

Woodcock 1934

Title

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Description and Summary of Results

In the early 1930s the Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola* appeared to be common in some places and much less so in others and was quite widely shot in the winter. It was known to breed over much of Scotland and Ireland as well as southern England but with gaps in the Midlands and in Wales and SW England. It was thought to winter over almost all of the country. However details of this and general biology of the species were largely unknown, and so it was deemed to be a species worthy of a survey to find out more, especially as it was also thought to have decreased as a wintering species and increased in the breeding season.

Forms and instructions were distributed in April 1934 with a request to return these by the autumn. When the forms were returned it was found that, especially in Scotland and Ireland, there were too few to produce sensible figures and so the survey was extended into 1935 with a particular emphasis placed then on areas not previously reported on.

By the end almost 1000 forms had been returned – 611 from England, 59 from Wales, 1 from Isle of Man, 245 from Scotland and 70 from Ireland. These enabled some detailed analyses of the status of the species over the country. In addition to distribution and some idea of numbers a lot of information was collected on the general biology of the species although not all observers answered all the questions.

In addition to this part of the project bird ringers were encouraged to ring the species, and ring prices for the species were specially reduced for this. Over 1200 were ringed in the two years and 80 recovered all of which added considerably to knowledge of movements in particular.

The published report gives full and detailed information on: breeding distribution (with a county by county summary of the results of the survey) and where possible the history (part 1); breeding habitat (237 in woods especially birch woods, 33 in bushy habitats and 68 in bracken, moorland or other habitats) and breeding biology (part 2); movements and migrations (part 3); the distribution in winter, again on a county by county basis (parts 4, 5 and 6).

Methods of Data Capture

The survey asked specifically for information on numbers and distribution, and other questions asked about all other aspects of the biology of the species. Forms were sent out to readers of the April 1934 issue of *British Birds* as well as to known naturalists, land-owners and estates. Letters publicising the project were also sent to various newspapers and magazines.

The questionnaire (form) asked for details of the area being covered and then a series of questions: 1) do Woodcock breed in the area, and if so how many and exactly where? 2) are they resident through the winter? 3) how long are they known to have bred there? 4)

have there been any increases or decreases? If so when? 5) are there more at some seasons than others?

Observers were asked to answer all these questions but some further optional questions were added: 6) are there any fluctuations in breeding numbers? 7) size of broods and clutches; 8) evidence of non-breeding or double-brooding; 9) what type of habitat do they breed and winter in; 10) evidence of main predators; 11) feeding methods and times of day; 12) details of roding behaviour; 13) observations of parents carrying young; 14) records of any shooting bags; 15) weights and measures of shot birds; 16) any other information.

Purpose of Data Capture

To gain as much information as possible on the biology of the Woodcock with an emphasis on distribution and numbers in both the breeding season and winter.

Geographic Coverage

All of Great Britain and Ireland. The report details records from all over both countries.

Temporal Coverage

1934 and 1935 with forms originally sent out in April 1934.

Other Interested parties

The survey was organised and run by the (then fledgling) BTO.

Organiser(s)

W B Alexander

Current Staff Contact

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Publications

The report of the project was eventually published in several parts in *Ibis*: Alexander, W.B. 1945-1947. The Woodcock in the British Isles. *Ibis* 87: 512-550 (part 1); 88: 1-24 (part 2); 88: 159-179 (part 3); 88: 271-286 (part 4); 88: 427-444 (part 5); 89: 1-28 (part 6).

The survey was also noticed in *BTO Annual Report* numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 9; and in *BTO Bulletin* numbers 1 and 2.

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

17 boxes containing data and letters, and 1 containing feather samples.

Notes on Access and Use

Other information

Notes on Survey Design

Specific Issues for Analysis