



# Nest Record News

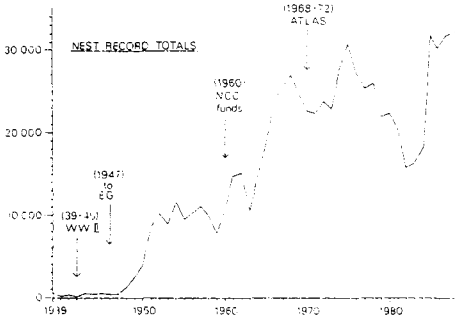
A newsletter for supporters of the NEST RECORD SCHEME, forming part of the BTO's Integrated Monitoring Programme carried out under contract to the Nature Conservancy Council.

No. 5      APRIL 1989

THE GOLDEN EGG! - 50 YEARS OF THE NEST RECORD SCHEME

Over the past 50 years, the BTO Nest Record Scheme has grown to become the largest of its kind in the World. In the next 50 years, we shall try to develop the Scheme's usefulness to the utmost, in order to be worthy of the very great efforts that you all put into the Scheme. We shall not only carry on investigating interesting aspects of the breeding biology of British birds, but we shall begin monitoring their fitness in the face of major environmental changes throughout the country. To this end, a new full-time organiser for the scheme, Dr Humphrey Crick, has been employed by the BTO under contract to the Nature Conservancy Council. News of our exciting plans are given inside.

To celebrate 50 years of the Nest Record Scheme, we are running a series of articles in each issue of BTO News this year. We are also giving the theme of 'Breeding in Birds' to the BTO's Annual Conference to be held in Swanwick from the 1st-3rd December. We will have a good line-up of lectures, including a session in which amateurs will talk about their analyses of nest record cards. We hope it will be a great gathering of Nest Recorders, so why not book it down in your diary now? BTO members will receive a booking form in due course, but non-members who fancy coming to this informal, enjoyable, interesting and inexpensive weekend, please write to our Membership Secretary, Mrs Audrey Causar.



ANOTHER RECORD YEAR

Yes - You've done it again! More cards than ever before were received at Beech Grove by 15th March. A huge 32,452 cards covering 178 species. Well done!

THE TRUST EXTENDS A VERY LARGE  
THANK YOU TO ALL THE NEST  
RECORDERS WHO CONTRIBUTE SO  
VALUABLY TO THIS SCHEME

MANY MORE MILESTONES PASSED

1988 was an exciting year, in that it brought three 'firsts' for the Scheme. These were Red-necked Grebe, Brambling and Whooper Swan. The 500th Dunlin card was received from A.Henthorn, West Yorkshire; the 1,000th Merlin from M.Natrass, Co.Durham; and Red-throated Diver passed the 1,500 mark with a card sent in by G.Christer, Orkney. M.R.Lawn completed the 10,000th Willow Warbler nest history for a pair which enjoyed a successful season on a Surrey heath; while the 30,000th Swallow card was received from R.Danson, Lancashire, this pair nesting in a dairy farm barn.

1988 - FLYING START LEADS TO BUMPER SEASON

1988 proved to be a highly productive breeding season for a refreshingly wide range of birds, though there were some notable exceptions. It all began with an unseasonably mild spell of weather in January which triggered off a scattering of unusually early nesting attempts by birds such as Great Crested Grebe, Barn Owl, Robin and Blue Tit. Fine weather continued through spring until late June, in most parts of the country, before rains arrived. Thankfully, there was a lack of those prolonged cool damp spells which have upset breeding birds in so many recent years. Many species, from Kestrel, Buzzard and Osprey to Blackbird, Stonechat and Willow Warbler, consistently raised large broods. Countrywide, most general comments from nest recorders were favourable, including 'fantastic season' (Inverness), 'very good' (Mid Wales), 'fine early on' (Surrey), 'upsurge in residents' (Herts), 'our best ever' (Hants).

EARLY OWLS AND RAPTORS FLOURISH

A damp summer, then a mild 1987-88 winter, resulted in high populations of small rodents and, consequently, for most early nesting owls and diurnal raptors a very productive year. There were many reports of high occupancy by Tawny Owls, with generally large, healthy broods, while Barn Owls regularly reared second sets of young up to October. Kestrels enjoyed an exceptionally early and rewarding season, with first eggs laid from late March. It was encouraging to note Peregrine and Merlin taking fresh, or re-occupying, traditional haunts despite local disturbance and egg stealing. Further good news came from those scarce raptors making a come-back. Marsh Harriers continued to expand with some fifty nests occupied, while Osprey reared over fifty young, the highest since recolonisation. Golden Eagle fared well, notably in west Scotland, while the reintroduced Sea Eagles reared another set of eaglets and the non-breeding population continued to swell.

