



BTO AVON NEWS

Introduction and thank you

Welcome to the Autumn/Winter 2025 newsletter for BTO members and volunteers in Avon and my first newsletter as Regional Representative. I have the privilege of succeeding Gordon Youdale as the Avon BTO Regional Representative. Thank you to Gordon for all the work that he has done on behalf of the BTO as Regional Representative. I know that the staff at the BTO are very grateful.

I have lived in Bristol for 35 years having come here to study Chemistry at the University of Bristol. I stayed to complete teacher training, worked in a number of Bristol and South Gloucestershire schools and have been a Headteacher for the last 15 years. I have contributed to the Breeding Bird Survey, Garden Birdwatch and the Avon Winter Bird Survey for the last 15 years as well as non-annual surveys such as the Rookery and Heronries surveys.

With the very dry weather we have had this summer, the reservoir levels have been below 50% and this in turn has attracted a lot of different species, especially during migration. I have not been able to get to Chew Valley Lake to see the White-tailed Eagle but did manage to get some good views of the Buff-breasted Sandpiper (a 'life tick' for me).

We would like to thank you very much for your support, it is really important to us. In this newsletter you will find locally relevant information and updates on a range of surveys. There is also information about our Youth work. Additionally, you can find out how to get involved in your local bird club, if you are not already.

J Ayell

The Winter Bird Survey



Winter scene: Mike Toms/BTO

Avon Winter Bird Survey (2025/26)

The BTO has recently launched a UK-wide Winter Bird Survey (the first since the English Winter Survey, 2018/19). Dave Stoddard and Peter Bryant are working together to manage this. BBS surveyors have been contacted directly; here is BTO's web page that contains further information with a call for further volunteers: <https://www.bto.org/get-involved/volunteer/projects/winter-bird-survey>

There will be a requirement to do up to four visits (minimum of two visits) between September and February during daylight hours (avoiding the hour after dawn and hour before dusk), with visits to be done at least three weeks apart. Here are the windows for the visits:

- **Visit 1:** 15 September until 31 October
- **Visit 2:** 1 December until 31 December
- **Visit 3:** 1 January until 31 January
- **Visit 4:** 1 February until 28 February

Winter can be a challenging time for fieldwork with shorter daylight hours and cold and often harsh weather making it trickier to fit in visits. It can also be very rewarding with the chance of finding wintering finch and thrush flocks. With good numbers of Common Crossbills around, perhaps you'll be lucky enough to find some in the forests. It might be that you find no birds in some squares and that's just as important too!

Dave has advised 'local' Avon Winter Bird Surveyors that the local scheme will operate in the same way as it has in previous years (starting in November).

Peter Bryant (peterbryant31@gmail.com)

The Wetland Bird Survey



Shoveler: Allan Drewitt/BTO

Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) coverage across our area continues to be excellent, with all major sites covered: a huge thank you to all involved. There is always scope to increase coverage of minor sites: even data from the local pond with a couple of moorhens is valuable, as every bit of data helps the statisticians at Thetford refine the models that they use to estimate the populations of widespread but thinly scattered species.

At the other end of the scale, WeBS data are used by Natural England to establish whether nationally important sites are in favourable condition. Numbers of some key species at Chew Valley Lake, the site I count, dropped alarmingly over the last couple of years. Even Tufted Duck and Coot, two species whose rise had seemed inexorable, were badly affected. These declines are the most obvious symptom of a complex series of environmental changes, the most important of which are probably shifting weather patterns which combine with changing agricultural practices in the catchment to increase nutrient levels. This has knock-on impacts on populations of plants, invertebrates, fish and, ultimately, birds. Identifying the issues involved is hard enough, solving them is even harder. Bristol Water, Natural England and the Environment Agency are trying to resolve the problems, however, a reminder that the information that we all work so hard to collect can lead to benefits in the real world. Thankfully, 2025 has seen a marked recovery in bird numbers at Chew. **Rupert Higgins, WeBS Local Organiser (Avon area)**

