

Woodpigeon 1942-1946

Title

Woodpigeon Enquiry 1942-1946

Description and Summary of Results

By the middle of the Second World War there was increasing concern being expressed that some birds were being detrimental to food production. The two most specifically thought to be such were the Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus* (the subject of this project) and the Rook *Corvus frugilegus* (the subject of a separate project which ran at much the same time). The BTO was asked and funded to provide information on the numbers and distribution of the Woodpigeon, and were asked to ensure that work on these projects on "birds of economic importance" should take precedence over all other natural history work.

Members and others were asked specifically to find and count nests in as many places as possible and to record all flocks seen at all times of year, while professional staff would concentrate on more detailed studies of feeding, development and growth of young, and movements, as well as experimental work on baiting and control of numbers of the species. In all 3155 nest records were submitted, 1860 in 1942 and 1295 in 1943. England and S Wales were adequately covered but N Wales was poorly and Scotland very poorly covered, the latter with only 190 nests of which 93 came from Orkney. Two peaks of nesting were found (late May- early June and mid-late July) with nests in 1943 found to be about a fortnight later than 1942.

Winter flock numbers were analysed and showed that flocks in eastern England were considerably larger than in Wales and SW England

An overall conclusion was that there was no need to take special steps to reduce the Woodpigeon population. There seemed to be a decline in numbers anyway during the course of the Second World War and it was thought that this was due, at least in part, to more pigeons being shot and fewer predators being killed than during peace time. The suggestion was made that the peacetime situation should be assessed fully before any control measures were needed.

Methods of Data Capture

The primary method used to determine distribution and numbers was nest counts during the breeding season. Observers (members of the BTO and many others recruited from various publicity) were asked to send in details of all nests they found and at all times of year using special nest record cards. They were also asked to send in details of all flocks they saw with place, date and numbers of birds seen.

Purpose of Data Capture

To get some actual figures on numbers and distribution of Woodpigeons as well as information on breeding biology over as wide an area as possible. This was primarily to find

out if and how much the species was affecting the production of food for human consumption.

Geographic Coverage

All of Great Britain.

Temporal Coverage

The project was carried out from 1942 to 1946 although the nest and flock counts carried out by BTO members and others were mainly in 1942 and 1943 and were not required after 1945.

Other Interested parties

The project was funded by the Agricultural Research Council as part of the war effort because Woodpigeons were thought to be detrimental to food production.

Organiser(s)

M K Colquhoun was the overall co-ordinator, but he was helped on various aspects by other staff for some or all the period of the project (E Cohen, R A Lewin, M Morris, T Ricketts, M Rothschild, D Z Self, G Waterston and I Werth).

Current Staff Contact

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Publications

The published report on this project is:

Colquhoun, M.K. 1951. The wood pigeon in Britain. *Agricultural Research Council Report* 10: 1-69.

(This is abridged from the full report submitted by the organiser to the Agricultural Research Council.)

The project was also noticed in *BTO Annual Report* numbers 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13; and in *BTO Bulletin* numbers 11, 13, 14 and 18. A *Wood Pigeon Bulletin* was also produced regularly and sent to participating observers, as well as some pamphlets on particular aspects of the project.

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

10 boxes; 3 contain field cards, 4 nest records and 3 contain letters and correspondence.

Notes on Access and Use

Other information

Notes on Survey Design

Specific Issues for Analysis