook has run the programme for several years and recognition of his work was given at the AGM in December 2012.

2011

The year started with those annual fixtures on the programme, New Years' Day at Slimbridge WWT and a coach trip to the Exe Estuary. Both enjoyed good support from the members though keeping track of them at Slimbridge was a challenge for the leader. A Red-breasted Goose provided a highlight of the Exe trip.

Cheddar Reservoir is always good in winter and it turned up Red-crested Pochards and Scaup this time with a huge number of Coot. The new Avon Wildlife Trust reserve at Portbury Wharf continued to develop and repeated visits tracked the arrival of new species and increased bird counts as the habitat starts to mature. The provision of hides made it a more comfortable experience.

The first weekend away was a visit to West Cornwall in February and it was speculative as to what would be found at that time of year. It turned out to be very worthwhile though the "twitches" were less successful. A weekend in Norfolk in May is always good and so it proved. Seeing a Red-necked Phalarope in summer plumage there was special and Nightjars and Quail made for a memorable visit.

Gordano Valley is close to Bristol and is a regular venue for the Club. A walk in March revealed a good mix of woodland birds including a male Redstart and the valley is home to a high density of Common Buzzards which were much in evidence. Sand Martins on migration flew over.

In May sixteen members went to southern Poland including a visit into the Tatra Mountains. Some bird species were familiar to UK birders but the highlights for many were the birds whose normal range is restricted to mainland Europe such as Lesser Spotted Eagle, Nutcracker, Icterine, Great Reed, and Barred Warblers and Citrine Wagtail. Montagu's Harriers flying over were a test for people's identification skills.

Evening meetings in the summer were popular with visits to Ham Wall, Stock Hill and Marshfield. The targets were crepuscular and nocturnal birds but a wide range of species was seen on these visits. The Bitterns have become well-established at Ham Wall and they were seen along with the expected Barn Owls. Good numbers of Corn Buntings were found at Marshfield which was

encouraging. A Yellow Wagtail in breeding plumage seen there sparked discussion on their breeding status locally.

A wet visit to Ottmoor, Oxfordshire, in July was perhaps a prelude of things to come but Turtle Dove and Hobby provided highlights. In August an evening visit was made to Slimbridge WWT after the crowds had gone home and it enabled the members to walk out to the river bank, pursued by inquisitive cattle, to see what was hiding at the waters' edge. There the challenge was picking out the Curlew Sandpiper amongst the other waders. A Northern Wheatear was an early autumn migrant passing through. The skies darkened and the heavens opened soaking the assembled company making it memorable for reasons other than the birds.

As summer turned into autumn the focus of field trips turned to migration and wader species which meant visits to Portland, Brean Down and Severnside. It was rounded off with the migration watch at several points along the coast of Avon and Somerset. All the locations reported low numbers of migrants again which generated much debate and a decision was made to give it a miss in 2012. Weather conditions on the day make a big difference to numbers passing through and something that cannot be planned.

An autumn holiday in late October to Islay meant shorter days but winter migrants passing through added to the interest of the resident species including Golden Eagle. The large flocks of Barnacle Geese made a spectacular sight. Dolphins, Seals and Otters provided a diversion from the birding as did the local distilleries.

The final one night away weekend was a visit to South Devon which was a change from the usual day trip to Torbay and made for a more relaxing time with the opportunity to check out Steps Bridge, Slapton Ley and Hope Cove. A visit to see the Cirl Buntings at Broadsands was fruitful.

The year was rounded out with a visit to West Sedgemoor and Greylake which produced the usual spectacular display of wintering birds.

At the AGM in December Gordon Youdale, Susan Sayers and Richard Belson were re-elected as chairman, treasurer and secretary respectively. Richard Brown retired from the committee and was thanked for his long service to the club. The Stanley Crick award was given to an outstanding younger birder, Alex Rhodes. He also appeared in the Christmas special edition of *Springwatch* on the BBC.

2012

A winter weekend away around the Poole area provided two contrasting habitats with heathland in the Wareham Forest and sea-watching on Poole harbour. Dartford Warbler and Crossbill were the main attractions on the heathland and sea-watching revealed Red-necked Grebes and Great Northern Divers amongst the more usual species. A wintering Sandwich Tern at Middle Beach created interest.