WeBS covers a variety of sites, from small urban ponds to large reservoirs and coastal sites. So, it's a survey that suits both beginner and experienced birders! You can find the vacant sectors map [here](#).¹

Time/ skill needed

- One visit per month on the Priority Core Count date, which falls on a Sunday. (If you are ever unable to visit your sector on the Priority date, not to worry, please get in touch at webs@bto.org)
- Able to identify the water birds that regularly occur at your allocated WeBS sector:

[Find out more about the Wetland Bird Survey](#)²

BTO Garden BirdWatch



Chaffinch: Liz Cutting/BTO

It is **FREE** to take part in BTO Garden BirdWatch (GBW), and you can do so throughout the year. As well as recording the bird species that you see over the course of the week in your garden, you can also submit records of a variety of other taxa, such as mammals and butterflies. You can sign up for the survey [here](#)³ and explore GBW data from your local area [here](#).⁴

There is also an option to support BTO Garden BirdWatch by becoming a 'member' of the scheme. GBW members receive the excellent [Bird Table magazine](#)⁵ four times a year.

As the new Avon GBW ambassador, I had a good introductory meeting with outgoing and incoming Avon Regional Reps, (Gordon Youdale and Jonathan Angell) and the Avon BBS/WBBS co-ordinator (Peter Bryant).

I have Introduced myself to South Gloucestershire Council's Green Infrastructure and Nature Recovery Programme Manager and she is keen to collaborate on optimising local and regional engagement in GBW and raising awareness about other BTO projects and I expect that, in due course, she will introduce me to her colleagues in other councils that are part of the Avon area.

Time/ skill needed

- As much time as you like, but a minimum of 20 minutes per week is recommended.
- Can identify common birds by sight.

[Find out more about BTO Garden BirdWatch](#)⁶

The Heronries Census



Little Egret: Liz Cutting/BTO

Thank you very much to everyone who has taken part in the Heronries Census during 2025, it is very much appreciated. The Avon 2025 census went well, with some good counts.

These were (Apparently Occupied Nests of Grey Heron unless otherwise stated):

- Newton Park, Corston: 4
- Cleeve Wood: 20
- Denny Island: 23; 4 Little Egret; 23 Cattle Egret (the first time they've been recorded nesting here!)
- Blagdon Lake: 3
- East Wood, Broom Hill, Brislington: 19
- Prior Park Gardens / Widcombe Manor: 8
- The Folly, Pill / Ham Green: 14
- Gordano Valley: 0
- Lady's Wood, near Gate: 0

There are two other sites on the list; one of which is confidential, so is never reported. The other is Uphill Grange Copse & Wood, Weston-super-Mare (ST320582). I have checked this site a couple of times myself and have not found any signs of herons nesting. It would be useful if this could be checked again; if the counts are negative for more than two years, then the site can be deemed to be extinct and removed from the list.

We are always looking for more volunteers to take part in the survey. The methodology is fairly simple, and you can take part in this survey in early spring prior to other surveys taking place. You can find out where there are vacant sites [here](#).⁷

Time/ skill needed

- Each visit requires 10 minutes to one hour excluding travel time
- Two or three visits between March and May
- Suitable for beginners - identify herons/ Cormorants and count occupied nests

[Find out more about the Heronries Census](#)¹³

Breeding Bird Survey / Waterways Breeding Bird Survey

Thank you very much to everyone who took part in the BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey and/or Waterways Breeding Bird Survey in 2025. It is very much appreciated.

The results of the 2025 surveys conducted between April and the end of June are now in. Overall, 217 one-*km* squares were surveyed which is comparable with last year's survey. I have only just started the data analysis, but more than 100 species of bird were recorded across the region. In addition, 780 individual mammals were reported. Many thanks to all the c140 surveyors - this is an important piece of citizen science that will influence planning at the highest levels.

