



Number 16

April 2000



British Trust for Ornithology

Nest Record News

A newsletter for supporters of the NEST RECORD SCHEME, forming part of the BTO's Integrated Population Monitoring programme funded by a partnership of the British Trust for Ornithology and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (on behalf of English Nature, Scottish Natural Heritage, the Countryside Council for Wales, and also on behalf of the Environment & Heritage Service in Northern Ireland).

1999 Breeding Season Report

Keen recorders keep cards coming in

The Nest Record Scheme celebrated its Diamond Jubilee in some style, with over 460 recorders sending in nearly 37,000 nest record cards for 1999. It was marginally the warmest year in modern times in Britain, yet for a spectrum of species it was the fourth successive mediocre season in terms of young reared, though certain birds bucked the general trend. Record-breaking early clutches were laid by Egyptian Goose and Little Ringed Plover; whilst young Cuckoo were successfully reared by Wren and Ring Ouzel foster parents. These upbeat features were more than matched by negative news, as spring downpours swamped nests and chilled broods, causing heavy losses among waders, gamebirds, tits and flycatchers. Certain predators were hyper-active, with heavy breeding season losses occurring locally among Great Crested Grebe, Arctic Tern and Pied Flycatcher, being attributed to pike, mink and pine marten respectively.

The usual 'Nest Box' species featured heavily in our card intake, with Blue Tit and Great Tit accounting for a significant amount of all those received. The species 'Top Ten' included some regulars, and some not so expected birds, with third place going to Swallow, then Blackbird, Pied Flycatcher, Reed Warbler, Woodpigeon, Song Thrush, Coot and Tree Sparrow respectively. The large quantity of Reed Warbler cards can be attributed to the considerable efforts of one observer whilst, amazingly, Tree Sparrow outnumbered House Sparrow records. Finally for the 2000 season, we would be very pleased to receive any nest records from the following species: Redpoll, Corn Bunting, Grey Partridge, Turtle Dove, Grasshopper Warbler, Willow Tit and Reed Bunting. There is a shortage of nest records for these species, all of which have experienced long-term declines in breeding population size.

New Year heat spurs on Grey Heron, Raven and wildfowl

Unlike the previous two years, autumn 1998 lacked any spells of Indian Summer weather to assist late breeding activity. Cold snaps, early on in both November and December, effectively terminated nesting operations by all but a sprinkling of reports involving Great Crested Grebe, Barn Owl, Mallard, Feral Pigeon and Crossbill.

New Year brought violent storms, accompanied by torrential downpours, and winds gusting to 60-80 knots, causing damage to stick nest platforms used by Grey Heron and Rook. Thereafter, record-breaking high temperatures in January, and the absence of any sustained cold spells from mid month, spurred on vigorous territory proclamation and nest building among grebes, corvids and doves. Cases of active nests, either with eggs or young, were reported among Grey Heron, Mallard, Tawny Owl, Blackbird, Collared Dove and Feral Pigeon.

A north-westerly airstream dominated throughout February over much of Britain, bringing a generally pleasant blend of sunny intervals and wintry showers. By the month's end, 16 species had been noted with active nests, including Blackbird, Song Thrush, Mallard and doves with free-flying broods. More unusual, were those instances of egg-laying by Mistle Thrush and Robin, whilst Scotland was *less fortunate, as arctic winds brought the heaviest* snowfall for quarter of a century in parts, checking premature breeding intent. Nonetheless, most of southern and lowland Britain survived yet another essentially snow-free winter. Not surprisingly, nest recorders reported populations of resident Wren, Dunnock, Robin, Blackbird and Chaffinch at high levels and key pockets of breeding Woodlark, Stonechat, Cetti's Warbler and Dartford Warbler were at their most promising status for more than a decade.

