



The half-way point of Atlas data collection has now been reached. We have already amassed a large amount of material and can draw some comparisons with the earlier findings in our county breeding and wintering atlases. Many local fieldworkers have taken part in collecting observations for all three atlas projects, in so doing, creating their own 10km and tetrad local patches. Time and again observers have expressed the satisfaction of covering inland rather than coastal areas in the winter months and of discovering “new” sites for the breeding season.

The work of the validators is now underway. Many hours are being spent looking at the hundreds of returns that have been sent in. The validators are not normally querying correct bird identification but checking that breeding status has been noted in the relevant season and that the grid reference is correct. Somewhat frustrating are those returns that do not identify a specific tetrad or fail to note the numbers of species present. Whilst the BTO has not always insisted on some figures, even stating that some are optional, this data is necessary for our proposed local atlas where numbers will permit comparison with our earlier county data.

In connection with information that will probably be needed for the LOCAL atlas fieldworkers should note that :

Do not put a tick in the Extra column after the two hour visit. Instead submit your “extra” records as Roving Records and include the numbers of each species seen

Roving Records add to data from Timed Tetrad Visits and should not be regarded as replacing the tetrad visit

Moorland tetrads where there is difficult access can have one two-hour visit rather than two separate one hour visits, but should you be considering this it must be cleared prior to undertaking the fieldwork with the county BTO Representative – Tom Cadwallender

If you need to change your original data as a result of a validator querying it you should alter or re-edit your electronic return to the BTO, not simply email or phone the validator. The validators cannot alter or change your data.

Nevertheless there are far more positives from our data collection to date than minor negatives, and a huge thank you to all fieldworkers is in order. A query from a validator is not criticism of your observations but a desire to ascertain or clarify a point.

The task however is only partially completed and as much if not more effort is still needed. Many tetrads that have named fieldworkers are still to do and a large number of tetrads are yet to be allocated to a volunteer. The extra effort is needed as many of the above are in the more remote and distant parts of the county. Even some of the more popular tetrads need to be re-visited to produce Roving Records for commoner species that were missed on the initial TTV survey. Roving Records should not be regarded as replacing a one or two hour visit to a tetrad, but rather as providing supplementary data to fill in any gaps left in the tetrad. **Any observer who has**

committed themselves to a number of tetrads or even a whole 10k square who now finds that time will not allow them to cover them all should notify Tom or Muriel who can re-allocate the square(s) or add them to the list of tetrads still requiring an observer.

Early Population and distribution Comparisons

- After two years winter fieldwork some interesting comparisons can be made with the previous county Atlas. Even though only ten years have passed the distribution of some species has changed out of all recognition.

White-fronted Goose - Now almost non-existent as a winter visitor with only two 10km squares registering this species as opposed to 13 ten years ago.

Ruddy Duck - Only noted in NZ26 but ten years ago was present in winter in 15 10km squares. Although the control measures are obviously having an effect there was a tendency for the species to winter elsewhere anyway.

Buzzard - The early expansion was first noticeable in the previous wintering Atlas but only in the S/W & N/W. Now they have spread to all corners of the county except for some of the wilder areas of the Cheviots. Many observers have commented that they see twice as many Buzzards than Kestrels.

Red-legged Partridge - Only missing from eight coastal 10km squares in this Atlas but previously only encountered in a quarter of the county. Birds from releases are able to spread now throughout the county.

Coot - A definite decline which has been well written up in BIN 2004. Only 26 10km squares have Coot on their list so far whereas 41 registered this species ten years ago.

Green Sandpiper - Twice as widespread as a Winter Visitor, now noted in 13 10km squares so far as opposed to only seven before.

Barn Owl - The recovery continues with records now from 43 10km squares as opposed to only 29 before in 1999. To come back from such a low ebb twenty years ago when only 18 pairs were left in the county is truly a success story.

Stonechat - Another remarkable transformation with only two 10km squares (NZ16 & NZ26) yet to encounter one. Its ability to turn up on a survey visit with no other species around makes one realize how versatile it can be.

Raven - Now to be found in any upland area with even a spread into parts of the North, found in 34 10km squares so far.

Snow Bunting - A marked decline in range with only half the 10km squares noted in 1999 (17 as opposed to 38). More visits to wild upland areas will undoubtedly turn up more.

Finally many species of conservation concern will only be helped if their true distribution can be definitively mapped and their habitat requirements understood. Grey Partridge, Little Owl, Green Woodpecker, Marsh & Willow Tits, Tree Sparrow and Corn Bunting are all species at low density in the county with many questions unanswered as to why they struggle to expand their populations. Hopefully the ongoing fieldwork will help to explain the situation better and measures can be taken so that in our dotage we shall not be expostulating along the lines of 'in my day I can remember when...'

JCD; TD; M & TC; DM Nov 2009