

Avon Region News



The newsletter for BTO members and volunteers in Avon

Winter 2023

Welcome

Welcome to the winter newsletter for BTO members and volunteers in the Avon area.

Thank you to everyone who supports BTO through membership, volunteering for survey work, ringing, nest recording, Garden BirdWatch or entering bird records into BirdTrack. Your help and support are really appreciated.

Nationally, we have reached **18,000** BTO members and have **40,000** volunteers registered for our surveys. In Avon, we have **342** members and **787** non-members for our surveys. We have 674 Garden Birdwatch participants and **103** active Breeding Bird Survey volunteers.

In terms of Garden BirdWatch participants, here is a breakdown of the active participants from the local area:

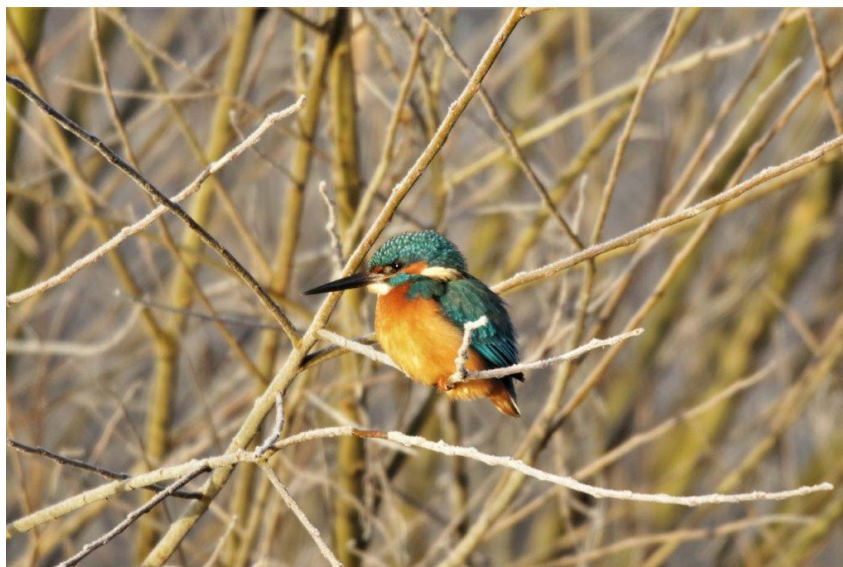
- **Bath and Northeast Somerset:** 53
- **North Somerset:** 52
- **Bristol:** 46
- **South Gloucestershire:** 45

Of course, We would love to have more new members and volunteers! We hope that this newsletter inspires you to do so!

Gordon Youdale, BTO Regional Representative, Avon

BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey and Waterways Breeding Bird Survey Summary 2022

This was our most successful year to date, with a total of **248** squares surveyed, and **74,509** birds recorded. This was definitely a relief after the difficulties of the previous couple of years.



This terrific achievement was only possible thanks to your efforts. Nationally, the Breeding Bird Survey is a vital conservation tool. It measures the changes in our breeding bird populations, particularly the more common bird species of town and countryside, which can otherwise be easily overlooked.

With the considerable additional help of our 'Local' squares, we are also able to gain a much better understanding of our own local bird populations, producing trends for **30** bird species in Avon in 2022.

2022 RESULTS

A total of **248** squares, including **166** for the national BTO scheme, and the **four** WBBS 'stretches' were surveyed. This compares to **225** squares surveyed in 2021 (which includes **three** WBBS) of which **151** were national squares. Overall, about 14% of the Avon BTO Region was surveyed and **74,509** individuals of **120** bird species were recorded (compared to **72,446** individuals of **115** species in 2021) at the rate of **107** birds per hour of surveying. This is the highest level of coverage since the survey began in 1994. The previous highest number of squares was **242** in 2018. However, the number of birds recorded was well below the **79,224** recorded in 2017. The number of birds recorded per hour of surveying was also the lowest recorded in the survey.

Table 1 - Breakdown of squares surveyed.

Unitary Authority	Squares Surveyed	% of UA Area Surveyed	Numbers Recorded	% of Total birds Recorded
Bath & NE Somerset	48	14%	14929	20.0%
City of Bristol	30	26%	9254	12.4%
North Somerset	66	17%	19933	26.7%
South Gloucestershire	74	17%	20932	28.1%
Somerset (BTO Avon)	30	9%	9461	12.7%
	248		74509	

