

Nest Sanitation

Title

Nest Sanitation Enquiry 1942-1947

Description and Summary of Results

This enquiry arose from the paper published in the journal *British Birds* by R H Blair (see below). This described observations from nests of various species and it was decided that it warranted a wider perspective.

The object was to find out more about the methods of disposal of the faeces of young birds in the nest and how these methods might change during the growth of the chicks. Any observations on the disposal of eggshells, infertile eggs or dead young were also welcome. There was a very small response in 1942 to the request, thought to be partly the result of war conditions. The organisers also had hoped to get records from previous years. However the enquiry persisted and a small trickle of returns increased considerably for 1946. It was wound up after the 1947 breeding season and for that year observers were particularly asked to look at seabird colonies.

It was noted in the annual report number 14 dated March 1948 that there would be “a considerable lapse of time before the report will be available” and it seems that no report was ever produced.

Methods of Data Capture

The original enquiry asked for all details of sanitation from the nests of all species. A form (questionnaire) was sent out to those who requested it but some returns were simply letters. The form asked 11 specific questions: 1) when does defaecation by chicks first occur? 2) at what age do encapsulated faecal sacs appear if at all; 3) at what age do young defaecate over edge of nest? 4) which species use “prodding”? 5) which species and at what age do adults swallow faeces? 6) which species and at what age do adults carry away faecal sacs? 7) which species continue sanitation after young fledge and how? 8) which species use special methods eg wood dust by woodpeckers, latrines in others? 9) is sanitation carried out by both parents? And if only one which? 10) do parents take direct from vent of nestling? 11) have adults been seen to actually drop faecal sacs, and if so how far away?

Purpose of Data Capture

To determine how much and how birds kept their nests clear of faecal material.

Geographic Coverage

All of Britain and Ireland.

Temporal Coverage

The breeding seasons of 1942-1947 (though some observations which prompted the survey were from 1941).

Other Interested parties

The enquiry was organised and run by Dr R H Blair for the BTO. He was associated with the Cornwall Birdwatching and Preservation Society whose members had provided some of the early data.

Organiser(s)

R H Blair

Current Staff Contact

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Publications

The original enquiry arose from:

Blair, R.H. 1941. Nest-sanitation. With additions from published sources by B W Tucker. *British Birds* 34: 206-215, 226-235, 250-255;

A further note on the subject is:

Tucker, B.W. 1942. Further data on nest-sanitation. *British Birds* 35: 66-72, 90-97.

However no formal report on the enquiry was ever published.

The enquiry was noticed in *BTO Annual Report* numbers 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13 and 14; and *BTO Bulletin* numbers 20 and 24.

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

1 folder containing letters and 1 filled in form.

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