

The newsletter for BTO members and volunteers in Ayrshire

July 2019

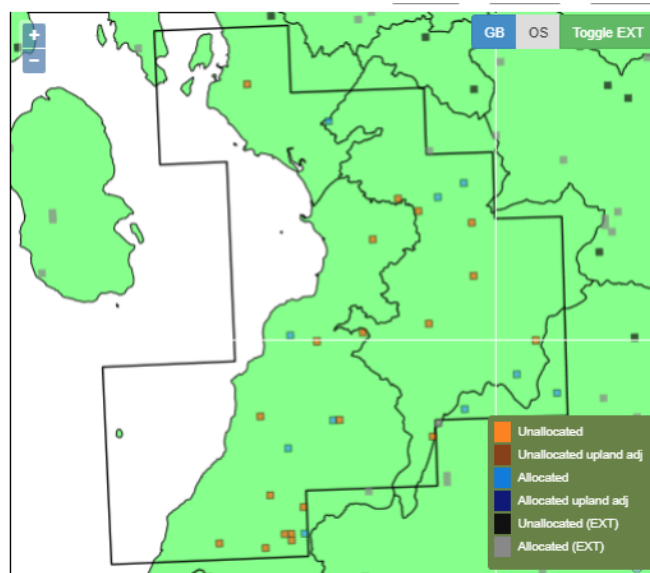
Welcome to this newsletter for BTO members and volunteers in Ayrshire. We hope there is something of interest and relevance to you. We are keen to build our Regional Network in Ayrshire, so if you are interested in helping out with promoting BTO and organising surveys locally, please read more at the end of the newsletter.

Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) and Waterways Breeding Bird Survey (WBBS)

The BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey is the main scheme for monitoring the population changes of the UK's common breeding birds. There are 10 squares currently allocated in Ayrshire - thank you to all of you that already survey a square! There are 20 BBS squares that are not allocated, and we welcome your help. Take a look at the BBS webpages and use the map to find a square near you:

<https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/bbs/taking-part>

The BBS requires just two visits in the breeding season to count birds (mammals can be counted too), and if you wish, you can make a visit later in the summer to count butterflies along the transect. If you can identify common birds by sight and sound, then do consider taking on a square – it is very rewarding!



Although the BBS season is finished, now is a good time to take on a BBS square, sort out the route and make a recce visit, and you'll then be all set up ready for two visits in 2020. We're also looking for volunteers that might be able to make a single visit to one of our upland squares, as part of the Upland Rovers initiative to achieve better coverage of upland habitats and species. Please see <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/btojnccrspb-breeding-bird-survey/taking-part/upland-rovers> if you have a sense of adventure!

There are also two Waterways Breeding Bird Survey squares (linear transect along waterways) that are covered by volunteers, and three available to cover in Ayrshire (Kirkmichael, North Balloch, Muirkirk). Sarah Harris from BTO HQ is currently coordinating BBS and WBBS in Ayrshire, so please get in touch if you are interested (Email: sarah.harris@bto.org).

The Breeding Bird Survey report for 2018 has recently been published and is available to download online at: <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/bbs/bbs-publications/bbs-reports>

English Winter Bird Survey

Thank you if you too part in this survey. Although the focus of the survey was on England, we were keen to allow all volunteers to take part – two squares were allocated to volunteers in Ayrshire. It was based on existing BBS squares especially those within farmland. The data entry system is up and running, so please submit your data as soon as possible.

Project Owl

In the autumn of 2018, there was a national Tawny Owl Point Survey (TOPS) organised by the BTO. This followed similar methodology to Tawny Owl surveys in 1989 and 2005. Nationally it is estimated that about 54% of the tetrads were occupied compared with 63% previously. Within Ayrshire, three tetrads were surveyed, and Tawny Owls were heard at two of the sites. Thank you to everyone that contributed to the Project Owl Appeal, and to the TOPS survey. Provisional results for the Tawny Owl Point Survey are available online:

<https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/project-owl/tawny-owl-point-survey/provisional-results>

The second survey BTO organised was the Tawny Owl Calling Survey (TOCS). This involved listening regularly from a point chosen by the volunteer (usually your garden). In Britain, over 12,000 signed up for the survey and over 8,000 have submitted records. In Ayrshire, returns were made from 22 sites. The survey finished at the end of March, but if you still have paperwork to return, please send it in as soon as possible.

As part of Project Owl, BTO are keen to encourage birdwatchers to go out and listen for Long-eared Owls, one of our most poorly known breeding species. The Rare Breeding Bird Panel report for 2016 gives a total of two confirmed breeding pairs in Ayrshire – could there be more pairs out there? Now is the perfect time to go out and listen for young birds. You can read more about Long-eared Owls, and listen to the call of young here: <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/project-owl/learn-about-owls/long-eared-owl>



Heronries Census



The BTO's Heronries Census has gathered nest counts annually since 1928 and in 2018 celebrated its 90th anniversary. The aim is to count as many heronries as possible each year and to ensure that newly established sites are quickly discovered and brought into the programme of annual counts. At the UK level, as at the end of January 2019, records had been submitted from over 1,250 sites visited in 2018. In recent years BTO have received counts from around 700 to 800 sites annually, so a big thank you to thank all those observers who have

helped us to achieve such an impressive level of coverage in 2018. We expect the number of records to increase further as we receive additional counts from observers and other sources, such as those which have been submitted to local bird clubs.

