

# Nature Reserves

## Title

Nature Reserves Study 1953-1954

## Description and Summary of Results

The BTO was asked by the Nature Conservancy to carry out ornithological surveys of certain proposed and declared National Nature Reserves and Sites of Special Scientific Interest. This was partly following the Trust's successful survey of the breeding distribution of 30 species in 1952 (Norris 1960 *Bird Study* 7: 129-184) and the methods used in the new project were based on this one.

It was originally intended to publish a full report of the survey but in the event this did not happen partly because of the confidential character of many of the observations, especially where rarer species were concerned.

In 1953 39 areas were surveyed: Anglesey: Newborough Warren and Llanddwyn Island; Caernarvonshire: Llyn Idwal; Cambridgeshire: Chippenham Fen; Cardiganshire: Tregaron Bog; Derbyshire: Cresswell Crag; Devon: Braunton Burrows, Axmouth-Lyme Regis Landslip, Yarner Wood; Dorset: Hod Hill, Studland Heath; Glamorgan: Worms Head; Gloucestershire: Birdlip Woods; Hertfordshire: Tring Reservoirs; Huntingdonshire: Woodwalton Fen; Kent: Blean Woods, Ham Street Woods, High Halstow; Lancashire: Ainsdale Dunes, Roudsea Wood; Leicestershire: Leighfield Forest; Lincolnshire: Lincolnshire Gate Scrubs; Norfolk: Scolt Head, Weeting Heath; Northumberland: Farne Islands; Nottinghamshire: Nottingham Sewage Farm; Oxfordshire: Wychwood Forest; Somerset: Shapwick Heath; Staffordshire: Dovedale Ashwood; Suffolk: Cavenham Heath, Orfordness, Staverton Park; Sussex: Kingley Vale; Warwickshire: Earlswood Lakes; Westmorland: Moor House; Wiltshire: Fyfield Down and Walkers Hill; Yorkshire: Askham Bog, Colt Park Wood, Skipwith Common.

There were sufficient data on 27 of these areas for more detailed analysis. The low occurrence of House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* and Swallow *Hirundo rustica* and the high of Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus* and Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* were due to the selection of sites surveyed: nature reserves contain fewer habitations and farms, but a higher proportion of marsh and dune habitats than the country as a whole. Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*, Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*, Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* and Blackbird *Turdus merula* occurred on all the 27 areas except the four bare coastal and the two high altitude reserves; Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* occurred on the two last and thus was the most generally distributed species. The habitat factor linking the other 21 reserves seemed to be a scrub layer, either in botanical succession following the cessation of human activity or as a climax on very poor soils.

In 1954 repeat surveys were made on 23 of these (though not all covered exactly the same area) and new surveys were made on five areas in England: Hampshire: Old Winchester Hill; Huntingdonshire: Holme Fen; Norfolk: Winterton Dunes; Northamptonshire: Castor Hanglands; Oxfordshire: Aston Rowant Woods.

The amount of time spent on the surveys varied from two or three visits at the height of the breeding season, sufficient to place the birds in rough status categories, to detailed studies.

A third and final season was undertaken in 1955 but there is no extant report covering which or how many areas were covered.

### **Methods of Data Capture**

Observers were asked to make a series of visits to a particular area, or part of it, during the breeding season and to record what they found and if possible place each species into one of five status categories. These were based on the categories used by C A Norris in his Survey of Breeding Distribution 1952 (Norris 1960 *Bird Study* 7: 129-184). They were: A -- expected species definitely not observed -- this category was optional and most observers omitted it; B -- species present but not breeding; C -- species breeding, probably less than 10 pairs on the area surveyed; D -- species breeding, probably between 11 and 100 pairs on the area surveyed; E -- species breeding, probably more than 100 pairs on the area surveyed. Intermediate ratings, e.g. B/C, C/D, D/E were also allowed where it was impossible to be more precise.

The classification differed from that used by Norris in that the categories did not apply to a fixed area, but to the total area of each Reserve surveyed. Thus the estimates given are not comparable between any two areas. However, most of the areas were of the same order of size -- tens to a few hundreds of acres (or hectares) -- and the sum of the status categories awarded to each species gives at least some indication of its frequency of occurrence on the areas as a whole. Only species probably or certainly breeding were included and the sum for each reserve was calculated on a points system as follows: B/C 1 point, C 2 points, C/D 3 points, D 4 points, D/E 5 points and E 6 points.

### **Purpose of Data Capture**

Ornithological surveys of declared or proposed Nature Reserves and Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

### **Geographic Coverage**

Reserves in England and Wales in 1953 with some repeats and some new areas in England surveyed in 1954.

### **Temporal Coverage**

Breeding seasons of 1953 and 1954. (It seems the survey was continued in 1955 but there is no extant report of work done then.)

### **Other Interested parties**

The Nature Conservancy commissioned the BTO to do these surveys and paid for some of the organiser's time for this.

**Organiser(s)**

Bruce Campbell as part of his job as Secretary of the BTO at the time.

**Current Staff Contact**

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**Publications**

A full detailed report of the project was never published largely because much of the information concerned rare or less common birds and their breeding sites, and which were deemed confidential and should not be published because of the threats to such species.

However two summary outline reports were published:

Campbell, B. 1954. Ornithological surveys of nature reserves, 1953. *Bird Study* 1: 48-52;

Campbell, B. 1955. Ornithological surveys of nature reserves, 1954. *Bird Study* 2: 84-86.

The survey was noticed in *BTO Bulletin* no. 50.

**Available from NBN?**

No.

**Computer data -- location**

None.

**Computer data -- outline contents**

N/A.

**Computer data -- description of contents**

N/A.

**Information held in BTO Archives**

Nothing found. Presumably the data were deposited with the Nature Conservancy.

**Notes on Access and Use****Other information****Notes on Survey Design****Specific Issues for Analysis**