Percentage changes in species recorded in BBS in the BTO Avon Region in 2022

Species	% Change 2021- 22	% Change 2019-21	% Change 2012 -22
Mallard	13	-14	-12
Pheasant	-27	17	-11
Swift	-38	3	-72
Feral Pigeon	14	-8	21
Wood Pigeon	1	5	0
Collared Dove	-4	-5	-33
Magpie	-6	0	-15
Jackdaw	-4	9	7
Rook	1	7	-41
Carrion Crow	-9	-1	-19
Blue Tit	-2	-17	-22
Great Tit	-14	-15	-34
Skylark	-2	-11	-16
Swallow	1	-27	-58
House Martin	-8	-44	-63
Long-tailed Tit	-2	-30	-20
Chiffchaff	22	15	3
Blackcap	-8	-6	2
Whitethroat	-15	22	9
Wren	4	-1	13
Starling	-23	12	-35
Song Thrush	-12	13	-22
Blackbird	-8	8	-16
Robin	-12	18	1
House Sparrow	-9	-3	-3
Dunnock	-6	-8	-23
Chaffinch	-12	-19	-63
Greenfinch	11	-12	-49
Goldfinch	-6	-24	6
Yellowhammer	-11	-17	-47

Out of the **30** species that are assessed above, **22** show a decrease compared to **2021**, although that decrease is **5%** or less for five of the species.

Mallard records an increase of **13%** substantially reversing the decline of **14%** in 2021.

In 2021, Blue Tit, Great Tit and Long-tailed Tit all experienced significant declines (**-17%**, **-15%** and **-30%** respectively). In 2022, both Blue Tit and Long-tailed Tit show a further decline of **2%** and while this is not statistically significant, it does add to the succession of poor seasons for these common species. The BTO's national Breeding Bird Survey results for England show a decline of **5%** for Blue Tit, but an increase of **7%** for Long-tailed Tit. However, the



Blue Tit. Image credit: Edmund Fellowes/BTO

notable result is a **14%** decline for Great Tit, which follows the decline of **15%** posted last year – here the national results are rather more positive showing a decline of just **3%**.

Swift. Image credit: Graham Catley/BTO



The migratory and aerial feeding Swifts and hirundines are again a cause for concern, with a decline of **38%** recorded for Swift (a **28%** decline in the results for England), which has now declined by **72%** in the region in the past 10 years. Swallow recorded a small increase of **1%** following on from the massive decrease of **27%** in 2021, while House Martin recorded a decrease of **8%** following the decrease of **44%** in 2021, and these figures result in huge declines of **58%** and **63%** respectively over the past 10 years.

Among the migrant warblers, Chiffchaff continues to romp ahead, posting an increase of **22%** following the **15%** increase of 2021. However, in a reversal of the Chiffchaff figures, Whitethroat posted a decrease of **15%** after the encouraging increase of **22%** in 2021. Blackcap posted a further statistically insignificant decrease of **2%** but is still marginally ahead by **2%** over the past ten 10.

Starling continues its unhappy way, with a decrease of **23%**. However, this does follow an increase of **12%** in 2021. Blackbird shows a decline of **8%**, following an increase of **8%** in 2021, and now records a decline of **16%** over the past 10 years. Rather more unusually, Robin also posted a significant decrease of **12%**.

Among the finches, Chaffinch again recorded a significant decrease of **12%**, and is now **63%** down over the past 10 years. The main reason for this is likely to be the disease Trichomonosis. However, Greenfinch, which has also been devastated by the disease, managed to post a significant increase of **11%**. This was the first increase posted for the species since a marginal **1%** in 2015. The species has experienced a **49%** decline over the past 10 years. Goldfinch, which recorded a **24%** decrease in 2021, posted a more modest decrease of **6%** (the national Breeding Bird Survey for England recorded a marginal increase of **2%**). This common species is still **6%** up over the past 10 years, but it remains to be seen whether it too has fallen prey to Trichomonosis.

Yellowhammer posts a decrease of **11%**, and now records a decline of **47%** over the past 10 years. However, the numbers of this species recorded in the survey are at the bottom of the range for making such estimates (**217** recorded in 2022) and these figures should be treated with caution. There were not really significant/unexpected changes in the other species with the Corvids only experiencing minor changes.

Species recorded in the Survey ranked by abundance 2022

The table below lists the **20** most common species recorded in the survey in 2022, ranked in order of abundance and their comparable positions in 2012. Please note that coverage was a little lower in 2012, with **186** squares surveyed and **65,510** birds recorded (**248** squares and **74,509** birds recorded in 2022).