TITMICE SUCCEED AS PIED FLYS SUFFER

Resident titmice populations were at high levels following the record-breaking year of 1987 and good over-wintering survival. Nestbox scheme operators, in both gardens and woodlands, reported a wide range of clutch and brood sizes, but most families were reared successfully before the rains of June and July. It was an early and compact laying season for Blue, Coal and Great Tit, with little evidence of repeat layings and second broods. Migrant Pied Flycatcher and Redstart also showed a generally high level of nestbox occupancy, with fresh sites taken in parts of the north and west. Again, many early clutches were laid, but the summer rains impaired breeding performance in some places, limiting brood sizes and repeat attempts.

PROTRACTED SEASON FOR MANY

An early return by many spring migrants, including Willow Warbler, Whitethroat, Whinchat and Yellow Wagtail, resulted in clutches started from eight or more days earlier than the average for the 1980s. An unusually high proportion of second clutches were underway by the third week of May, recalling 1960s conditions by old hands. For some birds it proved to be a protracted season with regular repeat layings: for instance, cases of confirmed triple-brooding were recorded for Swallow, Stonechat and Pied Wagtail.

Overall, then, 1988 will be recalled by most nest recorders as a very successful field season. Now, with a second successive mild winter in Britain and, apparently, rains having returned to improve the habitat for many of our birds wintering in Africa, all should be set fair for an exciting breeding season on our own local patches. Enjoyable nest finding and recording!

1988 CARD INTAKE - SAMPLE HIGHLIGHTS

The central strength of the Nest Record Scheme comes each year from those birdwatchers who fill in a handful of detailed cards for nests found on their local patch. Others are able to spend more time, sometimes concentrating on particular birds. Those nest finders who completed one hundred or more cards are listed below to give some idea of the spread of nest finders, to show which species are receiving specialist attention and just what can be achieved by an individual or group. Those birdwatchers operating through a local bird club, ringing group, or natural history society have the advantages of being able to exchange ideas, help with co-operative projects, and reduce the Trust's time with administration. This year the Trust received cards from 494 individuals and from 51 groups. THANK YOU ALL!

