

Starling Roosts 1932

Title

Survey of winter Starling roosts 1932/33

Description and Summary of Results

The Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* was well known to collect into large roosts in the winter, but it was not known where these all were or how widespread they were. Starlings were also thought to have increased in numbers during the previous hundred years or so in some parts of the country at least. So an enquiry was organised to find out as much as possible, and the appeals for information resulted in many hundreds of reports from all parts of the country, giving varying amounts of information.

There were often several reports about one roost, and as a big roost is very conspicuous, it is thought unlikely that very many were missed.

Reports of 285 roosts occupied during the winter 1932/33 were received (224 in England, 39 in Scotland, and 22 in Wales). In the autumn, roosts were often occupied only for a short time and then abandoned. It was hoped to compile a specific list of the roosts occupied in January 1933, when there was little movement of roosts taking place. However, it proved impossible to do this for all, and so the total number occupied at any time between October 1932 and April 1933 was considered. This number will have included the same group of birds more than once if they changed their roost during the winter, but this point was ignored as the exact number of cases was not known, and it was felt that the slight excess thus produced will have tended to counterbalance roosts which were missed altogether. The considerable majority of roosts were below 600ft asl (200m). The highest density was south of a line from the Severn to the Wash although numbers were lower in east coast counties. About 15000-20000 were found to roost on buildings in London, and some in other large cities. There was variation in the number of years that a starling roost was occupied and, of 247 roosts for which the age was reported, 107 had been used for over ten years, and 84 more for at least two. However some were much more transient.

The published report also contains some notes on the behaviour and effects of the Starlings and their roosts, including the effect on the trees, on other birds, on predatory animals, and in scattering the seeds of plants, as well as their potential effects on agriculture.

Methods of Data Capture

Printed questionnaires were sent out to those who responded to appeals in the press, and on BBC radio. Whenever possible the help of a reliable observer was obtained to oversee the returns dealing with each county.

In addition to the position of the roost, information was requested on such as the age of the roost, the kind of cover used, and the effect on the trees.

It was thought impossible to estimate the number of Starlings in a roost with any accuracy, even in favourable cases, and so the survey only considered the number of roosts, and only those estimated to contain 500 birds and upwards were included.

Purpose of Data Capture

The main object was to locate as many as possible of the major Starling roosts in Great Britain which were in use during the period October 1932 to April 1933, and to collect information of all kinds about them.

Geographic Coverage

All of Great Britain.

Temporal Coverage

All roosts encountered between October 1932 and April 1933.

Other Interested parties

B J Marples organised and ran the survey on the lines of what would become typical of BTO surveys. Appeals were broadcast on both radio and in many newspapers.

Organiser(s)

B J Marples

Current Staff Contact

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Publications

The main report of the survey is:

Marples, B.J. 1934. The winter Starling roosts of Great Britain, 1932-1933. *Journal of Animal Ecology* 3: 187-203.

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

4 boxes (1 containing data forms, 2 of letters, and 1 of tables, maps, and the report).

Notes on Access and Use

Other information

Notes on Survey Design

Specific Issues for Analysis