2022 Rank	2012 Rank	Species	2022 Count	2012 Count
1	1	Woodpigeon	8922	7063
2	3	Jackdaw	6405	4379
3	2	Blackbird	5111	5125
4	5	Carrion Crow	5117	4089
5	4	House Sparrow	4866	4303
6	6	Wren	4514	3117
7	7	Robin	3200	2499
8	13	Rook	2447	1765
9	9	Starling	2431	2212
10	8	Blue Tit	2375	2248
11	17	Goldfinch	2337	1539
12	18	Chiffchaff	1933	1348
13	14	Magpie	1833	1732
14	16	Herring Gull	1769	1567
15	-	Feral Pigeon	1597	1116
16	19	Blackcap	1533	1257
17	12	Lesser Black-backed Gull	1475	1941
18	15	Great Tit	1413	1569
19	20	Dunnock	1134	1143
20	11	Swallow	1067	1970
-	10	Chaffinch	941	1980

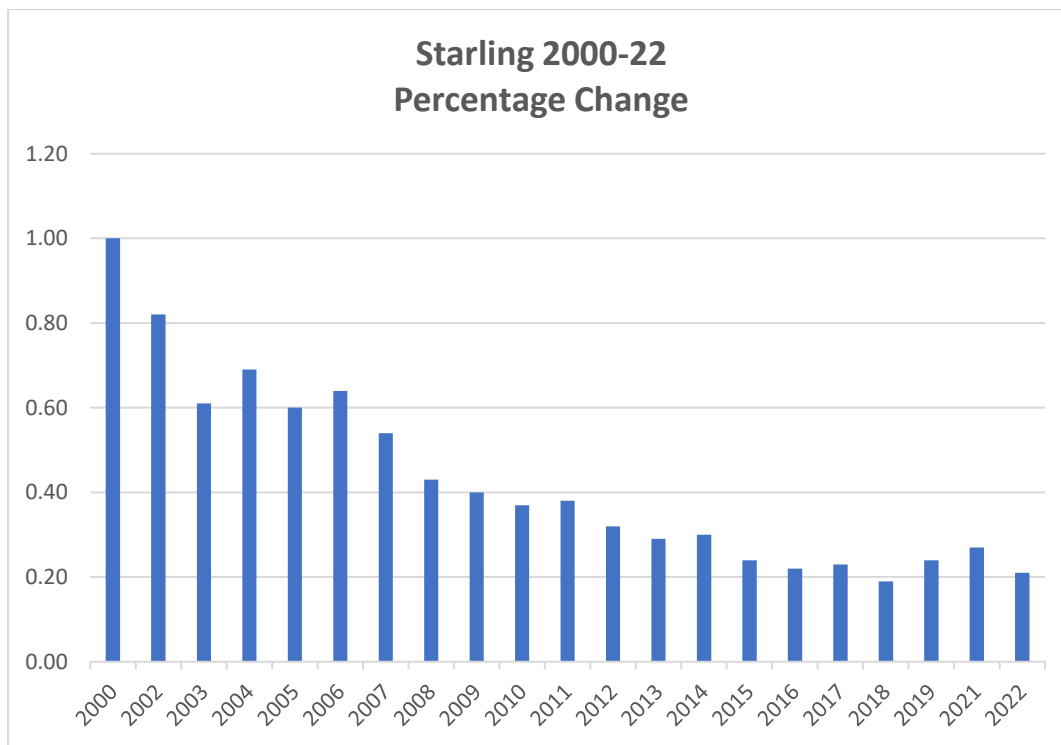
Starling and House Sparrow 2000–22

These two common species have so far experienced contrasting fortunes in the twenty first century.

Starling



Starling is still a common species in the Avon Region – ranked ninth in abundance in BBS in 2022 (unchanged from 2012) – see Table 4 above. However, it was noted as the most abundant species in both 1994 (the first BS season) and 2000 but has been subject to a continued decline ever since, the causes of which are unclear.



BBS percentage change for Starling 2000-22 in the Avon BTO Region
(no data is shown for 2001 and 2020, as only a restricted survey was possible in those years)

The graph above shows the shocking decline of Starling in numbers since 2000. The decline was most abrupt in the first decade of the century, and has since continued at a more modest rate, but with little sign of any recovery.

