1968-1972 Breeding Atlas

Title
Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland 1968-1972

Description and Summary of Results
The first systematic attempt to map the distribution of any bird species in Britain was by C A Norris who organised a survey in 1952 to map 100 species. The resulting publication (Norris, C.A. 1960. *Bird Study* 7: 129-184) mapped 30 species in 25-km squares of the National Grid although coverage was rather patchy and the presence of a species in a square was primarily the subjective opinion of 'experts' rather any than objective fieldwork. Field trials of methods for the Breeding Atlas project were conducted in 1966 and 1967 and, despite many people being very skeptical that sufficient coverage could be obtained to produce useful results, especially in the more remote parts of Scotland and Ireland, the project was launched in autumn 1967. Fieldwork was carried out 1968-1972.
The stated aim throughout was to include only actual records and not any speculation of what species occurred in an area. The whole of Britain and Ireland was included and the Irish Wildbird Conservancy (now Birdwatch Ireland) was an integral part of all the planning process to ensure this.
The project generated a lot of publicity and over its course BTO membership showed its biggest increase in many years. It was the first large scale bird project in the country which everyone could take part in. Even those with more limited knowledge were able to contribute useful records. The majority of the fieldwork was done by volunteers and the resulting publication became probably the most widely used and quoted British and Irish bird book other than fieldguides to identification.
Preliminary maps of individual species were produced at regular intervals during the fieldwork and several of these showed interesting and unexpected patterns of both presence and apparent absence, all of which helped to promote the survey and encourage new observers to send in information.
The maps published in the book were the first to show objectively the breeding distribution of every bird species in Britain and Ireland. The majority of species were mapped to 10-km squares but there were some concerns over the publication of maps at this scale for some rare breeding species especially those with quite specific requirements. It was feared that maps at this scale could lead people, particularly such as egg-collectors, specifically to individual sites, and hence cause major worries to conservation organisations and others. A great deal of care was therefore taken to ensure that the published maps did not give away information sensitive enough to cause any difficulties. Some species had dots moved, some were mapped at a reduced precision (eg summarised to 100-km squares) and even in a few cases dots were not mapped at all. This process of assessment for the atlas led directly to the formation of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel (www.rbbp.org.uk) which has functioned ever since as a repository for all information pertaining to rare breeding birds. It is thought

that most records of rare birds were submitted to the atlas although it is known that some were withheld.
The list of species recorded in each 10-km square is as complete as it can be. Those squares visited for less time (especially in the more remote areas) are likely to have fewer species recorded and it is the rarer and more elusive (eg nocturnal) species which will not be recorded in these circumstances. However it is considered that the maps as published are a true representation of the distribution of the species at a national level, while accepting that there will be some gaps in individual squares.

Methods of Data Capture
Specific fieldwork was conducted by volunteer (mainly) observers although professional help was used in some remoter areas.
Observers were asked to visit a 10-km square and record the presence of as many species as they could find and to record the level of breeding evidence obtained using a series of standard codes, which have since, with mostly minor modifications, become a worldwide standard. For mapping the codes were reduced to three levels: Possibly Breeding eg seen in the correct habitat; Probably Breeding eg holding territory, visiting a probable nest site; and Confirmed Breeding eg seen carrying food, recent fledglings, nest with eggs or young found. The stated objective was to get as many species as possible into the Confirmed Breeding category in each square.
For full details of the methods used in the field, how fieldwork was organised and the interpretation of the maps see http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/birdatlas/previous-atlases/previous-methods and the relevant pages in the published book.

Purpose of Data Capture
To compile as complete a breeding species list as possible for every 10-km square containing any land in Britain and Ireland and to record the highest level of breeding evidence found for each species.

Geographic Coverage
All of Britain and Ireland, including the Channel Islands. All 10-km squares with more than a very small amount of land were visited. At the request of residents Fair Isle (Shetland) was considered to be one 10-km square even though it actually comprises parts of four, and the five main Channel Islands (Alderney, Guernsey, Herm, Jersey and Sark) were each treated as one square.