G.Alexander (Hants) 141 cards inc. 44 Swallow, 22 Blackbird; W.D.Allen (Shrops) 228 inc. 41 House Martin, 22 Blue Tit; G.E. & G.K. Austin (Shrops) 349 inc. 11 Ring Ouzel, 21 Wood Warbler, 112 Pied Flycatcher; P.Baker (Cumbria) 366 inc. 67 Cormorant, 49 Lapwing, 104 Swallow; J.Baldwin & P.Maynard (Hants) 192 cards including 18 Nightjar, 10 Woodlark, 15 Nightingale; Mr & Mrs J.Barrett (Co. Durham) 173 inc. 88 Blue Tit, 29 Great Tit; G.C. & I.M.Bates and N.R.Foster (Sutherland) 110 inc. 4 Golden Eagle, 9 Hooded Crow; L.G.Baxter (Clwyd) 782 inc. 54 Oystercatcher, 39 Common Gull, 2 Hawfinch; G. Bottomley (Cumbria) 116 inc. 54 Pied Flycatcher, 34 Blue Tit; H.Bradley (Co.Down) 104 inc. 10 Sedge Warbler, 77 Hooded Crow; J.E.A.Brook & R.Cooke (Warks) 648 inc. 152 Woodpigeon, 43 House Martin, 96 Blackbird; R.H.Bucknall (Northumberland) 130 inc. 5 Wigeon, 1 Black Grouse, 2 Siskin; P.J.K.Burton, T.Holder, P.Johnson & M.Hunt (Herts) 194 inc. 139 Kestrel, 35 Tawny Owl; R.F.E.Butler (Worcs) 181 inc. 30 Canada Goose, 21 Mallard; J.Clark (Gwynedd) 180 inc. 9 Little Grebe, 23 Tufted Duck, 60 Common Tern; J.E.S.Cooper & R.F.Sanderson (Sussex) 275 inc. 80 Great Tit, 13 Nuthatch; D.Cox & B.Hawes (Bucks) 680 inc. 39 Pied Wagtail, 159 Blackbird, 38 Chaffinch; A.V.Cross (Dyfed) 110 inc. 11 Peregrine, 81 Raven; Captain A.J.Crease (Hants) 101 inc. 11 Stone Curlew, 25 House Martin; R.E.Danson (Lancs) 321 inc. 48 Swallow, 87 Tree Sparrow; P.G. & S.G.Davis (Surrey) 782 inc. 18 Woodlark, 19 Willow Warbler; C.N.Davison & J. Pollard (Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory, Kent) 383 inc. 5 Turtle Dove, 31 Skylark, 14 Yellow Wagtail; M.Davison (Northumbria Ringing Group) 509 inc. 5 Goosander, 15 Merlin, 78 Pied Flycatcher; S.J.Denny (Suffolk) 279 inc. 63 Sandwich Tern, 13 Avocet; J.Driver (Gwynedd) 140 inc. 28 Pied Flycatcher, 38 Carrion Crow; D.Elliott (Powys) 175 inc. 100 Pied Flycatcher, 39 Blue Tit; M.R.Fletcher (Surrey) 265 inc. 130 Starling, 58 Tree Sparrow; J.E.Flynn (Gloucs) 158 inc. 10 Grey Wagtail, 60 Blue Tit; D.M.Francis (Northants) 139 inc. 22 Coal Tit, 46 Blue Tit; D.J.Garner (Cams) 206 inc. 9 Long-eared Owl, 3 Kingfisher; Dr. G.R.Green (Llancillo Ringing Group, Surrey) 102 inc. 40 Pied Flycatcher, 27 Blue Tit; Major J.J.Gordon RAOC (Outer Hebrides) 214 inc. 13 Red-throated Diver, 51 Common Gull; R.Graham (Dumfries) 107 inc. 9 Sparrowhawk, 9 Buzzard; K.J.Green (Lancs) 104 inc. 26 Swallow, 29 Blue Tit; J. Groves (Surrey) 171 inc. 5 Little Grebe, 19 Wren; H.R.Hammacott (Bristol Naturalists' Society) 234 inc. 36 Blackbird, 49 Willow Warbler, 13 Yellowhammer; W.Hartley & Mrs S.Thomson (N. Yorks) 117 inc. 24 Blackbird, 13 Chaffinch; P.Hawkey (The National Trust, Northumberland) 1,022 inc. 228 Shag, 135 Eider, 266 Kittiwake; L.S.Higgins (W. Yorks) 155 inc. 107 Swallow, 9 Song Thrush; I., P. & D.Hildred (Lincs) 172 inc. 18 Wren, 12 House Sparrow; P. & D.Hill (Gtr Manchester) 108 inc. 9 Great Crested Grebe, 4 Great Spotted Woodpecker; T.W.Hill (Merseyside) 168 inc. 17 Dunnock, 42 Blackbird; R.Hogarth (South Glamorgan) 120 inc. 97 Lesser Black-backed Gull, 6 Herring Gull; D.Holman & M.Goodman (Northants) 111 inc. 27 Sparrowhawk, 5 Hobby; P.R.Holness (Suffolk) 306 inc. 211 Swallow, 2 Egyptian Goose; S.J.Huddleston (Lincs) 454 inc. 59 Sand Martin, 31 House Martin, 231 Rook; B.R.Hughes (Surrey) 103 inc. 23 Pied Wagtail, 15 Blue Tit; P.Jenks & D.Okines (Bardsey Bird Observatory, Gwynedd) 151 inc. 53 Oystercatcher, 21 Wheatear; G.Kaczanow (Devon) 128 inc. 4 Hobby, 6 Whinchat, 22 Raven; J.Kieser (Hants) 338 inc. 64 Swallow, 11 Jay, 36 Yellowhammer, J.M.S.Lewis & S.J.Roberts (Gwent) 229 inc. 52 Dipper, 6 Ring Ouzel, 2 Siskin; I.Livingstone (Strathclyde) 152 Swallow; J.V.Lloyd (Dyfed) 104 inc. 21 Pied Flycatcher, 4 Marsh Tit; R.J.Louch & D.Tompson (Oxon) 449 inc. 8 Grasshopper Warbler, 26



