



BTO

Looking out for birds

Surrey Newsletter Autumn 2012

Dear BTO Member/BTO surveyor

Introduction

Welcome to the autumn newsletter. If you have joined the BTO since my previous *Newsletters* then welcome. Whether new or not please contact me if you want to know more about how you can become more involved in helping the BTO with its surveys in Surrey. This is the first newsletter since the BTO's Nightingale Survey. The survey proved quite a challenge and, six weeks before it was due to start, the weather was almost summer-like but I did not have enough surveyors. However, a trip around the RSPB groups in Surrey and a good response to my last *Newsletter* resulted in me having all the priority tetrads (some 50) being covered and nearly all the non-priority tetrads (57) covered too. A big thank you to everyone who contributed.

The national results are still being collected so, if you saw or heard a Nightingale during the spring/summer and have not yet reported it, please do so. If you use the internet you can do so through BirdTrack but if you don't have internet access then you can let me know and I can report it for you.

As soon as the nightingale survey started, the weather deteriorated rapidly. Indeed the BTO extended the period of the daytime survey due to the appalling weather. Because of the weather, a number of people were unable to complete the surveys, especially the BBS (Breeding Bird Survey). If this is the case and you have not yet told me please do let me know as I am still waiting for quite a few results to come in. If you are no longer able to do a survey for me please do let me know as soon as possible because I am lucky enough to have new surveyors.

Results of the Nightingale Survey

I don't know how many birds were heard in the respective tetrads when the survey last took place in 1999, so I have taken the figures for Surrey's 10-km squares from the 1999 survey as they are published in Jeff Wheatley's book *The Birds of Surrey*. I've set out below how many birds were reported in each 10-km

square in 1999 and overleaf how many have been reported to me for 2012. You do need to bear in mind however that I do not have the figures for some of the 10-km squares, N/K means not known at present.

	SU84	SU85	SU86	SU93	SU94	SU95	SU96	TQ03	TQ04
1999	0	0	0	13	5	5	0	17	3
2012	0	N/K	N/K	39	4	1	0	31	
	TQ05	TQ06	TQ13	TQ14	TQ15	TQ16	TQ17	TQ23	TQ24
1999	1	2	0	1	18	1	0	0	6
2012	0	2	5	21	19	2	N/K	N/K	11
	TQ25	TQ26	TQ27	TQ33	TQ34	TQ35	TQ36	TQ44	TQ45
1999	0	0	0	0	12	1	0	1	1
2012	0	N/K	N/K	N/K	9	4	N/K	N/K	1*

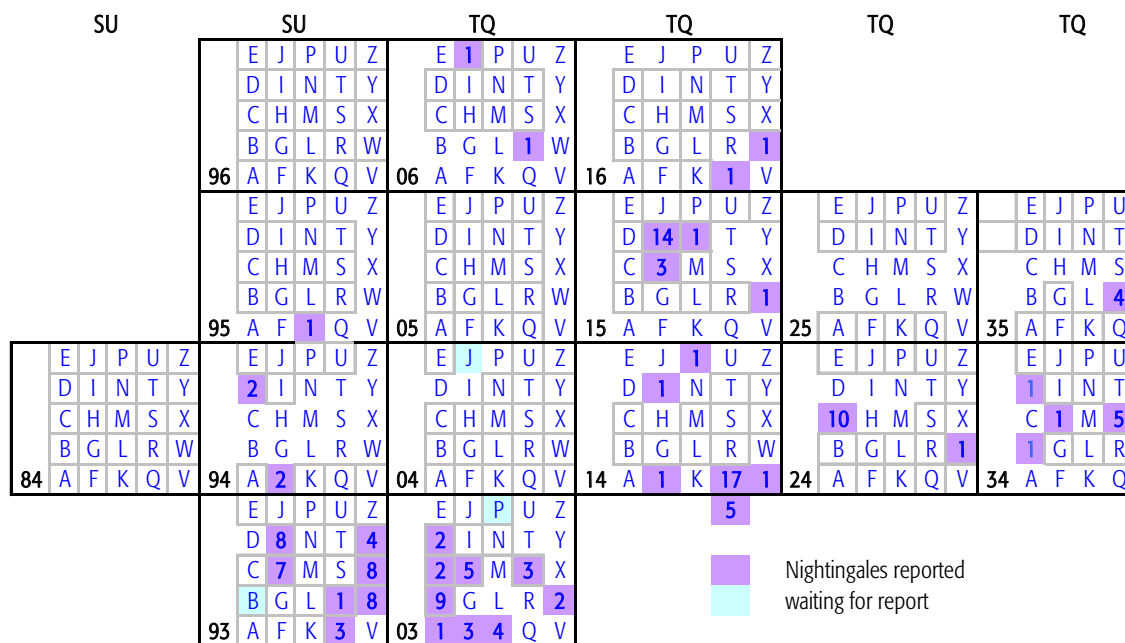
*BirdTrack entry so there may have been more than one

How you can help me and the BTO

• The Winter Thrushes Survey

Wednesday 12 September 2012 marked the start of the new Winter Thrushes Survey. Over the next two winters the BTO are asking people across the UK to record where and when they encounter any of the six species of thrush (Blackbird, Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Redwing, Fieldfare and Ring Ouzel).