If you are interested in taking on a BBS square or stretch in 2026, here is some more information for you. BBS squares and WBBS stretches are randomly selected, in order to try to prevent bias in recording. To survey a square or stretch, you will need to be able to identify the bird species that are typically found in that square or stretch by sight, song and call.

Peter Bryant will do his best to match you with a square or stretch that is not only close to where you live, but also appropriate for your birding ability.

If you would like to find out where there are vacant BBS squares near you, take a look at [this interactive map](#).⁸ You can find a similar map for vacant WBBS stretches [here](#).⁹

Time/ skill needed

- Undertake three site visits between April and June- a recce and two morning visits, along with data entry. This is roughly seven or eight hours per year for a single square.
- Able to identify UK breeding birds by sight, song and call that are typically found on your BBS square or WBBS stretch.

[Find out more about the Breeding Bird Survey](#)¹⁰

[Find out more about the Waterways Breeding Bird Survey](#)¹¹

BTO Youth events

Three young birdwatchers, including one from Bristol, have raised and donated over £1,000 to a charity close to their hearts, after completing a Welsh cycling tour.



After meeting on a Youth Camp in Pembrokeshire in 2024, organised by the BTO, the nature-loving teens became firm friends and now regularly meet up to go birding. With a shared love of birds and the open road, Finn, Rowan, and Jonathan decided to say a big thank you to BTO by planning and completing a sponsored five-day cycle ride from St David's to Rhayader, via Eryri National Park, in August.

On the trio's JustGiving page, they posted:

"We were treated to great weather (the majority of the time!), fabulous views and amazing wildlife" and they kept a detailed list of the birds seen along the route, with highlights including sightings of Osprey, Goshawk, Red Kite and Chough, among others.

After completing the 336 kilometre (209 miles) long journey, Jonathan said, "If anyone else wants to have fun and help nature at the same time, I would say to just go for it. This trip gave us the opportunity to make lifelong memories as well as experience some of the most beautiful landscapes in the UK, all on a pretty low budget, and I hope that this proves to other young people that they can have adventures like this in nature themselves, regardless of age or money."

If you know someone who might benefit from any BTO Youth opportunities, then why not send them our way! They can also be notified of our events by joining our [Youth Newsletter mailing list](#).¹²

This autumn, we have the fantastic **Natures Recovery in Dorset and Beyond** conference run in collaboration with [Bournemouth University](#)¹³ and looking ahead to next year, we are pleased to say that our Youth in Nature Summit will be returning to the [David Attenborough Building](#)¹⁴ over the weekend of the 21-22 February 2026!

[Find out more about BTO Youth events](#).¹⁵

BTO South West conference

The BTO regions of Somerset, Devon and Cornwall have come together to organise a BTO SW Conference. BTO members from Avon are more than welcome! More details can be found [here](#).



Find out about your local Bird Club

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

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/>

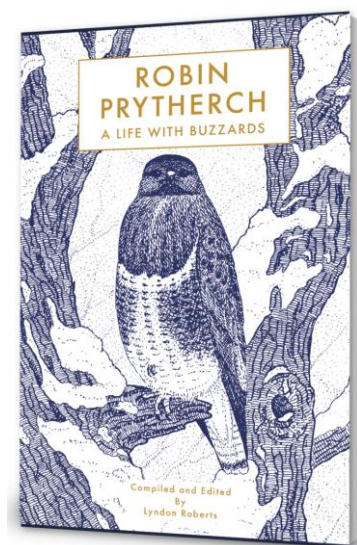
Blagdon Lake Birds <http://blagdonlakebirds.com/>