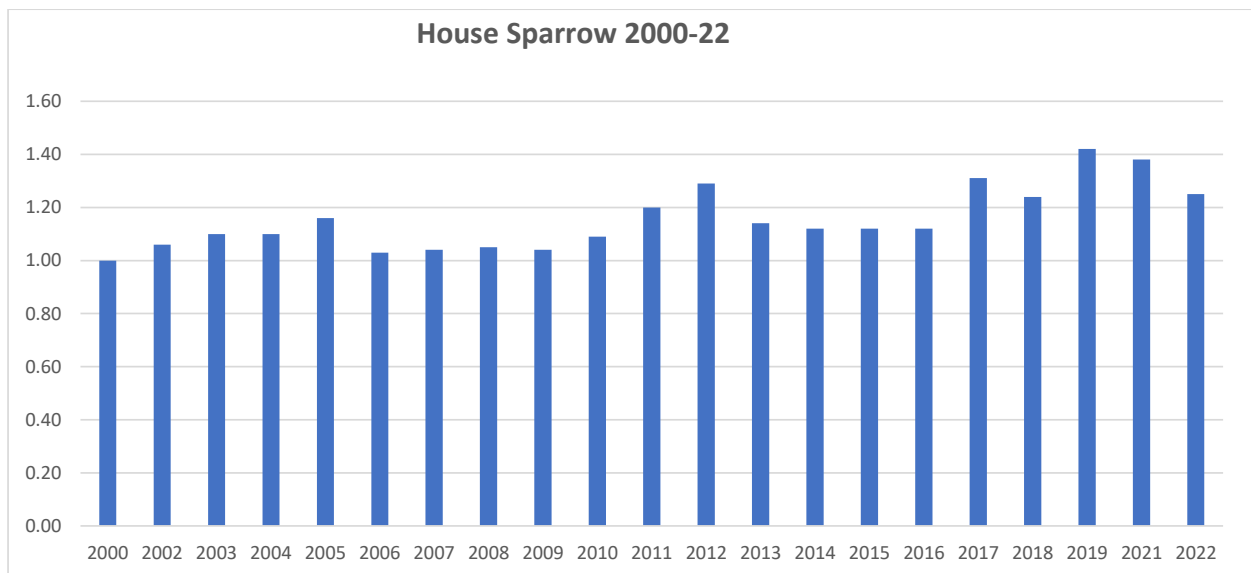
In all, there has been a decline in the Avon Region of **79%** since 2000 (and **90%** since the launch of the survey in 1994). Nationally, the BTO have calculated a decline of **62%** in England in the period 1995-2021. As ever, there is much regional variation and in the southwest England region of which Avon forms a part, the decline for the same period was calculated as **72%**.

House Sparrow

House Sparrow is another common species that has suffered declines at a national level, but unlike Starling, this has not been the case in Avon. Since 2000, the species has experienced a **21%** increase in the Avon Breeding Bird Survey – see the graph below.



House Sparrow. Image credit: Edmund Fellowes/BTO



**BBS percentage change for House Sparrow 2000-22 in the Avon BTO Region
(no data is shown for 2001 and 2020 as only a restricted survey was possible in those years)**

Although like any small passerine, it will have some bad and some good years, often weather related, the species has been in effect stable in Avon since 2000. It was the fifth most abundant species in BBS in 2022, and the eighth most abundant in 2000. In the Avon BBS, it has increased by **30%** since the start of the survey in 1994. However, nationally, it has experienced a **17%** decline in England in the period 1995 to 2021.

As with Starling, there are a lot of regional variation, but the southwest England Region (which includes Avon) is the only one which has a positive figure for the period, with a **10%** increase. At the other extreme, in the London Region, a decline of **60%** was recorded in the same period.

Many thanks to the 122 observers who made the time and effort to participate in the Survey - the level of coverage achieved would be impossible, and our knowledge of the changing fortunes of many of our common species much poorer, without your help.

If you are interested, contact Dave Stoddard dave.stoddard@tiscail.co.uk or Peter Bryant who is taking over as BBS organiser for the 2023 season at peterbryant31@gmail.com

Many thanks again to Dave Stoddard for his full report, which you can get a copy of by emailing him at dave.stoddard@tiscail.co.uk

David has decided to step down from his role as BBS organiser after 11 years, and I would like to thank David for his excellent work. Without him, I'm sure we would not have had such a thorough report into our breeding birds in Avon.

David will still be the organiser for the Avon BTO Winter Bird Survey as usual.

Peter Bryant has agreed to take over the BBS work from David, and I'm sure he will do an excellent job. (Peter's email address is stated above)

Avon Winter Bird Survey 2021–2022 Summary

Winter landscape. Image credit: Hugh Tooby



After a rather interrupted but still useful season in 2020–21, the Winter Survey bounced back well in 2021–22, with a record coverage of **156** squares surveyed (127 squares in 2020–21). The previous best was **148** squares in 2018–19.

The winter of 2021–22 was the sixth season of the Avon Winter Bird Survey (AWBS). The aim of the survey is to

monitor the changing fortunes of the common birds that spend the winter months in our area.

The BTO's Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), with additional local coverage, has been well established in the Avon BTO Region (the old County of Avon plus the western Mendips and the area around Cheddar) since 1994. This has provided valuable data on the common breeding birds of our area. However, it was clear that we did not have the same level of knowledge of our overwintering bird populations. At present, there is no national winter survey equivalent to BBS, and this survey is intended to fill that gap in the Avon BTO Region.

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

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.

RESULTS

It was another mild and rather dry winter with no significant cold spells - in fact, it was the fifth warmest winter in Bristol in **132** years of data (Bristol Naturalist News, April 2022). A total of **156** squares were surveyed, compared to **127** in 2020–21 and **145** in 2019–20. The area surveyed represents approximately **9.6%** of the region. Surveyed squares are spread reasonably evenly across the region, (**Table 1** below) but further coverage particularly in BaNES (Bath and Northeast Somerset) and in the Somerset section would be welcome. A total of **67,690** birds of **102** species were recorded in the **156** squares at the rate of **146** birds per hour.