Temporal Coverage
Records for 10-km squares were collated over the breeding seasons of 1968-1972 inclusive. Fieldwork was largely concentrated into the spring and early summer but extended all through the year as necessary.

Other Interested parties
The project was organised in conjunction with Irish Wildbird Conservancy (now BirdWatch Ireland). The bulk of the funding came from the British Trust for Ornithology itself, but a substantial grant was obtained from the Leverhulme Trust, and later supplemented by a second. The Republic of Ireland's Department of Lands also contributed a sizeable grant late on.

Organiser(s)
J T R (Tim) Sharrock organised and ran the whole project from 1969 onwards. Fieldwork for 1968 was co-ordinated by David Snow and then Chris and V Mead as part of the former pair's duties as BTO staff members. In the Republic of Ireland David Scott acted as organiser (unpaid) for the duration of the project.

Current Staff Contact
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Publications
The book containing the main results is:
Sharrock, J.T.R. 1976. *The Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland*. T. & A.D. Poyser, Berkhamsted.
During the course of the project from 1969 onwards various publications contained preliminary maps or other details of the project, and publicity was obtained by articles in many and various magazines and journals. Most issues of *BTO News* during the time period contained a mention of it, and especially in the later stages one or more hand-drawn maps.

Available from NBN?
Yes.
Summary records of all species (ie presence in each 10-km square) unless the species had any records withheld, moved or otherwise hidden in the published atlas and which records are still considered sensitive by the Rare Breeding Birds Panel (RBBP). All species which were in this category in the original book were reviewed by the RBBP in 2009 and only retained as sensitive if the Panel considered there was still a risk of persecution or disturbance if the real locations were to be revealed. For technical reasons to ensure that sensitive locations were not revealed, if a species contains any such records then no records are available to the public on the Gateway. Species which do still contain sensitive records and whose maps and data are therefore not available to the public without a specific request are: Slavonian Grebe, Honey Buzzard, Montagu's Harrier, Goshawk, Golden Eagle,

Dotterel, Wood Sandpiper, Temminck's Stint, Red-necked Phalarope, Marsh Warbler and Golden Oriole.
The records on the NBN Gateway also have the attribute of Seen or Breeding -- the latter is column 2 and 3 combined as was done for the Second Breeding Atlas. These attributes are also not available to the public although can be made so on request.

Computer data -- location
BTO Windows Network central area.

Computer data -- outline contents
Two copies of the main file sharrockbyspecies.txt and sharrockbysquare.txt contain species number, 2-letter species code, real 10-km square, published 10-km square and level of breeding evidence. The two files are the same except for sort order.
(In most cases the real and published 10-km square reference are, by definition, the same.)
There are also two directories containing earlier versions of these files.

Computer data -- description of contents
Note that computers were not used at all for this survey until the final mapping stage. All previous and preliminary maps were drawn by hand from cards.
The two main files were created in February 2010 by Simon Gillings, using all information available to compile complete and fully correct files with the original 1,2,3 levels of breeding evidence. They have both the actual 10-km locations and the locations as mapped in the book.
The format is: cols 1-5 numeric species code as in the Oracle database; 7-8 two-letter species code where one exists - there are gaps for subspecies; 10-13 real 10-km location; 15-18 10-km location as published -- a gap if the record was completely hidden; 20 breeding evidence (1=possible, 2=probable, 3=confirmed).

Information held in BTO Archives
1 Archive box containing correspondence; 1 Transfer Case containing details of the Pilot Survey; 1 Transfer Case containing photocopies of the Master cards. The original field data cards as submitted by observers were never kept.
There is also an envelope in the safe containing details of the records submitted in confidence to the organiser and notes of where these were moved for the publication.

Notes on Access and Use
See the notes under Available from NBN especially regarding details of Sensitive records.

Other information needed

Notes on Survey Design
A Pilot Survey was carried out in 1967 and the results used to help determine the methods to be used in the main survey.

Specific Issues for Analysis
The main computer files now extant on the BTO network contain all the real correct information.