Mid March warmth aids breeding residents and pioneer migrants alike

March roared in like the proverbial lion, raw north-westerly gales hitting breeding operations by open-nesting waterfowl, doves and small passerines. Thereafter, temperatures climbed quickly as settled high pressure built, further enhancing recent trends towards earlier egg-laying. Mid month temperatures reached 22C in the south-east, accompanied by mild showers, triggering a spate of nest-building by Magpie, Carrion Crow, Starling and Chaffinch, while clutches were started by Mute Swan, Cormorant, Peregrine, Grey Wagtail and Woodlark. High pressure intensified over the final week, generating a genuine 'spring-like' feel to conditions as values again topped 22C on the 31st. This favoured a further boost in egg-laying, involving Lapwing, Stonechat and House Sparrow. April blew hot and cold in a typical unsettled blustery fashion. Nonetheless, the mildest April since 1987 helped early nesting activity amongst certain seabirds, waders, owls and passerines. Mid month, a bitterly cold spell caused temperatures to drop to -7C, and hail to southern parts. Chilled clutches and moribund broods were reported among Rook, Lapwing, wagtails and thrushes. A winter legacy of heavy rains however, created fresh wetland habitats, attracting extra pairs of grebes and wildfowl to breed.

Heavy late spring rains hit tits and Pied Flycatchers

May flattered to deceive. Winds regularly from the southern sector, and daily temperatures 2 to 2.5C above the norm (a cool North Scotland excepted), produced the warmest May since 1964. Initially, conditions helped many species to raise bumper broods, whilst Little Grebe, Blackbird, Robin, Dipper and Starling were soon found incubating second clutches. Following a delay in migrants caused by adverse, unsettled cyclonic weather in the Mediterranean Region, warm, 'summer-like' episodes in mid May saw the bulk of summer visitors flooding back to favoured breeding haunts. CBC, BBS, ringers and Nest Recorders alike, noted encouragingly high numbers of most hirundines, Swift, Wheatear and Sedge Warbler; also a further boost for the recently depleted Lesser Whitethroat population, though numbers of both Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler were somewhat depressed. Gales battered north-western districts in mid May and, in tandem with high spring tides, badly affected some key coastal seabird and shorebird nesting populations. Finally during the last week, cooler blustery conditions, accompanied by torrential downpours created havoc amidst nestbox-using and ground-nesting species.

Changeable June brings mixed blessings for common and scarce birds

A 'hotch-potch' of unsettled weather dogged a 'Far from Flaming' June, nominally the coolest since 1991, variously helping and hindering different species. Persistent cloud cover, combined with low daytime temperatures, contributed towards modest to low success rates amongst Skylark, pipits, chats, Chaffinch, Nightingale, leaf and scrub warblers. Damp, windy weather, accompanied at times by hail over the first eight days of June, further reduced supplies of invertebrate food at a critical time. Various tits, Pied Flycatcher and Redstart endured substantial brood losses, though Nuthatch and Great Spotted Woodpecker were effected to a lesser extent. In all, regular rains meant another damp month, though the elements were never as damaging for most nesting birds as June 1998. Following initial losses in spate situations amongst wildfowl and wetland passerines, many divers, grebes, diving duck, rails, *acrocephalus* warblers and Reed Bunting gained from sustained water tables.

Interludes of higher pressure in mid June and glorious summer heat on 25th and 26th, when the mercury topped 24C, provided a welcome respite for diurnal raptors and owls. The resurgent Red Kite population reached 300 breeding pairs and the Sea Eagle recovery continued, with 18 territory holding pairs yielding 11 free-flying eaglets. Osprey numbers continued to increase, with some pairs using pylon nest sites and Marsh Harrier occupied fresh sites, though productivity overall was reduced. Red and Black Grouse over-wintered well, but enjoyed only a modest breeding season, especially in Scotland where Capercaillie endured another disastrous year. The Corncrake recovery stuttered slightly, although breeding was confirmed on the Isle of Man after an absence of 11 years, but sadly, rain-battered Lapwing and Curlew had vacated some upland and coastal sites before June was out.

Scorching July a timely bonus for some warblers, hirundines and finches

Temperatures in early July quickly soared and were maintained at a summer-like 26-28C countrywide, resulting in the hottest July since 1995. Sticky, often oppressive heat initially boosted supplies of aquatic, aerial and soil invertebrate foods. Great Crested Grebe, Little Ringed Plover, Stone Curlew, Nightjar, Wren, Robin and Woodlark reared second broods and the buoyant Hobby population thrived, with some pairs fledging three young. Eventually, parched habitats and reduced water levels, created less favourable breeding situations, as most regions received just one-third of their expected monthly rainfall. For many waterfowl, thrushes, warblers, wagtails and sparrows the season faded some-what, compounded in early August as sticky heat saw temperatures top 33C on the 3rd.