Table 1 - Breakdown of squares surveyed

Unitary Authority	Squares Surveyed	% of UA Area Surveyed	Birds Recorded	% of Total birds Recorded
Bath & NE Somerset	23	6.5%	11221	16.6%
North Somerset	38	9.6%	18465	27.3%
S. Gloucestershire	46	10.5%	17570	26.0%
City of Bristol	29	25.2%	10238	15.1%
Somerset (BTO Avon)	20	6.0%	10196	15.0%
	156		67690	

Percentage changes in species recorded in AWBS in the BTO Avon Region in the winter of 2021-22, compared to the winter of 2020-21 with change figures recorded in the previous AWBS season for comparison.

Species	% Change 20/21 - 21/22	% Change 19/20 - 20/21	Species	% Change 20/21 - 21/22	% Change 19/20 - 20/21
Mallard	-6%	-32%	Wren	12%	3%
Feral Pigeon	16%	1%	Starling	-26%	19%
Woodpigeon	28%	-32%	Redwing	1%	32%
Black-headed Gull	15%	-19%	Blackbird	4%	14%
Common Gull	64%	125%	Fieldfare	-8%	-28%
Herring Gull	0%	-5%	Robin	10%	2%
Lesser B-backed Gull	-17%	-16%	House Sparrow	-13%	22%
Magpie	7%	-2%	Duncock	-9%	26%
Jackdaw	2%	4%	Pied Wagtail	-8%	-6%
Rook	-15%	33%	Meadow Pipit	-10%	-5%
Carrion Crow	15%	0	Chaffinch	-36%	30%
Blue Tit	10%	-22%	Linnet	-9%	-8%
Great Tit	5%	-8%	Goldfinch	9%	12%
Long-tailed Tit	47 %	-46%			

The percentage change figures above are based on the **117** squares that were surveyed by the same observer in both 2020-21 and 2021-22. These figures are calculated by taking the higher count from the visits to each square and comparing the results over the two seasons.

The species for which an attempt has been made to measure change are all common, widespread species where at least **200** individuals were recorded in the 'best counts' for each season.

These figures should of course be treated with a degree of caution, particularly where samples are relatively small. However, differences of more than **5%** are likely to reflect a genuine change, while low single digit figures are unlikely to reflect any real change e.g. Jackdaw at **2%**.



Unlike BBS, we have included change figures for some gull species - they are excluded in BBS as so many are assumed to be non-breeders. Many will have been recorded in flocks on farmland, which are likely to be very mobile and results are likely to be volatile. Both Black-headed Gull and Common Gull are winter visitors in our region and the former was the fifth most common species recorded in the survey. Herring Gull counts seem fairly stable. In the case of Lesser Black-backed Gull, a substantial part of the breeding population migrates south to the Iberian Peninsula and Northwest Africa but the number remaining to over-winter in Avon appears to be declining with successive declines of **16%** and **17%**. It will be interesting to see over time whether any useful patterns emerge for the various gull species.

Both Blue Tit and Great Tit show increases with a significant **10%** for Blue Tit, which contrasts with the poor performance in 2020-21. Likewise, Long-tailed Tit shows a huge increase of **47%**, cancelling out the equally large decline of **46%** recorded in the previous winter. The BBS in 2021 recorded a decline of **30%** for the period 2019–21.

Reasonable numbers of Long-tailed Tit are recorded in the surveys and the reasons for this extreme volatility are unclear at present. Chaffinch showed a decline of **36%** after an increase of **30%** was noted in the previous winter. While the species has experienced significant declines in BBS over the past 10 years, many of our winter birds will be migrants and mild weather on the continent may have led many birds to limit their migration.

Species recorded in the survey ranked by abundance.

The table below lists the **20** most common species recorded in the survey, ranked in order of abundance, and their comparable positions in AWBS 2020-21 and BBS in 2021.

AWBS 21-22 Rank	Species	AWBS Count	AWBS 20-21 Rank	2021 BBS Rank
1	Starling	8551	1	8
2	Woodpigeon	7776	3	1
3	Jackdaw	6084	2	2
4	Carrion Crow	4540	4	4
5	Black-headed Gull	3590	5	-
6	Redwing	3055	6	-
7	Herring Gull	2620	10	13
8	House Sparrow	2546	7	5