TOTALS FOR NEST RECORD SCHEME FROM PRE 1987 to 1988

<u>SPECIES</u>	<u>Pre-87</u>	<u>1987</u>	<u>1988</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
Red-throated Diver + *	1,310	112	122	1,544
Black-throated Diver +	137	6	8	151
Little Grebe	1,341	59	76	1,476
Great Crested Grebe	1,788	113	60	1,961
Red necked Grebe +	-	-	1	1
Slavonian Grebe +	129	6	4	139
Black-necked Grebe +	12	-	-	12
Fulmar	2,035	168	153	2,356
Manx Shearwater	51	-	3	54
Storm Petrel	30	-	1	31
Leach's Petrel +	2	-	-	2
Gannet	18	4	-	22
Cormorant	924	94	7	1,025
Shag	2,289	260	331	2,880
Bittern +	17	-	-	17
Little Bittern +	1	-	-	1
Grey Heron *	2,112	190	121	2,423
Mute Swan *	2,684	120	107	2,911
Whooper Swan +	-	-	1	1
Greylag Goose +	331	75	18	424
Canada Goose	1,041	153	122	1,316
Egyptian Goose	2	-	3	5
Shelduck	191	10	-	201
Mandarin	141	15	11	167
Wigeon	101	9	7	117
Gadwall	43	3	4	50
Teal	159	1	9	169
Mallard	5,552	219	265	6,036
Pintail +	7	4	3	14
Garganey +	7	-	-	7
Shoveler	90	7	6	103
Pochard	107	-	-	107
Tufted Duck	674	56	53	783
Scaup +	1	-	-	1
Eider	1,328	230	157	1,715
Common Scoter +	29	1	1	31
Goldeneye +	14	4	4	22
Red-breasted Merganser	204	4	3	211
Goosander	124	16	11	151
Ruddy Duck	17	7	3	27
Honey Buzzard +	8	-	-	8
Red Kite +	14	1	-	15
Marsh Harrier +	5	2	2	9
Hen Harrier + *	502	74	124	700
Montagu's Harrier +	45	1	-	46
Goshawk +	70	23	21	114
Sparrowhawk *	2,521	221	237	2,979
Buzzard *	2,603	169	140	2,912
Golden Eagle +	302	30	16	348
Osprey +	25	1	4	30
Kestrel *	3,518	248	365	4,131
Merlin + *	839	127	194	1,160
Hobby + *	315	18	27	360
Peregrine + *	940	126	103	1,169
Red Grouse	449	44	40	533

<u>SPECIES</u>	<u>Pre-87</u>	<u>1987</u>	<u>1988</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
Ptarmigan	84	3	6	93
Black Grouse	32	-	-	32
Capercaillie	61	-	1	62
Red-legged Partridge	371	11	8	390
Grey Partridge	713	17	7	737
Quail +	10	-	-	10
Pheasant	1,647	34	44	1,725
Lady Amherst's Pheasant	1	-	-	1
Water Rail	61	1	2	64
Cornorake +	25	1	-	26
Moorhen *	15,518	436	382	16,336
Coot	8,223	366	369	8,958
Oystercatcher	7,775	444	522	8,741
Avocet +	3	92	56	151
Stone Curlew +	369	1	14	384
Little Ringed Plover +	1,013	51	53	1,117
Ringed Plover *	4,882	551	300	5,733
Kentish Plover +	19	-	-	19
Dotterel +	121	5	5	131
Golden Plover	610	40	52	702
Lapwing *	14,355	667	552	15,574
Temminck's Stint +	1	-	-	1
Purple Sandpiper +	3	-	-	3
Dunlin	454	45	13	512
Ruff +	-	1	-	1
Snipe	1,136	61	41	1,238
Woodcock	484	17	11	512
Black-tailed Godwit +	6	-	6	12
Whimbrel +	42	5	-	47
Curlew	1,872	101	83	2,056
Redshank	1,669	52	53	1,774
Greenshank +	125	9	3	137
Wood Sandpiper +	2	-	-	2
Common Sandpiper	954	53	35	1,042
Red-necked Phalarope +	32	-	-	32
Arctic Skua	209	12	8	229
Great Skua	275	11	6	292
Little Gull +	-	3	-	3
Black-headed Gull	3,213	415	493	4,121
Mediterranean Gull +	2	-	-	2
Common Gull	1,751	167	148	2,066
Lesser Black-backed Gull	694	100	121	915
Herring Gull	3,472	79	158	3,709
Great Black-backed Gull	764	103	97	964
Kittiwake	1,740	285	346	2,371
Sandwich Tern	284	226	63	573
Roseate Tern +	116	14	-	130
Common Tern	2,578	182	304	3,064
Arctic Tern	1,356	1,332	213	2,901
Little Tern +	2,779	313	212	3,304
Guillemot	687	130	73	890
Razorbill	375	56	37	468
Black Guillemot	600	159	88	847
Puffin	165	-	-	165
Rock Dove	136	36	4	176
Feral Pigeon	831	45	43	919
Stock Dove *	3,707	180	145	4,032
Woodpigeon	16,142	523	544	17,209
Collared Dove *	1,914	179	153	2,246
Turtle Dove	1,620	31	20	1,671