The following weeks brought disruptive downpours, with localised flooding, further degrading conditions for nesting, but not before some Barn Owl, House Martin, Linnet, Greenfinch and Corn Bunting were able to tend or raise second broods. Breeding activity generally remained at a low level but glorious spells of Indian Summer warmth in September and October helped Swallow, Stock Dove, Collared Dove, Feral Pigeon and House Sparrow to rear triple sets of young. In all, though far from a memorable year for many of the UK's birds, conditions in 1999 helped to erase memories of the dismal spring and summer of 1998, for certain species the least productive of the decade.

Staff Changes

In September 1999, Mike Raven was appointed to the position of Assistant Nest Records Officer, after his predecessor Caroline Dudley left for pastures new, having given many years of dedicated service to the Nest Record Scheme. Her superb meticulous approach and dedication helped increase the computerisation of the NRS enormously and she always provided a very friendly and helpful contact for nest recorders over the past 12 years. We wish her every success for the future. Mike has come from the RSPB via the Little Tern Colony at Great Yarmouth and Pulborough Brooks Nature Reserve in Sussex respectively, having previously had a working background in computers. He is also a mad keen birdwatcher and ornithologist and is very much looking forward to helping the Nest Record Scheme develop further in the future.

Moving from Cards to Computers

The drive towards using computers for submitting nest records is finally underway with the creation of the new, 'Integrated Population Monitoring Reporter' (IPMR) system, written by volunteer Mark Cubit, and presently in its final stages of development. This will enable nest recorders to enter their valuable observations directly onto computer, instead of having to fill out cards. The records will then be sent on disk to the BTO, enabling us to instantly use them for that year. For some of our more keen nest recorders, it will enable them to keep their own permanent record of all their hard work, and will also allow the BTO to direct scarce resources away from having to send large quantities of cards to commercial companies for data input. Obviously the majority of nest records will still be received on card for several years to come, however it is hoped that IPMR will prove a useful tool and time-saver for both nest recorders and the BTO alike.

Contacts : *Dr Humphrey Crick* heads up the NRS, leads on data analysis and can advise potential analysts on methodology; *Mike Raven* is the main point of contact for nest recorders and manages the NRS data archive; *David Glue* summarises the progress of each season as it happens, for articles in BTO News and elsewhere.

Totals for Nest Record Scheme from Pre-1998 to 1999

SPECIES	Pre-98	1998	1999	TOTAL
Red-throated Diver	2,238	7	74	2,319
Black-throated Diver	197	5	5	207
Little Grebe	2,158	79	68	2,305
Pied-billed Grebe	1	-	-	1
Great Crested Grebe	3,289	152	92	3,533
Red-necked Grebe	1	-	-	1
Slavonian Grebe	181	-	1	182
Black-necked Grebe	30	-	-	30
Fulmar	5,497	336	268	6,101
Manx Shearwater	227	61	48	336
Storm Petrel	70	11	7	88
Leach's Petrel	7	-	-	7
Gannet	33	-	-	33
Comorant	1,700	101	105	1,906
Shag	8,517	905	1,558	10,980
Bittern	27	11	-	38
Little Bittern	1	-	-	1
Grey Heron	5,332	618	339	6,289
Night Heron	3	-	-	3
Spoonbill	2	-	-	2
Mute Swan	5,249	200	154	5,603
Whooper swan	9	1	3	13
Bar-headed Goose	1	1	1	3
Greylag Goose	608	8	29	645
Snow Goose	8	-	-	8
Canada Goose	3,222	175	130	3,527
Barnacle Goose	22	10	4	36
Egyptian Goose	57	14	11	82
Shelduck	295	10	7	312
Mandarin	376	19	19	414
Wigeon	166	11	6	183
Gadwall	121	10	6	137
Teal	220	4	-	224
Mallard	8,069	232	144	8,445
Garganey	9	-	-	9
Pintail	23	-	-	23
Shoveler	159	5	10	174
Pochard	136	6	6	148
Tufted Duck	1,166	20	32	1,218
Scaup	1	-	-	1
Eider	4,546	769	778	6,093
Common Scoter	42	1	-	43
Goldeneye	194	14	3	211
Red-breasted Merganser	267	3	5	275
Goosander	277	6	2	285
Ruddy Duck	112	10	16	138
Honey Buzzard	24	6	10	40
Red Kite	28	5	9	42
Marsh Harrier	48	6	5	59
Hen Harrier	1,455	62	41	1,558
Montagu's Harrier	53	-	-	53
Goshawk	574	52	54	680
Sparrowhawk	5,013	107	67	5,187
Buzzard	4,776	216	219	5,211
Golden Eagle	466	16	16	498
Osprey	60	7	4	71
Kestrel	6,571	235	189	6,995
Merlin	2,899	156	147	3,202
Hobby	598	43	61	702
Peregrine	2,344	106	77	2,527

