

# Pied Flycatcher 1952-1962

## Title

Pied Flycatcher distributions 1952-1962

## Description and Summary of Results

The Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca* was first recorded in Britain in 1676 and up to 1850 had been found to breed regularly in the northern counties of England, eastern North Wales and occasionally in SE England. Between 1851 and 1901 it was found to breed regularly in most of Wales and had begun to breed in the south of Scotland and perhaps on Exmoor. From 1901 to 1939 records in southern England virtually ceased, but there was some increase in the west of England, Wales and Scotland, but around 1940 it started to spread out further from established breeding areas, with first records from seven counties and reappearance in ten others after long intervals.

The survey of 1952 was set up to find out the status at that time and some subsequent work carried this on with a further repeat survey (although as it turned out less complete) in 1962. The detailed work was carried out by Bruce Campbell himself but questionnaires were used in both 1952 and 1962 to determine the status of the species all over Britain. In 1952 79 schedules (some of them covering parts of more than one county) were returned by 74 observers and the organiser received letters from 30 more. For 1962 72 questionnaires were completed and a number of letters were received.

The answers to the questionnaires and other data available during 1952-1962 suggested that the phase of increase and range extension which marked the period 1940-1952 had either slowed down considerably or, in certain areas, been reversed. But there were few ideas as to the factors governing the relatively long term fluctuations of such a summer visitor, whose life is hidden from observers in Europe for nearly three-quarters of the year. Estimates of numbers were produced but with several known caveats: the difficulty of assessing increase or decrease where the species was relatively common; the patchiness of the observer cover, especially in some important Welsh counties; the effect of an increase in numbers of nestboxes which make the birds easier to observe; and the increase in active bird-watching which probably emphasised positive rather than negative observations.

A detailed county by county summary is included in the reports for both the 1952 and 1962 surveys.

## Methods of Data Capture

The surveys were carried via questionnaires sent out to known representatives in the areas in which the species was known to be breeding or to have bred in the recent past. Experience had shown that questionnaires for enquiries of this type must be as simple as possible. Observers, though encouraged to give additional information, were asked three of the same questions in 1952 and 1962: whether they had proof of breeding in their nominated area; whether breeding was occasional, regular but in very small numbers, or regular in some numbers; and whether they had personal knowledge of the species' arrival

and spread in the area. In 1962 observers were also asked whether there had been a change of status since 1952.

The second object was to investigate the nature of the breeding habitats of the Pied Flycatcher in Britain and to relate their characteristic features, if possible, to the geographical distribution. Three questions in the schedule sent out dealt with: the typical breeding habitat in the observer's area; other types of habitat recorded; and the presence or absence of thick 'undergrowth' (in the sense both of shrub layer and field layer) in the habitats occupied.

### **Purpose of Data Capture**

To determine the status of the Pied Flycatcher throughout its breeding range in Britain.

### **Geographic Coverage**

All of Britain but coverage was less complete in 1962 than in 1952. The species is known only as a passage migrant in Ireland and the Isle of Man.

### **Temporal Coverage**

The breeding seasons of 1952-1962, with specific questionnaire surveys in 1952 and 1962.

### **Other Interested parties**

The 1952 and 1962 enquiries were organised and run by the BTO as Trust-aided Investigations. Bruce Campbell was employed as Secretary of the BTO for most of this time with part of his work funded largely by the Nature Conservancy, who provided a grant which covered the expenses of his field tour in 1952.

### **Organiser(s)**

Bruce Campbell

### **Current Staff Contact**

archives@bto.org

### **Publications**

The main reports from the surveys of the species are:

The 1952 enquiry: Campbell, B. 1954-1955. The breeding distribution and habitats of the Pied Flycatcher (*Muscicapa hypoleuca*) in Britain. *Bird Study* 1: 81-101; 2: 24-32; 2: 179-191.

The 1962 enquiry: Campbell, B. 1965. The British breeding distribution of the Pied Flycatcher, 1953-1962. *Bird Study* 12: 305-318.

The survey was noticed in *BTO Annual Report* number 19, *BTO Bulletin* numbers 45 and 47; and *Bird Study* issues for December 1961, and all four issues in 1962. In addition publicity

for the 1962 enquiry was given in *Scottish Birds* and *The Slasher* (the house journal of the Forestry Commission) and in several local ornithological society newsletters.

**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 Card Drawer containing records and notes from 1952, 2 Card Drawers containing ringing records from Forest of Dean, 1 Transfer Case containing Bruce Campbells's data from the Forest of Dean area 1948-1962 and various notes, and 1 Folder containing copies of the forms and instructions. (There is also 1 Transfer Case containing information from Chris Mead's extensive ringing of the species in Welsh Woods during the 1980s.)  
All the survey data cards and sheets have been scanned.

**Notes on Access and Use**

**Other information**

**Notes on Survey Design**

**Specific Issues for Analysis**