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

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

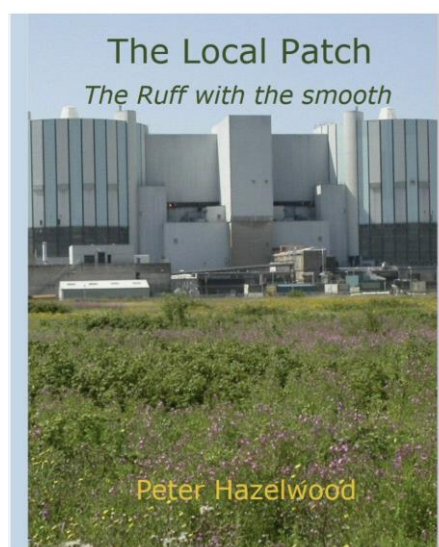
Local Bird Watching Books

A Life with Buzzards – Robin Prytherch



As many of you will know Robin Prytherch spent a huge amount of time studying Buzzards in this area. His drawings of individual buzzards have been collated together in a book which is available here: [Robin Prytherch: A Life with Buzzards – Bristol Books CIC](#)

The Local Patch – Peter Hazelwood



Peter Hazelwood blogs about the birds and other nature sightings at [Oldbury Power Station](#) and has written an account of his "patch". The book is available on [eBay](#) or at [Oldbury Community Shop](#)

BTO Avon Contact details:

Name: Avon Regional Representative **Email:** jonangell71@outlook.com

Name: Avon WeBS Local Organiser **Email:** rupert@wessexeco.co.uk

Name: Avon Winter Gull Survey Organiser **Email:** jonangell71@outlook.com

Name: Avon BBS Regional Organiser **Email:** peterbryant31@gmail.com

Name: Avon WBBS Regional Organiser **Email:** davestoddard@tiscali.co.uk

Name: Avon Heronries Census Regional Organiser **Email:** eve.tigwell@icloud.com

Name: Avon Woodcock Survey Organiser **Email:** jonangell71@outlook.com

Name: Avon GBW Ambassador **Email:** dhavercroft@outlook.com

BTO on social media

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/The.BTO>

Instagram: @btobirds

Bluesky: @btobirds.bsky.social

BTO e-newsletters

Sign up for BTO e-newsletters to stay up to date with the latest news and events

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

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

Full page links

¹ **WeBS vacant sector map:**

<https://app.bto.org/websonline/sites/vacant/vacant-sites.jsp#lon=-4.5263672&lat=54.8006849&zoom=5>

² **Find out more about the Wetland Bird Survey:** <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/wetland-bird-survey>

³ **Sign up for GBW:** <https://www.bto.org/get-involved/volunteer/projects/gbw/join-gbw>

⁴ **Explore Garden BirdWatch data:** <https://www.bto.org/get-involved/volunteer/projects/gbw/results>

⁵ **Bird Table Magazine:** <https://www.bto.org/our-work/science/publications/magazines/bird-table#:~:text=Bird%20Table%20is%20our%20quarterly,unusual%20observations%20and%20interesting%20behaviour.>

⁶ **Find out more about Garden BirdWatch:** <https://www.bto.org/get-involved/volunteer/projects/gbw>

⁷ **Heronries Census vacant squares map:** <https://app.bto.org/colonies/public/vacant-sites.jsp>

⁸ **BBS vacant squares map:** <https://app.bto.org/bbs/public/request-square.jsp>

⁹ **WBBS vacant stretches map:** <https://app.bto.org/bbs/public/request-square.jsp?s=WBBS>

¹⁰ **Find out more about the Breeding Bird Survey:** <https://www.bto.org/get-involved/volunteer/projects/bbs>

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- ¹¹ **Find out more about the Waterways Breeding Bird Survey:** <https://www.bto.org/get-involved/volunteer/projects/waterways-breeding-bird-survey>
- ¹² **Youth newsletter mailing list:** <https://www.bto.org/our-work/youth/e-news>
- ¹³ **Bournemouth University:** <https://www.bournemouth.ac.uk/>
- ¹⁴ **David Attenborough building:** <https://www.cambridgeconservation.org/about/the-david-attenborough-building/>
- ¹⁵ **Find out more about BTO Youth events:** <https://www.bto.org/our-work/youth/events-training>