On the road to Steart Point signs of the work starting to build a new wetland habitat and nature reserve for the WWT were evident. At the car park a Little Owl in the trees was pointed out by the leader before the group headed off to the existing hides at the point where the Dunlin and Knot gave an exciting aerial display in the bright sunshine. A Short-eared Owl gave prolonged close views as it quartered the fields on the way back creating much excitement amongst the watchers.

Mid-Wales is a regular weekend destination and this year the visit was brought forward to late February. Glorious weather helped to make it very successful. Red Kites are a given here but seeing Hen Harrier was a bonus. A trip to the coast found 25 Red-throated Divers and a Glossy Ibis that had been ringed in 2007 on the Coto Doñana in Spain.

The Exe estuary coach trip was a little later this year being in March but good numbers of wintering birds were seen. Common Scoters, Slavonian Grebes and Eider were still present. An American Wigeon that had been there all winter was found. A Peregrine Falcon disturbed the birds on Exminster Marshes.

A visit to the Forest of Dean in March was successful though it was early for the arrival of summer migrants but overwintering Brambling were still present. Several of the local specialities found included Goshawk, Hawfinch and Crossbill.

A field trip to Warmley Park on the outskirts of the city in April showed that there are surprisingly rural locations close by which are worth a visit and it can easily be reached by bus. For some it was the first Swallow of the year.

Following a talk about the Newport Wetlands RSPB reserve at the indoor meeting in March, a visit was made in April on a very stormy day. It is a mark of the hardiness of members that three people turned up. The larger birds braved the weather but passerines were hard to find. The hardy trio eventually sought shelter in the café.

The Somerset levels around Ham Wall and Shapwick Heath have matured as a nature reserve which warrants regular visits. A trip in May saw Bitterns very much in evidence with one chasing another across the reed beds. A Great White Egret vied for attention. Seeing Marsh Harriers raised hopes that they may have bred this year. Hobbies chased insects over Noah's Pool and a remarkable number of Whitethroats were seen.

Huge numbers of Swifts and hirundines were seen on an evening visit to Frampton pools in May. Highlights of the evening were listening to Nightingales calling and seeing a Tawny Owl perching conveniently on a TV aerial as the light faded.

The decision was taken to have the club holiday in the UK this year which proved to be an excellent choice with a week in Northumberland in May and superb weather throughout helped considerably. It included trips out to Holy Island and Coquet Island. A Club member who lives in the area led the holiday where local knowledge and contacts proved their worth and resulted in an impressive trip bird list.

The second half of the year turned out to be exceptionally wet; by year end the rain totals made it the second wettest year on record according to the Meteorological Office. The bad weather impacted the club programme. Chew Valley Lake was full and spilling water into the overflow channel from July onwards which meant a very poor wader passage this year and the regular autumn club visit to the reservoir found fewer birds than usual.

What is normally a pleasant summer walk through Velvet Bottom on the Mendips became a muddy battle. Redstarts were found in the woods and Ravens, Buzzards and Skylarks flew over the open moors. Swifts were seen already heading south. There is some evidence that migration started earlier this year due to the cold wet conditions.

The mid-week walks which were associated with Margaret Searle were revived with a visit to Langford Lakes and Normanton Down where a visit was made to the Stone Curlew project.

A break in the poor weather made the trek along the sea wall at Clevedon in September very pleasant and productive. One Dunlin stood out from the flock with a noticeably straight bill. After much debate and consultation of reference books it was decided that it was the American race, *hudsonia*.

Another one night away weekend trip to Farlington Marsh and Pagham harbour was popular with a good variety of water and woodland birds seen. A swimming Water Vole in Pagham harbour was the best sighting of the weekend for many.

Although it was a longer drive and days are short in November, twenty two members met at Aylesbeare Common, later going on to the Axe Estuary in Devon. Stonechats provided a diversion but the main objective at Aylesbeare, Dartford Warbler, was eventually located. The Axe estuary was new to many but it was an excellent location with many waders and duck species.

