

Road Deaths 1960

Title

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Description and Summary of Results

Through the 1950s there was increasing concern over the numbers of birds (and mammals) being killed on Britain's roads. Hence a survey was organised with the support of the BTO, covering the period 1 May 1960 to 30 April 1961. The objectives were to discover approximately how many birds of which species were killed on the roads of Britain and any seasonal variations.

In spite of the magnitude of the task, 176 observers returned the necessary forms, but preliminary analysis made it plain that only the returns of those observers who had been able to continue without a break throughout the year could give reliable annual totals of casualties. With a minimum coverage fixed at 150 days more or less evenly spaced throughout the year, with no weeks missed, only 76 forms representing 25 English, 6 Welsh and 3 Scottish counties were fully usable for analyses, covering a total of 349 miles (562km) of road.

Generally speaking, busy main (A) roads passing through rural areas had the highest casualty rate, with busy B roads a close second, particularly if grain crops were growing alongside them. Built-up areas recorded many fewer, due no doubt mainly to the restricted speed of vehicles and the smaller bird populations of such areas. Numbers recorded there were probably reduced further by cats, dogs and cleaners removing them before they could be recorded.

On the roads which were covered in the survey, there was an annual casualty rate of 15.1 birds per mile (9.4 per km). If the 349 miles were a representative sample, the annual total casualty figure would be not less than about 2.9 million. However, there were many potential biases in the sample towards roads with higher casualty rates than average though precise calculations could not be made. For example: a) only about 20% of stretches surveyed were unclassified (10 casualties per mile) compared to 52% of the overall 195217 miles (314300km) being unclassified; b) many birds are struck glancing blows and thrown onto the verge, or fly clear only to die later, some are quickly removed by carrion-feeders, and some become lodged on vehicles, all leading to the recorded total being a minimum as most of these are never counted. Provisionally it seemed likely that around 2.5 million birds was a reasonable annual total.

The 76 returns which covered the entire year of the enquiry included 5269 casualties, representing 80 species of birds, with a further 8 recorded in the other returns.

For nearly all species for which there were adequate figures, deaths were most frequent from March to July and fewest in November to January. Some species stand out from the general pattern, but none very strikingly, although for example House Sparrows were killed in greatest numbers in July and August, when they visited cornfields in large flocks.

Methods of Data Capture

Questionnaires were circulated to members of the BTO and others who expressed willingness to help in the enquiry in response to radio and press publicity. They were asked to make regular surveys of a defined stretch of road at least once weekly, to identify the various vertebrate casualties, giving age and sex if possible, to record any significant features of the road surface where such casualties occurred, and to note any unusual conditions of traffic, weather etc. In addition, details of the length and location of the road surveyed (with, if possible, a sketch map) were requested, with information as to the type and volume of traffic using it, whether any speed restrictions were in force over part or the whole of the route, the nature of the road surface and adjacent borders, and the method of survey (by foot, cycle, car).

Purpose of Data Capture

The stated objectives were to find out approximately how many birds were killed in one year on the roads of Britain, which species were the chief victims, and whether there were any seasonal variations in the total numbers or the species composition.

Geographic Coverage

All of Britain.

Temporal Coverage

1 May 1960 to 30 April 1961.

Other Interested parties

The survey was organised and run by the BTO as a Trust-aided enquiry.

Organiser(s)

Terry Gompertz

Current Staff Contact

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Publications

The main report of the survey is:

Hodson, N.L. & Snow, D.W. 1965. The Road Deaths enquiry, 1960-61. *Bird Study* 12: 90-99.

The original proposal for a survey of this was:

Finnis, R.G. 1960. Road casualties among birds. *Bird Study* 7: 21-32.

The survey was noticed in *Bird Study* vol. 7 (for 1960) March and June issues and vol. 8 (1961) June, September and December issues.

Some other information on the subject is contained in:

Dunthorn, A.A. & Errington, F.P. 1964. Casualties among birds along a selected road in Wiltshire. *Bird Study* 11: 168-182; and in:

Hodson, N.L. 1962. Some notes on the causes of bird road casualties. *Bird Study* 9: 168-173.

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

3 archive boxes containing the data and letters; and 1 card drawer containing names and addresses of participants. Some follow up information is included. All have been scanned.

Notes on Access and Use

Other information

Notes on Survey Design

Specific Issues for Analysis