<u>SPECIES</u>	<u>Pre-87</u>	<u>1987</u>	<u>1988</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
Ring-necked Parakeet	1	1	-	2
Cuckoo	1,450	52	52	1,554
Barn Owl + *	1,056	142	236	1,434
Snowy Owl +	1	-	-	1
Little Owl *	1,069	55	48	1,172
Tawny Owl *	3,682	321	361	4,364
Long-eared Owl *	410	22	31	463
Short-eared Owl *	186	25	29	240
Nightjar	542	87	50	679
Swift	804	28	36	868
Kingfisher +	369	17	34	420
Hoopoe +	1	-	-	1
Wryneck +	11	1	1	13
Green Woodpecker	224	7	13	244
Great Spotted Woodpecker	614	43	52	709
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	114	6	5	125
Woodlark +	371	28	37	436
Skylark *	5,390	240	141	5,771
Sand Martin	684	87	79	850
Swallow *	28,438	1,476	2,171	32,085
House Martin	3,129	356	616	4,101
Tree Pipit	1,123	43	48	1,214
Meadow Pipit *	6,690	352	312	7,354
Rock Pipit	450	19	24	493
Yellow Wagtail	780	13	28	821
Grey Wagtail *	3,146	284	271	3,701
Pied Wagtail	5,952	281	255	6,488
Dipper	5,030	549	494	6,073
Wren *	10,273	319	391	10,983
Duncock	25,117	502	453	26,072
Robin *	14,667	375	464	15,506
Nightingale	342	7	22	371
Bluethroat +	1	-	-	1
Black Redstart +	119	2	5	126
Redstart *	2,296	199	226	2,721
Whinchat	1,288	48	118	1,454
Stonechat	1,726	38	46	1,810
Wheatear *	2,270	221	155	2,646
Ring Ouzel	1,079	40	60	1,179
Blackbird	104,487	2,418	2,088	108,993
Fieldfare +	3	2	-	5
Song Thrush *	62,717	946	967	64,630
Redwing +	88	-	3	91
Mistle Thrush *	5,602	176	178	5,956
Cetti's Warbler +	17	1	-	18
Grasshopper Warbler *	258	15	15	288
Savi's Warbler +	2	-	-	2
Sedge Warbler *	3,183	197	111	3,491
Marsh Warbler +	106	-	-	106
Reed Warbler *	7,851	401	333	8,585
Dartford Warbler +	327	6	18	351
Lesser Whitethroat *	629	16	25	670
Whitethroat *	4,526	90	98	4,714
Garden Warbler *	1,161	64	76	1,301
Blackcap *	2,092	139	105	2,336
Wood Warbler *	1,377	148	110	1,635
Chiffchaff *	1,470	93	125	1,688
Willow Warbler *	9,409	336	338	10,083
Goldcrest *	602	8	9	619
Firecrest +	8	1	-	9