The final field trip of the year had a change of itinerary as the RSPB reserve at Greylake was flooded though views were obtained from the safety of the car park. The RSPB reserve at West Sedgemoor was closed as the approach roads were under water. Ham Wall provided a good alternative and the main track was dry.

The AGM in December saw changes to the Committee. Gordon Youdale stood down as Chairman with Ed Drewitt being elected to that post. Susan Sayers and Richard Belson were re-elected as treasurer and secretary respectively. Charles Stapleton retired from the committee. Both Gordon and Charles have given many years of valuable service to the club for which they are sincerely thanked. Louise Bailey and Emma Davis were elected to the committee. The Stanley Crick award was given to Louise Bailey whose interest and skill have progressed so much over the year.

Indoor Meetings 2011 and 2012

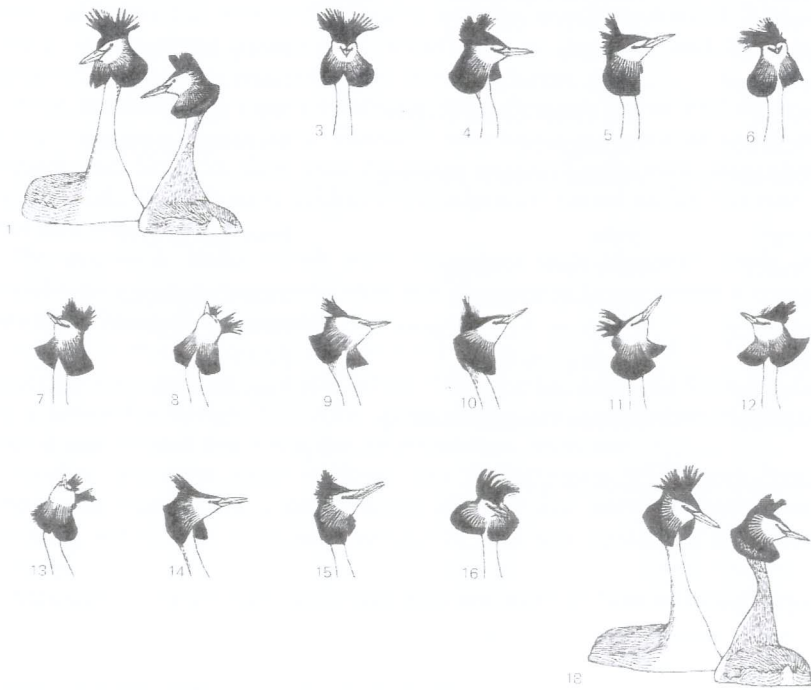
20 January	An evening with Mike Dilger	
17 February	Members' evening	
17 March	Bulgaria	Philip Mugridge
15 September	Poole Harbour	Neil Gartshore
20 October	The Great Crane Project	Amy King
17 November	Madagascar	Malcolm Sainsbury
15 December	Annual General Meeting	
19 January	India	Peter Basterfield
16 February	Members' evening	
15 March	Newport wetlands	Tom Dalrymple
20 September	Focus on the Falklands	Jackie Garner
18 October	Birding topics	Ed Drewitt*
15 November	Oman and Libya	Paul Bowden
13 December	Annual General Meeting	

*replacement for the booked speaker

Richard Belson
Honorary Secretary

Bristol Ornithology

Bristol Ornithology is the journal of the Bristol Ornithological Club and exists to publish the results of studies undertaken by members of the Club. Both papers and short notes are welcome – the Editors will be delighted to discuss ideas for future submissions at any time. The range of subjects covered by the journal is wide, reflecting the varied interests of Club members over the years. Many articles have reported results of studies in the Bristol region, but there is no fixed restriction limiting studies to the Club's recording area. More general behavioural studies are also welcome.



Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* - head shaking ceremony: while the right-hand bird completes a single Slow Head-turn, the other carries out a burst of High Head-wagging (head only shown). The small numbers on the figures indicate frames of cine-film at 24 frames per second. Both movements lasted about three-quarters of a second.

Extracted from – Simmons K.E.L. (1975) Further studies on Great Crested Grebes. 1. Courtship. *Bristol Orn.* 8: 89-107.

