



Blackbird: Liz Cutting / BTO

BTO AVON NEWS

Introduction

Welcome to the Winter / Spring 2026 BTO Avon Newsletter!

In this edition there is some information regarding how bird records and data are used in the local area as well as updates on a number of surveys including the new Birds in Greenspaces survey and the next Bird Atlas 2027-2031.

One of the attractions of participating in regular surveys is the knowledge that the data that is collected is used for a number of purposes. To understand more about how bird records in Avon are used Daphne Havercroft, BTO Garden Birdwatch Ambassador, Peter Bryant, BTO Breeding Bird Survey organiser and I met with Tim Corner, manager of Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre (BRERC). The centre is based at Blaise Castle and is part of Bristol City Council Culture and Museums and like many sections of local authority is continually having to fight for financial resources. BRERC was one of the first Environmental Record Centres set up in 1974. It has service level agreements with several agencies including the Environment Agency, Wessex Water, the Forest of Avon and South Gloucestershire County Council. The service level agreements cover 40% of the income for the Centre and the remaining 60% comes from commissioned surveys.

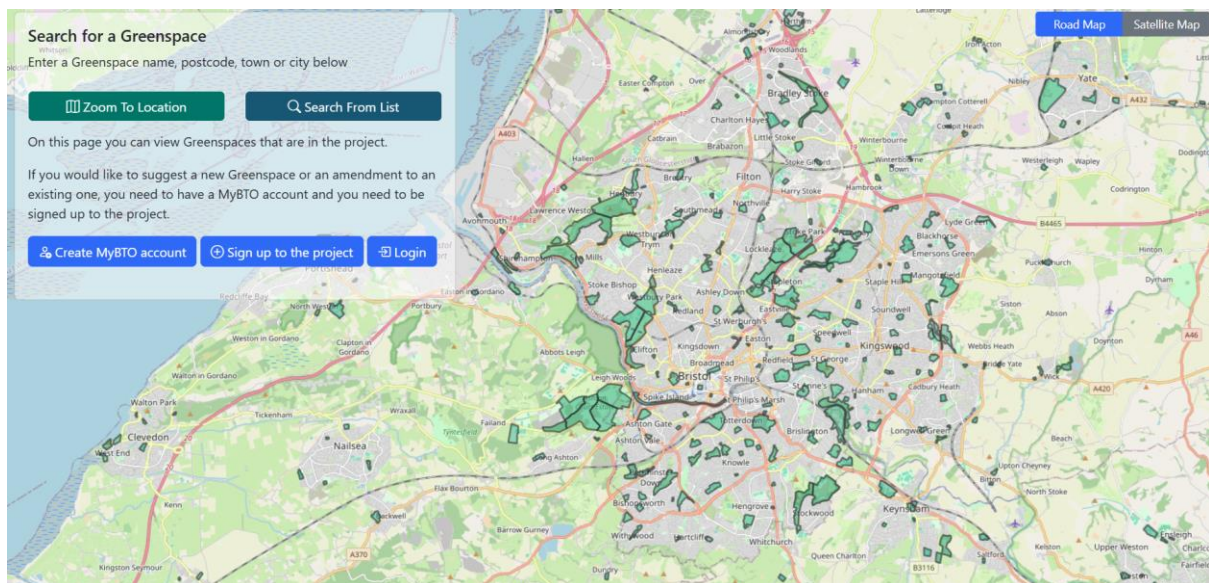
The centre process between 2 – 500, 000 records a year from all taxon. There are a few observers that submit bird data directly to the BRERC rather than through Birdtrack, the BOC or AOG. The data is then entered into a number of databases and much of this is freely available through this link: <https://www.brerc.org.uk/dataresources.htm>

The centre is also part of the [National Biodiversity Network](#) along with most of the other regional environmental record centres and over 200 other organisations. The BRERC records are also shared with the NBN.

There are many reasons why we as birdwatchers collect lists and record data about birds, from the personal of a life list or patch list to wanting to contribute to citizen science through organised surveys such as the BBS. By entering data into Birdtrack (the best way for your data to be used) or eBird, individual records can be processed (alongside survey data) by the Avon Ornithology Group for the Avon Bird Report and then forwarded to BRERC. This ensures that these records contribute to understanding of bird trends in the region and are also used to influence planning decisions in our local area.

Birds in Greenspaces is a new BTO project that aims to find out how important our local parks, churchyards, playgrounds and open spaces are to birds. More information can be found here [Birds in Greenspaces](#) If you regularly walk your local park it would be fantastic to have your support.

Please look at the Birds in Greenspaces map (see example screenshot below) and add any new sites you think we should cover as part of this survey is not already featured.



Bird Atlas 2027-2031 is the time span that the next Bird Atlas will cover which seems a long way off but fieldwork will begin next year. The last Atlas was 2007-11 and as part of the project an Avon Atlas for 2007-2011 was also produced by Richard Bland and Mark Dadds. There is an intention to produce a local Atlas for 2027-31. I will confirm the plans as more details become available during the course of this year regarding methodology.