<u>SPECIES</u>	<u>Pre-87</u>	<u>1987</u>	<u>1988</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
Spotted Flycatcher	7,614	334	306	8,254
Pied Flycatcher	13,945	1,566	1,861	17,372
Bearded Tit +	53	-	-	53
Long-tailed Tit	3,159	103	102	3,364
Marsh Tit	878	32	31	941
Willow Tit	328	15	19	362
Crested Tit +	145	20	14	179
Coal Tit	3,417	148	154	3,719
Blue Tit	38,566	2,606	2,994	44,166
Great Tit	24,886	1,486	1,736	28,108
Nuthatch *	1,330	88	127	1,546
Treecreeper	1,559	85	71	1,715
Short-toed Treecreeper +	1	-	-	1
Golden Oriole +	1	5	9	15
Red-backed Shrike +	251	-	-	251
Jay	1,109	34	33	1,176
Magpie *	4,297	209	201	4,707
Chough +	348	27	11	386
Jackdaw	3,573	208	216	3,997
Rook	3,460	380	935	4,775
Carrion Crow	4,009	228	200	4,437
Hooded Crow	707	125	70	902
Raven *	1,816	129	151	2,096
Starling *	10,106	368	475	10,949
House Sparrow	9,615	213	163	9,991
Tree Sparrow	12,192	280	284	12,746
Chaffinch *	15,800	601	429	16,830
Brambling +	-	-	2	2
Serin +	1	1	-	2
Greenfinch	11,210	262	211	11,683
Goldfinch	2,356	49	47	2,452
Siskin	45	4	7	56
Linnet *	21,625	427	356	22,408
Twite	754	14	9	777
Redpoll	1,168	28	19	1,215
Common Crossbill +	88	5	3	96
Parrot Crossbill +	4	-	-	4
Scarlet Rosefinch +	1	-	-	1
Bullfinch	4,551	106	66	4,723
Hawfinch	111	3	12	126
Snow Bunting +	10	-	-	10
Yellowhammer *	5,339	166	142	5,647
Cirl Bunting +	57	-	1	58
Reed Bunting *	6,266	157	164	6,587
Corn Bunting *	435	12	14	461
<u>TOTALS</u>	<u>Pre-87</u>	<u>1987</u>	<u>1988</u>	<u>GRAND TOTAL</u>
	699,268	32,546	32,452	764,266

- + Bird species protected under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act
- \* TARGET SPECIES - deserving special attention as indicators of environmental change within the BTO's Integrated Monitoring Program.

The totals for Pre-1987 and 1987 have changed since those printed in Nest Record News No.4 due to the addition of cards received at the BTO after March 1988.



## REVIEWING THE NEST RECORD SCHEME - EXCITING THINGS TO COME

Question: Is the Nest Record Scheme doing a good job or can it be improved?

Answer: Yes, on both counts!

So says the Final Report of the group of experts who looked at all aspects of the Nest Record Scheme over a period of two years. Raymond O'Connor, the BTO's previous Director, realised the huge potential of the Nest Record Scheme and made full use of it in his numerous publications, especially Farming and Birds. He was also keenly aware that more could be done with the data than investigating basic breeding biology, although he saw that there were some drawbacks in the data which needed further investigation. So in 1986, he persuaded Ian Newton (of Sparrowhawk and Finches fame) to chair a group that would look into the Scheme's workings and objectives. The members of the group were Kevin Briggs, David Hill, Chris Mason and Mike Pienkowski, with major contributions from Raymond O'Connor, David Glue and Sara Cross.

### Major Objectives: Basic Breeding Biology and Monitoring

When the Nest Record Scheme was originally set up, the aim was to provide information on basic breeding biology of British Birds. The Review Group considered that this was still a very worthwhile aim and that analyses of breeding biology were to be thoroughly encouraged.

The quality of Britain's countryside and urban environment needs to be monitored more and more as radical changes occur in farm management and pollution control and with new developments such as water privatisation. This is to be a major function of the Nest Record Scheme from now on because the breeding performance of birds is an ideal tool for gauging such changes. The BTO stores so much historical data and receives so much valuable new information each year, that we can monitor the countryside breeding performance of a wide range of species in different regions and habitats. Every contribution of cards, no matter how small, is a valuable brush stroke in a picture that can only be produced by the combined efforts of many people. We will start to produce annual summaries, much like those for CBC and WBS, to let you know how the breeding birds of Britain are faring. The Trust sees the need for some more feedback to you, our Nest Recorders, as essential in showing how useful are everybody's efforts.

We shall be combining the findings from Nest Record Cards with other BTO data (such as from CBC and ringing) to find the influence of aspects like clutch size and fledging success on movements, mortality and population sizes of birds. This Integrated Monitoring Scheme is going to be a very important and very exciting development within the BTO over the next few years and Nest Recording will be at its hub.

### Improving the Scheme: A New Nest Record Card

It might seem hard to believe, but the faithful green Nest Record Card needs to be modified after all these years, to make both your and our lives easier.

(a) Habitat Recording: Currently, there is a large blank space on the Nest Record Card for writing in details of habitat. This is unsatisfactory for a number of reasons. (1) The nest recorder has little guidance as to the sort of information or detail that is required: one recorder might write down "wood" whereas another may give great detail about tree species, undergrowth, proximity to water, etc. (2) Nest recorders that have a lot of cards to complete may get tired of filling in the same information again and again, or of writing down much detail, so that they refine it to the barest minimum or even to nothing at all! (3) We, at the BTO, have to interpret what is written and assign special codes for habitat which are put onto the computer. It is possible that we sometimes misinterpret what was written. The process is also very time-consuming.

