

Wintering Cormorants 1985/1986

Title

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Description and Summary Results

Cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo* are large birds which eat fish. Until the passing of the Wildlife & Countryside Act of 1981 and the Wildlife Order for Northern Ireland in 1984, Cormorants could be shot if they were perceived to be causing problems, but the two Acts made it necessary to obtain a licence to do this. Cormorants also discovered that fish farms which were proliferating through the 1970s and 1980s were an excellent supply of food, and many owners were applying for licences to control the birds.

Hence there was a need to find out how many there actually were. The breeding population was known (from Operation Seafarer and other surveys) to be around 6000 pairs with almost all on the coast, but there was very little known about how many occurred and where in the winter, not helped because many ornithologists ignored them, even on such as estuary or wildfowl counts. Hence the BTO organised a survey of wintering birds to find out.

In all 456 coastal sites were counted (211 in England, 82 in Wales, 129 in Scotland and 34 in Northern Ireland) and produced 10000-12000 birds in each of September to December, a number which dropped steadily through ca 9500 in January, 8000 in February, just over 7000 in March to 4500 in April. At 667 inland sites (430 in England, 57 in Wales, 12 in Scotland and 59 in Northern Ireland) there were 12500 in September, 14500-15000 from October to January, 12700 in February, 11000 in March and 6200 in April. The December peak was slightly lower than had been expected and the drop-off in numbers through the spring was marked. Only 20 inland sites held more than 50 birds.

Methods of Data Capture

The survey was to determine how many birds were wintering the UK. Observers were asked for monthly counts at all inland and coastal waters between September 1985 and April 1986, as well as three counts at all known roosts.

Total numbers were calculated using these counts and any made during Birds of Estuaries Enquiry and the National Wildfowl counts.

Purpose of Data Capture

To determine the number of Cormorants wintering the UK.

Geographic Coverage

All of the UK.

Temporal Coverage

The winter of 1985/86 with counts requested for each month from September 1985 to April 1986.

Other Interested parties

The survey was organised and run by the BTO in association with the Scottish Ornithologists' Club and with support from both the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (Richard Porter was employed by them at the time) and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Organiser(s)

Richard Porter, Jeremy J.D. Greenwood and Julian G. Greenwood.

Current Staff Contact

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Publications

The survey was announced in *BTO News* number 140 and there was a preliminary report in number 150. This promised a fuller report, which would include an analysis of the roost counts, to be published in *Bird Study* in due course. The latter was however never produced.

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 Transfer Case containing survey cards and letters. All have been scanned.

Notes on Access and Use

Other information

Notes on Survey Design

Specific Issues for Analysis