Jon Angell, BTO Avon Regional Representative

Jon Angell

The Winter Bird Survey

We are now up to 97 records for Visit 1 (to 31 October) and 82 records so far for Visit 2 (through December). The data from the first two visits, i.e. those in 2025 will be shared with the Avon Ornithological Group for the 2025 Avon Bird Report. Thank you to those observers who will have undertaken the 3rd if not the 4th visit to your square(s). If you could also upload your records as soon as possible, particularly for visits one and two so that they can be used for the Avon Bird Report 2025.



*Part of the new planting for Pucklechurch Community Forest.
This area is in a BBS square that is being surveyed for the Winter Bird Survey.
Photo Jonathan Angell*

BTO Garden BirdWatch

Thanks to the enthusiasm of our local supporters, BTO Garden BirdWatch participation across Avon in 2025 led to 58 participants in Bath & Northeast Somerset, 44 in Bristol, 55 in North Somerset and 50 in South Gloucestershire—valuable contributions. Every additional garden makes a real difference, strengthening the picture of how birds are faring locally and nationally. If you already take part, thank you—perhaps you could encourage a friend or neighbour to join too. And if you've been thinking about it, there's never been a better time to add your garden to the Avon story and Garden BirdWatch is a great place to start surveying if you haven't done any before.



Chaffinch by Liz Cutting / BTO

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 BirdWatch¹](#)

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. 220 sites were fully or partially surveyed with 64,882 individual birds counted from 119 species.

The Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) is a national scheme organised by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and is the main scheme for monitoring the population changes of the UK's common and widespread breeding birds. It is one of the longest running and most consistent examples of citizen science and as outlined in the introduction the data collected is used for a number of purposes. The survey consists of two visits in the breeding season to a one-kilometre square counting all birds seen or heard. Comparing these annual bird counts enables us to monitor population changes locally and, in the case of the National BTO squares, also contribute to the national picture. Squares are randomly assigned by the BTO.

Alongside the national scheme, there is also a smaller Waterways BBS and a local Avon BBS. The latter runs on similar lines, the key differences being: the survey method is a simple count and we can select which squares to survey. There are training programmes run both locally and by the BTO to support new surveyors.



Chiffchaff, Graham Fellowes / BTO

Organisation

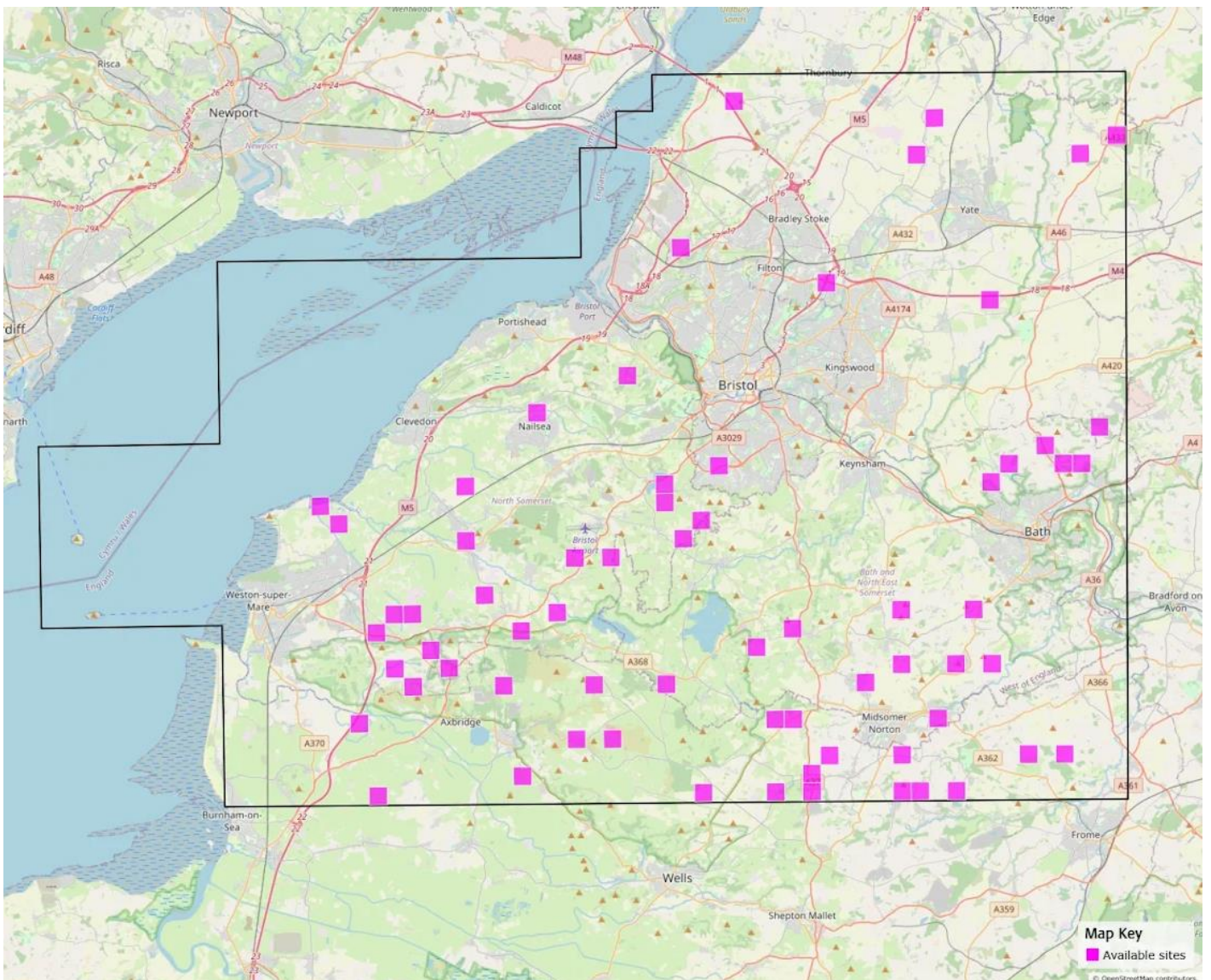
Peter Bryant is the Avon Regional Organiser for the three surveys mentioned above (but not the annual Winter Avon survey). For convenience, squares are organised via five Unitary Areas: Bristol, South Gloucestershire, North Somerset, Bath & North-East Somerset (BANES) and a part of Somerset. This differs from the Avon region recognised by the Avon Ornithological Group (AOG) for the annual Avon Bird Report (ABR) in that Somerset is excluded from their remit. BBS data feeds into the ABR.

