



Chaffinch

Fringilla coelebs

Photo: Alan S Gilbertson

AS ONE OF THE MOST ABUNDANT AND WIDESPREAD BIRDS in Britain the Chaffinch has remained a stalwart of Northumberland avifauna for over two hundred years being recorded by Bewick in 1797, and referred to by Hancock in 1874 as ‘probably the most abundant bird in the district’ (Galloway & Meek, 1983). Bolam (1932) noticed large flocks on the coast in autumn and spring, probably referring to the nominate race *F.c.coelebs*, our breeding birds being of the *F.c.gengleri* race.

In the breeding season during this atlas survey 94% of tetrads had Chaffinch as a breeding species, one of the highest percentages of any species. As expected, most of the tetrads not having a recorded Chaffinch were those high on the moors in the south west of the county, and along the ‘Border Ridge’. In density in both seasons, the south east urban areas had least numbers, perhaps reflecting its preference for the countryside and villages. The largest concentrations in winter were in North Northumberland, though, and with the exception of a very late winter flock in the Cheviots, the breeding season’s favoured areas seem to be in the west and north. 84 of tetrads were occupied showing the species’ partial retreat out of the uplands in winter compared to the summer population. Proportionally, wintering chaffinches consist of about equal numbers from both the British and Scandinavia populations (Lack *et al*, 1986).

Nationally, a long term study of Chaffinches has shown an increase in population of 37% between 1970 and 2010 ((SUKB) *Bird Atlas 2007-11*), mostly in Northern Scotland and the outer islands, as well as along some mainland coastal

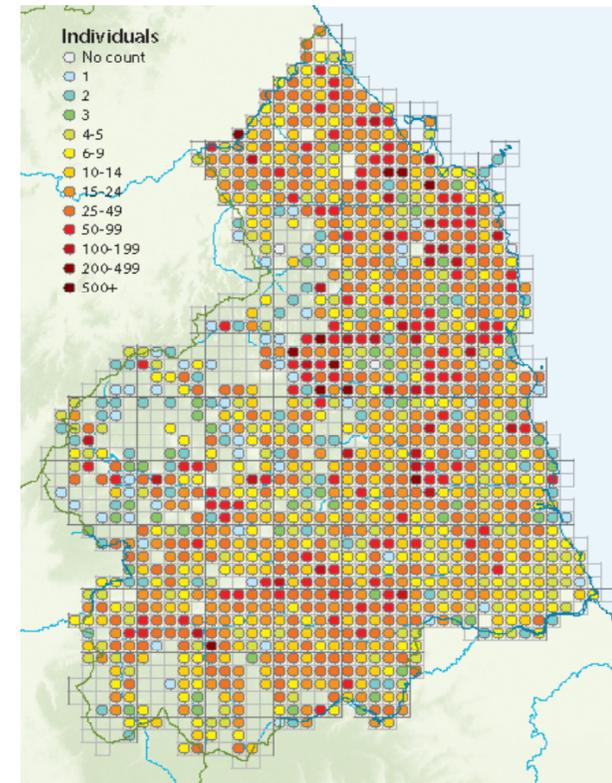
strips. Since the 1968-72 *Breeding Atlas* there has been a 2% increase of tetrads being occupied, and in Northumberland there has been an increase of about 5% holding chaffinches in the breeding season, and 12% in winter since the last two Northumberland atlases.

With its most catholic taste for food of all the finches there is every reason to believe that the Chaffinch will be entertaining us with its familiar cascading, if a little strident, song for a long time to come.