BTO analysis shows that a slight decrease in Grey Heron numbers has occurred since 2017, with a provisional population estimate of 10,262 apparently occupied nests (AONs) in 2018, around 4% fewer

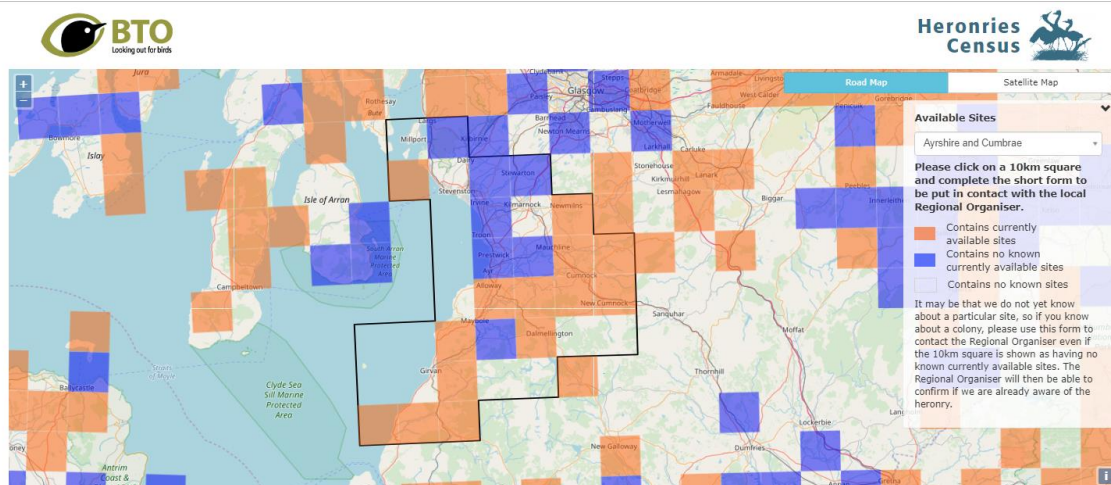
than in the previous year. This was anticipated following the 'Beast from the East', which occurred in late February and early March. Although the weather was particularly severe at that time, the fact that it was also relatively short-lasting may have helped ensure that the dip was less pronounced than some of the historical decreases caused by more prolonged periods of wintry weather. You can download a summary of the 2018 season here: <https://www.bto.org/sites/default/files/heronries-census-summary-2018.pdf>

The main species covered is Grey Heron but Little Egret and Cormorant are also counted, as well as any rarer herons you might encounter.

National Organiser, Ian Woodward, is keen to remove old sites from the register where birds no longer breed. This is not always straight forward as birds can sometimes cease breeding at a particular locality, only to return again a few years later. However, there are some sites currently on the register that have received no data for many years now and are probably genuinely extinct. There are 30 sites in Ayrshire that are not being checked for Herons, so we would really appreciate your help in offering to cover some of these sites. It ought to be possible to check this year to see if there are any signs of activity (most Grey Herons will be just about to fledge, or may have done).

Please have a look at the website to see where the gaps in coverage are:

<https://app.bto.org/colonies/public/vacant-sites.jsp> and make an enquiry via the website, or contact Ian Woodward (ian.woodward@bto.org) direct.

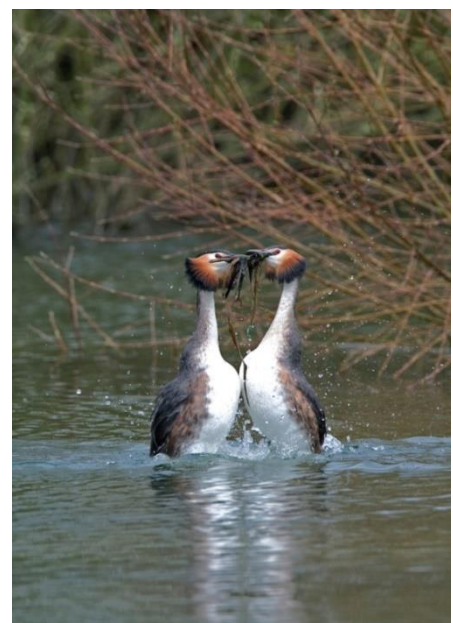


Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS)

The BTO/RSPB/JNCC Wetland Bird Survey is our key survey for monitoring non-breeding waterbirds in the UK. The key counting period is the winter, but we strongly encourage counting all year round.