The solution seems simple. We need a habitat coding system which allows standardisation throughout the country. Time will be saved because recorders will just cross numbers off the back of the card, that correspond to a habitat. For instance: 1,2,4,3 would refer to "Woodland" + "Coniferous" + "Mature plantation" + "Sparse Shrubs". To help you remember these codes we will provide a plasticised coding card, for easy reference. At the BTO, life will be much easier because we will let the computer "read" the information automatically. We will then be able to process a lot more information and produce more results each year. Good News!

Of course, for species names of plants and for those habitats that do not fit into the standardised system, we will still provide a space for extra descriptions.

(b) Nest Site, Stage and Activity Codes: A similar train of thought has led the BTO to design a tick-box system for nest site, with the twin benefits of speed for you and quick computer input for us. Finally it seems sensible to introduce some easily remembered codes to describe the stage of the nest or young and the activity of the parents. For example: CO for cold eggs, WA for warm eggs, NA for naked young, DO for downy young etc. These codes will also be on the handy plasticised card.

A PROTOTYPE NEW NEST RECORD CARD IS BEING FIELD-TESTED THIS YEAR, IN THE MEAN TIME THE GOOD OLD GREEN NEST RECORD CARD WILL CONTINUE TO BE OUR VALUABLE WORKHORSE.

#### Food for Thought

The Review Group also discussed various other interesting questions, for example: (a) What is the effect of the drop-off in recording effort late in the season? This is a subject which Peter G. Davis of Surrey thinks should be tackled urgently. He has evidence, from his specialist studies, of previously unsuspected levels of double and triple brooding in Stonechat, Dartford Warbler and Woodlark. (b) Are those nests which are most easily found, the most vulnerable to predation? (c) What is the effect on nest success of the number of visits to nests by recorders? Work by Raymond O'Connor suggested that there is none. (d) How do the results from Nest Record Cards compare with studies by specialist workers? (e) What is the effect on our overall figures of breeding success, of increasing amounts of recording at nest-boxes?

These and other questions were posed by the review group and will be a source of many interesting studies in the future. But one thing was certain: Contributing to the Nest Record Scheme is very valuable and will continue to provide unique information of importance in an ever widening variety of ways. THANK YOU FOR ALL YOUR EFFORTS.

#### ANALYSES OF NEST RECORD CARDS

Ornithologists using Nest Record Cards have been amazingly productive over the years. Since David Lack's ground-breaking paper on Robins in 1946 (in British Birds), there have been 105 publications which contain analyses of Nest Record Card data. Raymond O'Connor, our previous Director, was the most prolific analyst with 10 publications, followed by Robert Morgan (9), David Glue and David Lack (8 each). Amateur ornithologists (literally those who study birds for the sheer love of the subject) have made very useful contributions in the study of Nest Record Cards. Given the large number of unfunded studies underway at the moment (see Nest Record News No.4) amateurs will continue to make important additions to our knowledge of breeding birds for many years to come. The total number of studies in progress at the moment is 49.

#### New projects

In 1988, all the new analyses bar one have been proposed for non-passerines. (Surely passerines are interesting too!) Mike Shrubbs is turning to Kestrels,

having completed a very interesting analysis of Lapwings (which has been submitted to a journal for publication). Now he is looking at the possible effects of mercuric seed dressings on Kestrels, in addition to having an interest in their types of nest sites. Our own Caroline Stockley has begun a general study of the Hobby cards. John Cayford of the RSPB is using Nest Record Cards in his study of breeding success by Barn Owls in Suffolk. Two doctoral students from Glasgow University, Graham Austin and Chris Thomas, are looking at the Buzzard and Raven data sets respectively. They will look at these carrion feeding species to investigate what are the effects of changing landuse in the uplands, particularly with respect to afforestation and changes in sheep farming.

Waterbirds and gamebirds are being investigated in some detail. Graham Elliott and Philip Bayel of the RSPB have looked at the Black-necked Grebe and Bittern cards respectively. They need all the information they can get for conserving these species. Tony Fox of the Wildfowl Trust intends to examine the breeding ecology of British ducks and has begun with Teal and Shoveler. Paul Johnson found a Shelduck using a cylindrical straw bale as a nesting site, and was so intrigued that he decided to look at the nest sites recorded by other contributors to the Scheme. Finally, Peter Robertson at The Game Conservancy is carrying on David Hill's studies of the Pheasant and is widening his interests to include Grey and Red-legged Partridges.