SPECIES	Pre-98	1998	1999	TOTAL
Red Grouse	817	14	5	836
Ptarmigan	131	.	.	131
Black Grouse	71	2	4	77
Capercaillie	80	.	2	82
Red-legged Partridge	451	5	4	460
Chukar	1	.	.	1
Grey Partridge	822	12	7	841
Quail	14	.	.	14
Pheasant	2,067	41	25	2,133
Golden Pheasant	6	.	.	6
Lady Amherst's Pheasant	1	.	.	1
Water Rail	82	4	1	87
Comcrake	30	.	.	30
Moorhen	20,728	566	412	21,706
Coot	15,117	669	554	16,340
Oystercatcher	14,121	711	361	15,193
Black-winged Stilt	2	.	.	2
Avocet	544	39	26	609
Stone Curlew	430	.	.	430
Little Ringed Plover	1,855	76	87	2,018
Ringed Plover	8,508	421	149	9,078
Kentish Plover	19	.	.	19
Dotterel	251	.	.	251
Golden Plover	841	21	5	867
Lapwing	22,974	1,278	498	24,750
Temmick's Stint	1	.	.	1
Purple Sandpiper	4	.	.	4
Dunlin	545	5	1	551
Ruff	4	.	.	4
Snipe	1,612	79	23	1,714
Woodcock	620	8	6	634
Black-tailed Godwit	20	10	.	30
Whimbrel	60	.	.	60
Curlew	2,772	126	30	2,928
Redshank	2,417	88	92	2,597
Greenshank	159	.	.	159
Wood Sandpiper	2	.	.	2
Common Sandpiper	1,431	30	20	1,481
Red-necked Phalarope	167	.	.	167
Arctic Skua	357	4	.	361
Great Skua	397	3	.	400
Little Gull	3	.	.	3
Black-headed Gull	9,511	50	45	9,606
Mediterranean Gull	6	1	.	7
Common Gull	4,554	457	146	5,157
Lesser Black-backed Gull	1,280	45	3,246	4,571
Herring Gull	5,744	212	971	6,927
Great Black-backed Gull	2,381	275	763	3,419
Kittiwake	10,574	1,009	969	12,552
Lesser Crested Tern	5	.	.	5
Sandwich Tern	1,813	.	.	1,813
Roseate Tern	726	.	.	726
Common Tern	5,671	235	373	6,279
Arctic Tern	7,704	763	429	8,896
Little Tern	5,103	273	172	5,548
Guillemot	1,110	.	.	1,110
Razorbill	922	101	148	1,171
Black Guillemot	1,403	28	.	1,431
Puffin	403	75	50	528
Rock Dove	478	33	.	511
Feral Pigeon	1,973	127	56	2,156
Stock Dove	7,249	419	322	7,990