9	Blackbird	2438	8	3
10	Robin	2369	9	7
11	Blue Tit	2146	12	11
12	Feral Pigeon	2120	11	17
13	Magpie	1861	14	12
14	Rook	1830	13	9
15	Goldfinch	1742	15	10
16	Fieldfare	1266	16	-
17	Great Tit	1241	19	14
18	Mallard	1117	18	-
19	Chaffinch	818	17	20
20	Common Gull	816	20	-
-	Wren	695	-	6
-	Lesser Black-backed Gull	342	-	15
-	Blackcap	9	-	16
-	Chiffchaff	23	-	18
-	Duncock	531	-	19



Starling remains the most abundant AWBS species. Predominantly summer visitors such as Chiffchaff disappear from the 'Top 20', while the winter thrushes and Black-headed Gulls are present in significant numbers. Wren is as usual absent from this list (ranked sixth in the BBS list), but as with some of our other resident species, this is presumably because many are detected by song in the breeding season, and it is thus an issue of detectability rather than reflecting any change in numbers.

COMPARISON WITH BBS RESULTS

Of the **156** squares surveyed in the survey, **141** were surveyed by the same observer as part of the BBS in 2021 and it is of interest to compare the results.

Even for many of our resident species, there can be major population changes, as some breeding birds move further south for the winter and are replaced to a lesser or greater extent by birds migrating from the north and east. Just because a species is present in both periods, this does not mean that they are the same birds. The prime example as in previous years is Starling, which in BBS has declined by some **29%** locally in the past 10 years, but which shows an increase of **385%** in AWBS compared to BBS in 2021, and this is even though 2021 was a good year for the species in BBS, with a **12%** increase recorded for 2019–21.

Another reason for differences is that many passerine species are identified by song in the BBS survey and may be rather more difficult to detect in the winter months: Wren, Dunnock and Song Thrush may all be examples.

The other difference will be that BBS counts (at least in theory) exclude juveniles, whereas AWBS figures will include first winter birds, and this may reflect the success or otherwise of the previous breeding season.

The table below gives a selection of the differences between AWBS and the 2021 BBS for those **141** squares where observer, location and route all remain unchanged. Species which are predominantly summer migrants, such as Barn Swallow and the warblers, and predominantly winter visitors such as Black-headed Gull and Redwing, are excluded from the table.

Comparison of results for squares surveyed by both BBS and AWBS

Species	Best Counts in AWBS 2021-2022	Best Counts in BBS 2021	AWBS compared to BBS 2021
Mallard	588	352	+67%
Pheasant	171	359	-52%
Feral Pigeon	1134	670	+69%
Woodpigeon	4641	3200	+45%
Collared Dove	246	270	-9%
Herring Gull	1766	727	+143%
Lesser Black-back Gull	243	667	-64%
Magpie	982	781	+24%
Jackdaw	3720	2407	+55%
Rook	1182	918	+29%
Carrion Crow	2628	2140	+23%
Blue Tit	1179	971	+21%
Great Tit	728	691	+5%
Skylark	198	274	-28%
Long-tailed Tit	478	172	+178%
Wren	428	1515	-72%
Starling	6130	1265	+385%
Song Thrush	182	377	-52%
Blackbird	1382	1972	-30%
Robin	1376	1448	-5%
House Sparrow	1500	2069	-27%
Dunnock	364	500	-27%
Chaffinch	596	433	+38%
Greenfinch	170	208	-18%
Linnet	273	360	-24%
Goldfinch	1130	990	+14%

As mentioned above, Starling is the most conspicuous out-performer compared to BBS. Woodpigeon follows the general increase noted in Table above.

Blue Tit, Great Tit and Long-tailed Tit all record increases over BBS 2021, with Long-tailed Tit showing a huge increase of **178%**. Long-tailed Tit is particularly interesting, as in the previous winter a big and very encouraging increase of **122%** was noted over BBS, but in the following 2021 BBS season, a **30%** decrease was noted for the period 2019-21. It will be very interesting to see if this pattern is repeated in the 2022 BBS season.

Chaffinch also shows a large increase of **38%** over BBS despite the decline noted in Table 4 above, but this may be caused by winter migrants. Greenfinch, which has suffered large declines in the past 20 years, shows a decrease of **18%** compared to BBS 2021.

An enormous and very sincere thank you to all observers who have made the effort to contribute to this survey, and add to our understanding of Avon's birds.

Many thanks again to Dave Stoddard for his full report, which you can get a copy of by emailing him at dave.stoddard@tiscali.co.uk



BTO Garden Birdwatch

Help with research into garden wildlife by joining our Garden BirdWatch community.

- BTO has run the year-round Garden BirdWatch scheme since 1995, and thousands of people across the UK contribute their sightings each week.
 - Gardens are really important habitats for wildlife, but we need to understand how and why populations of garden birds and other wildlife are changing, and how we can help them.
-
- You can help by keeping a simple list and telling us which species visit each week, helping us learn about how wildlife uses the food, shelter, and other resources in our gardens.
 -

- The more we can understand about how birds and animals use our gardens, the more we can improve our cities, towns, villages, and individual gardens for wildlife.