#### What about you?

Analysing Nest Record Cards is interesting, challenging and rewarding. If you would like to get to know a particular species better and fancy analysing a set of Nest Record Cards, please don't hesitate to contact Humphrey Crick or David Glue. We will be pleased to give you advice and help in planning, analysis and writing up your study.

#### RECORDING OWLS: NOT JUST A HOOT!

The BTO is currently carrying out a project on the population dynamics of Barn and Tawny Owls, integrating data on the birds' breeding performance from Nest Records with those on survival and dispersal from the Ringing Scheme. The project has two main aims: firstly to investigate the factors that affect owl numbers and secondly to establish a baseline for their future monitoring. It involves an analysis of all the BTO's historic owl data gathered over the last 40 years (many thanks to all contributors - carry on the good work), together with the collection of new detailed data to allow a closer examination of breeding performance. Further information on this detailed nest recording and the study in general is available from Steve Percival at the BTO. Anyone wishing to take part, even with only a few owl nests, would be most welcome and could make a valuable contribution to the project.

#### SENDING IN YOUR CARDS

Please send all completed cards in one batch as soon as your fieldwork finishes - by the end of January if at all possible and by 15th February at the very latest (if you want them to be included in next year's Nest Record News). Early batches of cards and comments throughout the season provide useful material for articles prepared for BTO News. Cards can be handed directly to staff, if you are passing Beech Grove, or if you plan to attend one of the BTO's conferences.

PLEASE ENSURE THAT YOUR CARDS ARRIVE IN ONE PIECE BY BINDING THEM WITH RUBBER BANDS OR STRING, BEFORE PLACING THEM IN A POLYTHENE BAG AND PAPER WRAPPING WITH A BOLDLY MARKED ADDRESS LABEL. Many thanks. It is always tragic when cards go missing in the post due to flimsy packaging. Ordinary envelopes are not strong enough to take more than 20 cards; padded envelopes are much more suitable. Please don't let your hard-won data be lost like this.

SUCCESSIVE NESTING ATTEMPTS

Please make sure that all successive nesting attempts by a known pair of birds are clearly marked as such and that the cards are clipped together.

CUCKOO CARDS

Please complete a duplicate card for every Cuckoo nest found, so that cards can be filed under Cuckoo as well as the species of the foster parent.

THE NEST RECORDS UNIT

Dr Humphrey Q.P. Crick (Head of Unit)  
David E. Glue (Research Officer)  
David N. Pearman (Research Assistant)  
Caroline Stockley (Research Assistant)

Humphrey was appointed in August, under the NCC contract, to develop the use of Nest Record data as part of the Integrated Monitoring Programme of the BTO. He began bird watching and ringing with Dr Jeffery Harrison at the Sevenoaks Reserve, and has been lucky enough to undertake ecological research on bee-eaters, Coal Tits and the side-effects of pesticides in Scotland and Zimbabwe. Sara Cross left the Unit to take up a post in Employment Training Management. We are very grateful to Sara for all her efforts in running the Scheme and wish her well in her new job. David Glue will be continuing a programme of analysis of the basic breeding biology of species of conservation interest and maintaining his excellent links with our contributors. Currently he is working on woodpeckers, owls, Woodlark and Nightjar. A paper on his analysis of the Grasshopper Warbler cards will be appearing soon in British Birds.

David Pearman and Caroline Stockley have continued their valuable work of administering the day-to-day running of the Scheme. The contributions of these unsung heroes are huge, because they process all the cards that come in, code them up for computerisation, as well as helping to train our VDU operators. In addition, the BTO has been fortunate in having a Manpower Services Commission, and latterly Employment Training, team to computerise the Nest Record Cards. Working hard for us this year have been Frank Duling, Alan Mills, John Preece and Terry Seaward; and for shorter periods Amjad Mahmood, Rusty Rizvi, Roy Massey, James Simeon and Sharon Carden. More cards than ever were computerised this year: 29,701. The Trust would like to thank the team for their excellent work.

1989

The fresh year started with a bang! Such a mild winter set birds breeding earlier than for several seasons - which is very appropriate in our anniversary year.

WE HOPE THAT YOU WILL ENJOY A REWARDING SEASON.  
THE TRUST IS ENORMOUSLY GRATEFUL FOR YOUR VERY KIND HELP.  
GOOD LUCK!

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