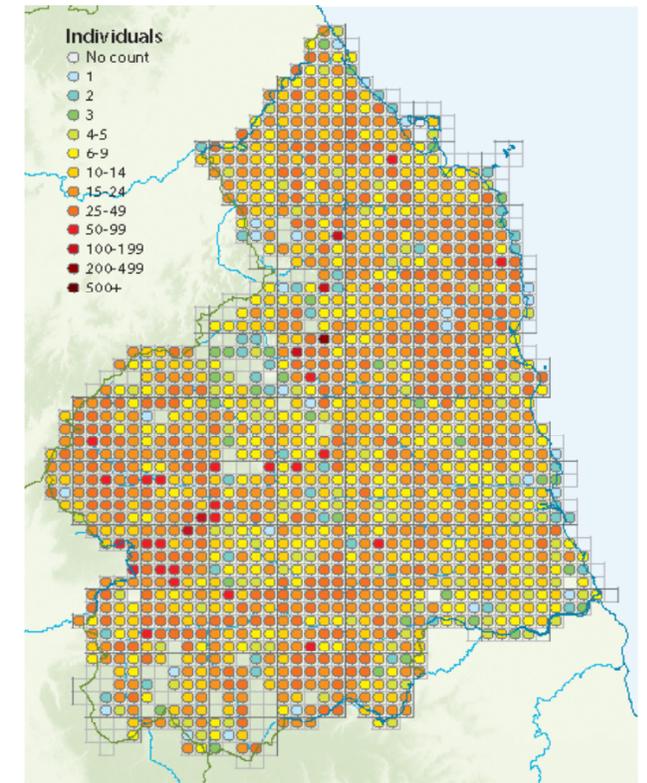
Muriel Cadwallender

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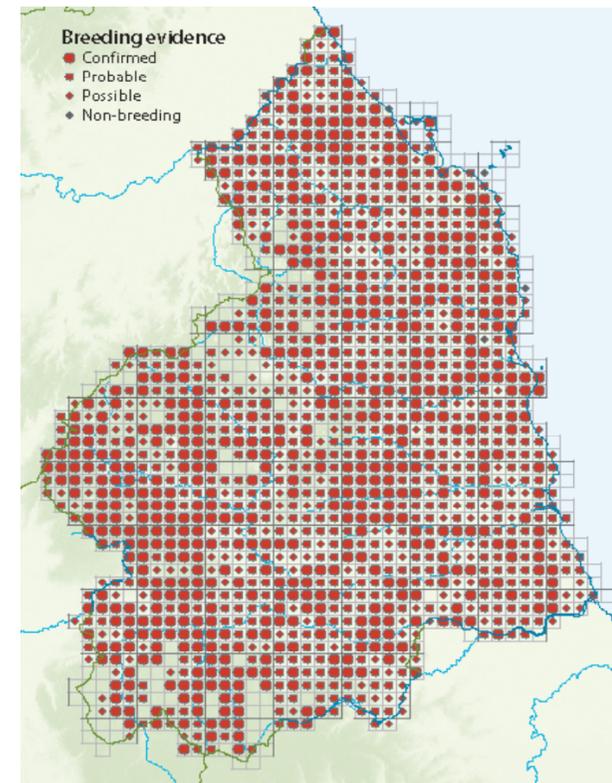
	Summer 1988-92	Winter 1996-99	Summer 2007-11	Winter 2007-11
Present			5	
Possible	25		206	
Probable	738		535	
Confirmed	491		571	
Total	1254 (90%)	1048 (75%)	1312 (94%)	1176 (84%)
Loss			20	43
Stable			1234	1005
Gain			78	171
% Change			(+5%)	(+12%)
Maximum recorded in tetrad (winter) 310 (NT90U) 28/11/09				
Maximum recorded in tetrad (summer) 205 (NT90U) 03/05/09				



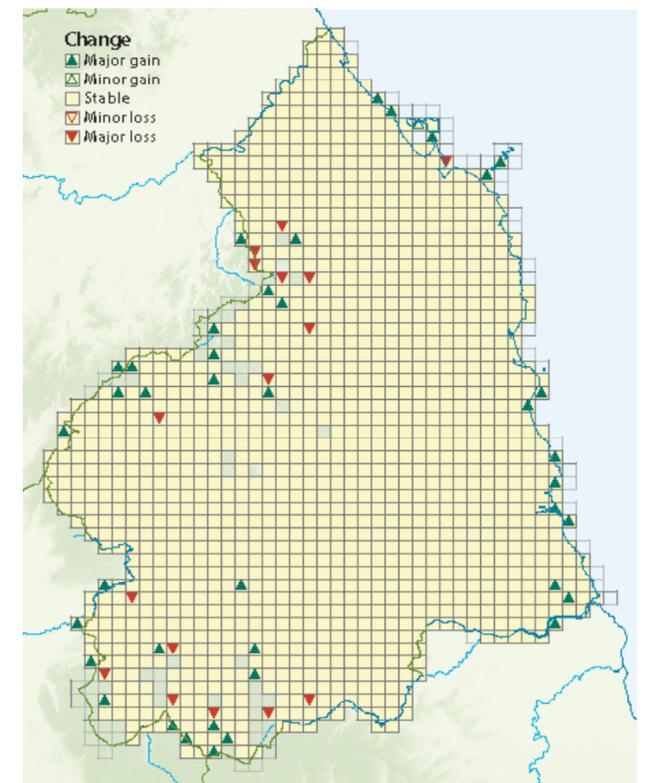
Winter Abundance



Summer Abundance



Breeding Distribution



Overall Distribution Change