SPECIES	Pre-98	1998	1999	TOTAL
Woodpigeon	24,351	773	665	25,789
Collared Dove	4,172	187	100	4,459
Turtle Dove	1,922	24	8	1,954
Ring-necked Parakeet	46	2	-	48
Cuckoo	2,023	43	42	2,108
Barn Owl	4,223	400	413	5,036
Snowy Owl	2	-	-	2
Little Owl	1,726	110	72	1,908
Tawny Owl	8,193	458	383	9,034
Long-eared Owl	702	15	6	723
Short-eared Owl	359	17	4	380
Nightjar	1,481	32	50	1,563
Swift	1,527	48	164	1,739
Kingfisher	610	13	12	635
Hoopoe	1	-	-	1
Wryneck	23	-	-	23
Green Woodpecker	348	15	12	375
Great Spotted Woodpecker	1,165	55	59	1,279
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	175	9	7	191
Woodlark	1,092	109	91	1,292
Skylark	7,409	490	43	7,942
Sand Martin	1,325	216	218	1,759
Swallow	49,102	1,821	1,831	52,754
House Martin	8,402	364	295	9,061
Tree Pipit	1,599	48	14	1,661
Meadow Pipit	8,974	204	146	9,324
Rock Pipit	745	20	17	782
Yellow Wagtail	987	5	2	994
Grey Wagtail	5,440	121	117	5,678
Pied Wagtail	8,950	284	209	9,443
Dipper	9,128	247	158	9,533
Wren	14,288	394	356	15,038
Duncock	29,130	336	244	29,710
Robin	19,220	432	383	20,035
Nightingale	443	12	6	461
Bluethroat	1	-	-	1
Black Redstart	146	5	11	162
Redstart	5,974	182	136	6,292
Whinchat	1,987	158	107	2,252
Stonechat	2,792	172	191	3,155
Wheatear	3,416	166	132	3,714
Ring Ouzel	1,513	71	105	1,689
Blackbird	124,333	1,745	1,333	127,411
Fieldfare	7	-	-	7
Song Thrush	71,343	709	595	72,647
Redwing	113	-	-	113
Mistle Thrush	7,546	151	99	7,796
Cetti's Warbler	26	2	-	28
Grasshopper warbler	369	3	1	373
Savi's warbler	2	-	-	2
Sedge Warbler	4,560	73	66	4,699
Marsh Warbler	168	-	-	168
Reed Warbler	12,118	799	763	13,680
Dartford Warbler	445	8	8	461
Lesser Whitethroat	828	10	10	848
Whitethroat	5,776	68	59	5,903
Garden Warbler	1,894	48	48	1,990
Blackcap	3,203	103	90	3,396
Wood Warbler	2,335	36	40	2,411
Chiffchaff	2,681	165	77	2,923
Willow Warbler	12,063	243	193	12,499
Goldcrest	782	4	16	802

SPECIES	Pre-98	1998	1999	TOTAL
Firecrest	0	.	.	0
Spotted Flycatcher	10,306	192	148	10,646
Pied Flycatcher	35,052	1,628	1,100	37,780
Bearded Tit	103	49	50	202
Long-tailed Tit	5,109	235	148	5,492
Marsh Tit	1,321	44	49	1,414
Willow Tit	442	12	7	461
Crested Tit	364	25	14	403
Coal Tit	4,944	127	101	5,172
Blue Tit	79,717	4,337	3,844	87,898
Great Tit	49,755	3,020	2,864	55,639
Nuthatch	3,045	172	140	3,357
Treecreeper	2,311	56	52	2,419
Short-toed Treecreeper	1	.	.	1
Golden Oriole	41	.	.	41
Red-backed Shrike	256	.	.	256
Jay	1,465	40	19	1,524
Magpie	7,261	245	107	7,613
Chough	634	38	27	699
Jackdaw	6,396	380	233	7,009
Rook	11,541	1,270	585	13,396
Carriion Crow	6,948	229	147	7,324
Hooded Crow	1,089	26	9	1,124
Raven	3,163	202	173	3,538
Starling	14,823	386	314	15,523
House Sparrow	12,268	303	149	12,720
Tree Sparrow	15,887	545	507	16,939
Chaffinch	21,246	384	323	21,953
Brambling	2	.	.	2
Serin	1	.	.	1
Greenfinch	13,524	184	120	13,828
Goldfinch	3,057	35	30	3,122
Siskin	76	6	3	85
Linnet	26,873	208	252	27,333
Twite	853	2	6	861
Redpoll	1,302	7	4	1,313
Common Crossbill	150	3	.	153
Parrot Crossbill	4	.	.	4
Scarlet Rosefinch	1	.	.	1
Bullfinch	5,393	49	90	5,532
Hawfinch	186	4	.	190
Snow Bunting	193	9	.	202
Yellowhammer	7,011	125	122	7,258
Chil Bunting	255	.	.	255
Reed Bunting	7,680	88	63	7,831
Corn Bunting	865	33	9	907
GRAND TOTAL	1,097,552	40,070	36,850	1,174,472