Starling. Image credit: Liz Cutting/BTO



This survey is free to join and is very widely supported in the region, with **674** BTO members or non-members within Avon taking part in this important survey, for more information contact gbw@bto.org or visit the website: <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/gbw>.

Heronries Census



As top predators in the freshwater food chain, Grey Heron are able to thrive only when their potential prey are also present in good numbers. Monitoring their breeding population sizes can therefore provide a valuable indicator of the health of the freshwater environment.

We have been annually counting Grey Heron nests since 1928, making it the longest running bird survey of a single species in the world, and we would like all records for this species within Avon. We have new tutorials on how to use the online Heronries Census at: <http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/heronries-census>

The BTO Heronries Census collects nest counts of Grey Heron from as many heronries as possible in the UK each year. The main species

covered is Grey Heron, but Little Egret is fully included, as are more scarce species of colonial herons such as Cattle Egret (which nested in the UK for the first time in 2008). Nest counts of Cormorant are also collected, especially where they are nesting alongside Grey Heron e. Data are shared with county recorders, and for rare species with the [Rare Breeding Birds Panel](https://rbbp.org.uk/) (<https://rbbp.org.uk/>).

Within Avon, we counted **at nine sites holding 81 occupied Grey Heron nests and two Cormorants nests**, we have not received any counts from two other known sites, Uphill Grange Copse & Wood and Gordano Valley NNR. If anyone has details of these sites, please let me know.

Thank you very much to all of you that took place in the Heronries Census across our Region this year.

The person who was counting both the Cleeve and the Chew Valley Heronries is unable to do so; so we are looking for a help in recording these site in 2024. If you are interested in surveying these heronries, please could you please contact Eve Tigwell at (eve.tigwell@icloud.com) if you can help as these are important long standing sites.

You can find the vacant sites map here: <https://app.bto.org/colonies/public/vacant-sites.jsp>

Alternatively, please contact herons@bto.org if you are keen to help.

Breeding Waders of Wet Meadows 2022

Thank you very much to everyone who took part in the Breeding Waders of Wet Meadows (BWWM) Survey this year, we really appreciate it.

The purpose of this survey was to assess the importance of both existing and new wet grassland, and other breeding wader habitats in England.

In total, nationally **2238** individual sites were reported as covered, consisting of **518** sites with Lapwing Plots, **71** with Agri-environment management. Then a further **1249** BWWM sites, which had been covered in 1982 and/or 2002. In Avon, we were allocated **21** sites of which **62%** were surveyed. The analysis is now underway, and we expect to have summary results available in the New Year?

Volunteers needed to count winter gulls (WinGS)



The last survey took place from 2003/04–2005/06 and concluded that the UK and near-shore coastal waters supported over 3.8 million wintering gulls at that time. Population trends from the BTO/RSPB/JNCC Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) for gull species present in the UK in winter are variable and updated information is necessary to identify potential Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for gulls.



Herring Gull. Image credit: Liz Cutting/BTO

The primary goal of the survey is to produce new population estimates for wintering gulls in the UK and assess how populations have changed since the last survey in 2003/04–2005/06. The results of this survey will also aid us in assessing the impact of the ongoing outbreak of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) on gull populations and enable us to identify sites where the 1% threshold for the population is exceeded to thus recommend potential protected area designation for the species. Surveys will be conducted in mid-winter 2023/24 and 2024/25. Further information will be collected in autumn 2024 which will mean that we can compare numbers across seasons for the first time.

The Winter Gull Survey (WinGS) will run over the winters of 2023/24 and 2024/25 and volunteers are needed to cover survey sites in the UK, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. The volunteers will visit roost sites used by wintering gulls, counting all gull species but with particular focus on six key species: Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Mediterranean Gull and Great Black-backed Gull.

BTO is seeking volunteer birdwatchers who are confident that they can:

- Count large numbers of birds accurately – roosts can number thousands of individuals and birds gather in late afternoon as the light fades.
- Identify the six most abundant UK gull species: Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Mediterranean Gull, and Great Black-backed Gull.

Potential volunteers can find out more about the survey, the availability of survey sites near them, and how to sign up by visiting the project webpage: <https://www.bto.org/wings>

Woodcock Survey

Up to 2013, data showed that counts for Woodcock were relatively stable until 2008. The number of roding (displaying) males then declined steadily until 2015. In 2016, there was a substantial increase, giving the highest counts since 2008 - but numbers then reduced in 2017, stabilised, and declined again in 2020. In 2021 and again in 2022, numbers increased slightly, but the overall trend is for decline. We wait the latest results for the 2023 survey.