Somerset, which is a large county, has its own BBS and Regional Organiser but we cover the northern part (including Portishead, Chew Valley Lakes and the Mendips). We particularly need to recruit additional surveyors in these areas, Peter can provide more details.

Peter will be in touch with current surveyors to confirm their participation in 2026. If you volunteer to take part he 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.

You can request a BBS square via [this interactive map](#).² You can find a similar map for vacant WBBS stretches [here](#).³

Vacant BBS squares in the BTO Avon region are shown on the map below.



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.

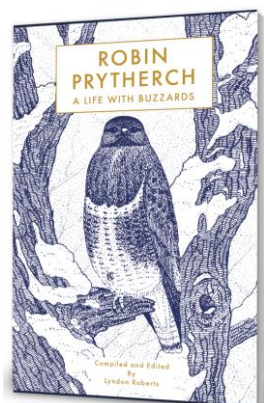
You can request a BBS square via [this interactive map](#).

[Find out more about the Breeding Bird Survey](#)⁴

[Find out more about the Waterways Breeding Bird Survey](#)⁵

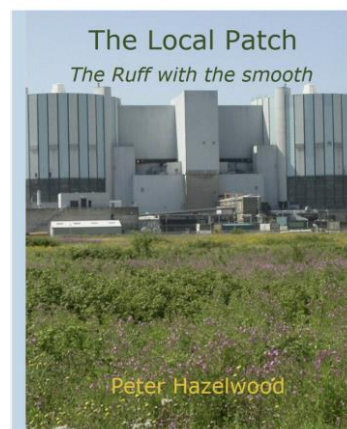
Local Bird Watching Books

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](#)

Useful Resources

The BTO has recently launched two very useful sources of information; Bird Facts Places and Bird Facts Species

Bird Facts Places provides you with information at a region level. This is a link to [Avon. Bird Facts Species](#) provides you with a wealth of information from identification, key statistics, trends, movements as well as links to research for the species of your choice.

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](#)

Other local Natural History groups are:

Bristol Naturalists Society: [Home - Bristol Naturalists' Society](#)

Bath Natural History Society: [BATH NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY |](#)

Excellent local birding websites to keep you up to date with what is going on:

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

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

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

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

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

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

BTO Avon Contact details:

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

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

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

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

Name: Heronries Census Regional Organiser **Email:** jonangell71@outlook.com

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

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

BTO on social media

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

Instagram: @btobirds

Bluesky: @btobirds.bsky.social

Website: www.bto.org

Please note that the 'X' (formerly Twitter) account will shortly be retired following the main BTO account moving away from posting on this channel last year. Locally run BTO Avon social media accounts will also be closed in time. This follows a review of how social media was being used across the organisation, and that posting on personal accounts or local ornithological feeds appears to be more effective in recruiting volunteers and spreading awareness, so the BTO will be spending more time creating assets (e.g. social media tiles) rather than encouraging local accounts. For more information, please email alice.johnson@bto.org.

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 Find out more about Garden BirdWatch: <https://www.bto.org/get-involved/volunteer/projects/gbw>
- ² BBS vacant squares map: <https://app.bto.org/bbs/public/request-square.jsp>
- ³ WBBS vacant stretches map: <https://app.bto.org/bbs/public/request-square.jsp?s=WBBS>
- ⁴ Find out more about the Breeding Bird Survey: <https://www.bto.org/get-involved/volunteer/projects/bbs>
- ⁵ Find out more about the Waterways Breeding Bird Survey: <https://www.bto.org/get-involved/volunteer/projects/waterways-breeding-bird-survey>