NB A few records for some wildfowl species may relate to feral birds (eg Whooper Swan, Greylag Goose and Mallard).

Species highlighted in bold are those used within the BTO's Integrated Population Monitoring programme.

The totals for pre-1998 and 1998 have changed since those printed in *Nest Record News No. 15* due to the addition of cards received at the BTO after March 1999.

BIRD SPECIES PROTECTED UNDER THE WILDLIFE AND COUNTRYSIDE ACT 1981

The species listed below are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended by the Environmental Protection Act 1990. If you wish to consider visiting the nests of any of these species, write to Jez Blackburn, the Licensing Officer, at the BTO for a licence application form. No nest may be visited without prior approval.

The majority of licenses issued during the breeding season are renewals for the same workers who held the appropriate approval during the previous season. Newcomers to the Nest Record Scheme, or recorders who have never held such a licence before, can apply for the relevant approval through the BTO. However, it is necessary to provide two references from 'respected' ornithologists eg County Recorder, BTO Regional Representative, Bird Club Chairman, BTO Bird Ringer etc, or a letter of support from a study group - relevant to the species application being sought. Please note that applications must be received before the end of February to be given priority; and no renewal can be granted until a report form has been submitted (including nil returns) for the previous season.

List of Schedule 1 species

Avocet	Goose, Greylag	Ruff
Bee-eater	Goshawk	Sandpiper, Green
Bittern	Grebe, Black-necked	Sandpiper, Purple
Bittern, Little	Grebe, Slavonian	Sandpiper, Wood
Bluethroat	Greenshank	Scaup
Brambling	Gull, Little	Scoter, Common
Bunting, Cirl	Gull, Mediterranean	Scoter, Velvet
Bunting, Lapland	Harrier (all species)	Serin
Bunting, Snow	Heron, Purple	Shorelark
Buzzard, Honey	Hobby	Shrike, Red-backed
Chough	Hoopoe	Spoonbill
Corncrake	Kingfisher	Stilt, Black-winged
Crake, Spotted	Kite, Red	Stint, Temminck's
Crossbill	Merlin	Swan, Bewick
Curlew, Stone	Oriole, Golden	Swan, Whooper
Diver, Black-throated	Osprey	Tern, Black
Diver, Great Northern	Owl, Barn	Tern, Little
Diver, Red-throated	Owl, Snowy	Tern, Roseate
Dotterel	Peregrine	Tit, Bearded
Duck, Long-tailed	Petrel, Leach's	Tit, Crested
Eagle, Golden	Phalarope, Red-necked	Treecreeper, Short-toed
Eagle, White-tailed	Pintail	Warbler, Cetti's
Falcon, Gyr	Plover, Kentish	Warbler, Dartford
Fieldfare	Plover, Little Ringed	Warbler, Marsh
Firecrest	Quail	Warbler, Savi's
Garganey	Redstart, Black	Whimbrel
Goldeneye	Redwing	Woodlark
Godwit, Black-tailed	Rosefinch, Scarlet	Wryneck

NB A rarer breeding species than these may be added to the Schedule 1 species list without warning, so if you find one, contact the BTO's Licensing Officer for clearance.

Nest Records Unit, BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2PU

Tel: Thetford (01842) 750050 Fax: Thetford (01842) 750030 E-mail: mike.raven@bto.org

Registered Charity No. 216652