BirdTrack

BirdTrack (www.birdtrack.net) is a free and convenient way of storing your bird records either on the BirdTrack website or via the smartphone app. The system lets you keep up to date with what others are seeing, view the latest trends, and contribute your data to BTO science.

Remember, you can record a wide range of other taxa – butterflies, orchids, amphibians & reptiles, dragonflies, and mammals.

You can find out more about the app here:

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

Training

Keep an eye out for new online training courses on the BTO website, we run courses on various subjects throughout the year. There are courses on bird of prey identification taking place in January.

You can find out more about these here:

<https://www.bto.org/develop-your-skills/training-courses>

Alternatively, please contact: training@bto.org for more information.



Sparrowhawk. Image credit: Edmund Fellowes/BTO

Bird Ringing

In Avon, we have bird ringers operating in various sites within the area. However, our main site is at Chew Valley Lake (Herriot's Green), where we run annual training courses.

Avon Ringing Totals for 2022 were 7009 birds ringed across the region The Avon ringing report, which was produced by Mike Bailey, can be found in the Avon Bird Report 2022. For more details see later in the newsletter.

The online ringing report was recently updated to include information for 2022:

<https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/ringing/publications/online-ringing-reports>

NOTE: you can select your county and extract information on numbers of each species ringed in your county. By clicking on the Swallow icon at the end of the line, you can see interesting recoveries relating to your county.

Avon Bird Report



It's out, and members of either Bristol Naturalists' Society or Bristol Ornithological Club (BOC) should have received their copies.

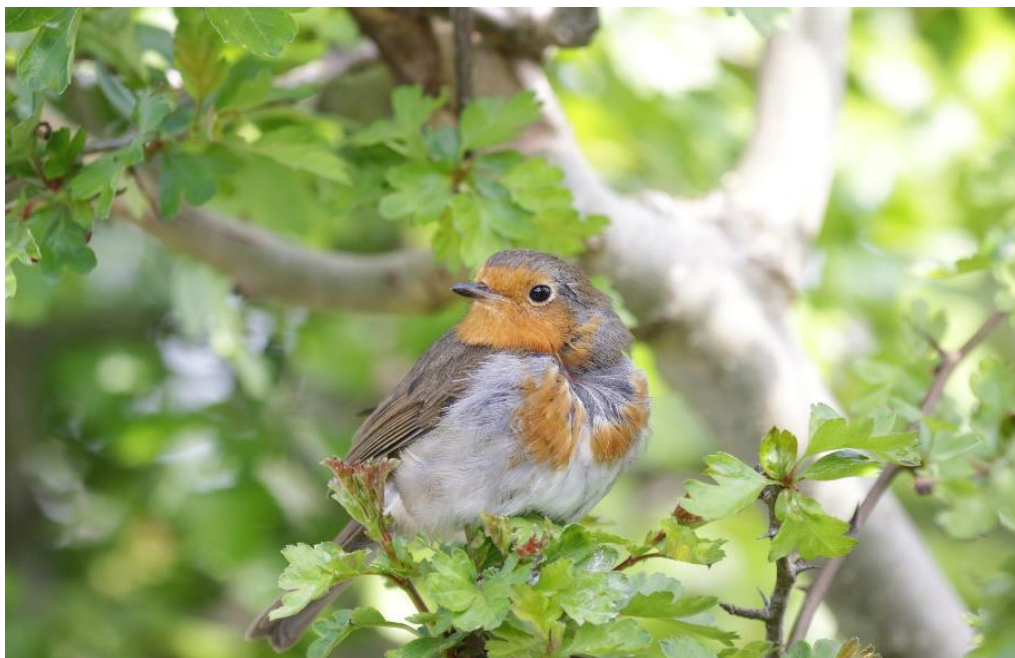
Copies of the current report and most preceding years are available. For details, contact Dr.H.E.Rose via email at bktlgodwit@gmail.com

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

There is 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/
Sevenside Birds	http://www.sevensidebirds.co.uk/
Blagdon Lake Birds	http://blagdonlakebirds.com/
Newton St. Loe Birding	https://newton-st-loe-birding.blogspot.com/
Oldbury Power Station	http://www.opsbirding.co.uk/



May I wish you a very Happy Christmas
and
thank you for your continued support in 2024

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WBBS Local Organiser/ Rupert Higgins	email: rupert@wessexco.co.uk
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GBW Ambassador / Jane Cumming	email: kittiwake.co.uk

Twitter: @AVONBTO @_BTO

Facebook: BTO Avon Group

Instagram: @btobirds

Website: www.bto.org

Photographs: Gordon Youdale, Brian Todd, Liz Cutting, Edmund Fellowes, Allan Drewitt, Hugh Tooby/BTO

Sign up for BTO enews and hear more about BTO!

BTO enews: <https://www.bto.org/community/news/e-newsletter>

Science enews <https://www.bto.org/our-science/enews>