The majority of our key wetlands are well covered in Ayrshire for WeBS, so a big thank you to all the volunteers that currently help with the monthly counts. This is a really important survey, and provides valuable information about the waterbirds that use our wetlands throughout the year. There are a number of sections on the coast vacant, and many small waterbodies inland. Here's some of the vacant sites:

Hunterston Sands, Ayr Harbour to Pow Burn, Penwhapple Reservoir, Cairnhill Pond, Bogton Loch.



Have a look online (www.bto.org/webs-vacant-sites) for more details.

Please contact your local organiser:

Ayrshire (mainland): Dave Grant email: daveg466@gmail.com

Isle of Cumbrae: BTO staff email: webs@bto.org

JNCC Seabird Count 2015/19

This year volunteers in some areas have been making visits to 1-km squares to look for rooftop nesting gulls, as part of the JNCC Seabird Count project. Fieldwork has also been undertaken by volunteers and professionals on all seabird species over the last few years. If you are interested in helping out with seabird counts in 2020, please contact Daisy Burnell at JNCC (Email: seabirdcountcoordinator@jncc.gov.uk) or find out more online <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-7413>



Rare Breeding Birds

The Rare Breeding Birds Panel (<http://rbbp.org.uk/>) collects data on the rarer species of birds breeding in the United Kingdom. Its records allow the production of annual totals of breeding pairs for each species on its list. It was formed in 1972 by representatives of the RSPB, the BTO, The Nature Conservancy Council and *British Birds*. The present Panel is made up of representatives of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, RSPB, BTO, three independent members, and a Secretary and a report is published each year in *British Birds* and available on their website. Approximately 160 species are monitored by the RBBP, although the list is reviewed and changing so that in 2019 Cettis Warbler will no longer be recorded but Turtle Dove is now being considered.

So, if you see a rare breeding bird,

- Ensure you follow the bird watchers code, <https://www.bto.org/sites/default/files/u10/downloads/taking-part/health/bwc.pdf> and do not disturb the bird,
- Remember the RBBP guidelines for reporting on social media <http://rbbp.org.uk/> and
- Please submit your records to the County Bird Recorder to support the monitoring of rare birds.

Please contact the County Recorder Fraser Simpson (recorder@ayrshire-birding.org.uk) if you are interested in more information. Records of rare and scarce breeding birds submitted to BirdTrack (www.birdtrack.net) are treated in confidence and not shown on any public outputs.

Useful online resources

There are some fantastic resources on the BTO website that are worth a look.

BirdTrack: Visit 'BirdTrack NEW' and take a look at 'Explore data' and use the 'Reporting rate' to produce interesting graphs. Try out then new data entry too! It's very easy www.birdtrack.net Your data feeds through to Eurobirdportal too (<https://www.eurobirdportal.org/ebp/en/>)

BirdTrends: A one-stop shop for information on population and demographic trends for our common breeding birds. Includes results from BBS, WBBS, Constant Effort Sites, nest recording www.bto.org/birdtrends

Online ringing and nest recording report: Summary information by species and county <https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/ringing/publications/online-ringing-reports>

Wetland Bird Survey Report Online: Summary information by site and species for all species monitored through WeBS <https://app.bto.org/webs-reporting/>

Breeding Bird Survey: English region trends and country trends for common breeding species

<https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/bbs/latest-results>

Mapstore: All the maps from *Bird Atlas 2007–11*, and previous breeding and winter atlases.

www.bto.org/mapstore

Garden BirdWatch: Explore the Garden BirdWatch results and look at the long-term pattern of garden use by species. Some fascinating trends! <https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/gbw/results>

The Regional Network in Ayrshire – can you help?

Very many thanks to Brian Broadley who was BTO Regional Representative from 2003 to early 2019. Brian did a great job as Regional Rep, especially through the years of intensive fieldwork for *Bird Atlas 2007–11*, and we really appreciate all the time and energy he gave to the role.

We are keen to build the BTO community in Ayrshire, and would like to recruit volunteers to be part of the local Regional Network team, alongside the local Wetland Bird Survey Organiser we already have in place. We are looking for a Regional Representative to lead the team, supported by a Regional Ambassador, and perhaps an organiser for the Breeding Bird Survey/Waterways Breeding Bird Census and Heronries Census too. Please contact Dawn Balmer (dawn.balmer@bto.org) if you are interested.

Dawn Balmer, Head of Surveys, BTO

Contact details:

Regional Representative: Vacant

Regional Ambassador: Vacant

BBS/WBBS Organiser: Vacant. Contact Sarah Harris email sarah.harris@bto.org

Heronries Census Organiser: Vacant. Contact Ian Woodard email ian.woodward@bto.org

Wetland Bird Survey Organisers:

Ayrshire (mainland): Dave Grant email: daveg466@gmail.com

Isle of Cumbrae: Vacant. Contact. BTO WeBS Team email: webs@bto.org

BTO Website: www.bto.org

We'd love to receive short contributions from you for future issues. Please contact Dawn Balmer at BTO (email: dawn.balmer@bto.org)

Photographers: Edmund Fellowes, Jill Pakenham, Liz Cutting, John Harding.