The reason for this survey is that populations of all six species have shown signs of decline over the last 40 years. Blackbird, Song Thrush and Mistle Thrush have largely sedentary populations in the UK but the Blackbird population is heavily augmented each winter by huge arrivals of immigrants from Scandinavia and continental Europe, along with a sometimes massive winter influx of Redwing and Fieldfare from Scandinavia and Iceland. It is clear that these birds find something to their liking in the British countryside during the winter months. The aim of the survey is to discover exactly what this is and to determine seasonal and geographical patterns of how thrushes use the countryside.



Above I have set out how many males have been reported singing in each 2-km square in 2012.

Everyone can take part

John Marchant, the Survey Organiser at the BTO, said, 'This is a survey that anyone can take part in, whether new to birdwatching or an experienced BTO surveyor. There will be a wealth of online resources, from species identification videos, photographs and audio material, to guides on berries, fruit and crops that are likely to be important for thrushes. If you have a regular winter walk, and you see thrushes, then this survey is for you.' If you do not have such a walk you can always create one.

In the UK, thrushes show a strong liking for berries such as hawthorn, blackthorn, ivy and holly in the first part of the winter, and then forage extensively for earthworms, snails and other invertebrates later in the season. Therefore an important aspect of the survey will be to record which food sources the birds are using at different times and places. It will also look at how changes in the countryside have affected thrush populations and how important food resources provided by gardens, orchards, hedgerows and woodlands are to their winter survival.

To take part in the survey, and help find answers to these questions, all you will have to do is map the thrushes you see on your favourite winter walk, or in your local neighbourhood, observe their habitat and behaviour and report details to the survey using a simple online recording system. The survey is running through to early April 2013 and again in the winter of 2013/14. I tell you more below under the heading 'How you get involved in the Winter Thrushes survey'.

How you get involved in the Winter Thrushes survey

I need help with at least 20 1-km squares. The BTO want to ensure that these are covered so this is my priority – organising this coverage. I list these squares below and I am supposed to allocate up in the order in which they are set out below. However, I do appreciate that, if you are willing to help, you may not want to travel too far, so I am happy to take whatever offers I get. Each of these squares only has to be surveyed once between 27 December and 10 January. You can, of course, survey the square more than once if you wish.

These squares have been randomly selected and I have been asked to let the BTO know if any of them are inaccessible. Now I certainly know that one of them is as it is the 1-km square covered by Gatwick runway, therefore it is likely that that square will be replaced by another one. If all the squares are covered and volunteers are still coming forward, I will be offered further squares. If you can help please do contact me.

Although I am responsible for allocating the squares (and I am willing to enter results for anyone who does not have internet access) I do not have to collect paper results as all the results are entered online. Therefore, rather than setting out more information about the survey method here, I am giving you a link to the part of the BTO website which details all of the survey instructions and has the paper forms which you can complete whilst out on your survey. I can supply paper forms to anyone who needs them and wants me to enter their results. (The link is at www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/winter-thrushes/survey-methods).

10 KM	Grid Ref	Site Name	10 KM	Grid Ref	Site Name
SU94 – 1	SU9146	Puttenham Common	SU93 –11	SU9836	East of Chiddingfold
TQ06 – 2	TQ0667	Shepperton Gravel Pits	SU93 –12	SU9834	North of Tugley Wood
TQ06 – 3	TQ0966	West of Walton on Thames	TQ34 –13	TQ3045	W of Outwood and the M23
TQ14 – 4	TQ1349	S of Ranmore Common	TQ25 –14	TQ2252	S of Walton Heath
TQ35 – 5	TQ3456	Caterham	SU94 –15	SU9742	Busbridge Hall
TQ04 – 6	TQ0548	N of Albury	TQ15 –16	TQ1958	East of Ashted
SU93 – 7	SU9439	South-west of Witley	SU95 –17	SU9958	Woking
SU96 – 8	SU9766	Wentworth Golf course	TQ24 –18	TQ2740	Gatwick Airport Runway
TQ05 – 9	TQ0652	Hatchlands	TQ05 –19	TQ0858	East of Boldermere
TQ04 – 10	TQ0641	S of Winterfold Heath	TQ15 –20	TQ1350	Ranmore Common

If you do not want to choose one of these 1-km squares but you wish to become involved then you can still do so. You have to select your own 1-km square from the website. First of all you have to login. You will find a list of options on the right-hand side, click on 'Choose a square' – the screen then tells you to put the mouse over the square you want. You will find you have a map of the whole of the UK at this stage which makes it difficult getting the square that you want to select listed in the box 'Mouse over'. My tip is to put your mouse over the part of Surrey where your selected square is, click once and then use the slider on the left-hand side to increase the size of Surrey so that you can see your selected area more clearly. You can drag the UK around by using your mouse so that the increase in size occurs for the area that you want to see. Only then should you then move the mouse around over the screen until you can see the 1-km square that you want listed.

In the published BTO instructions there is some information about mapping your route for your 1-km square. I am hoping to persuade the BTO to produce a video demonstration which is put onto the BTO website in order to demonstrate how to do this. I think this will be much easier for everyone to understand rather than trying to follow the written instructions.

A second survey

A parallel piece of work, launching on 30 September and running over this winter until Saturday 30 March 2013, examines how wintering thrushes use the berries and other fruits available in gardens. This work, the 'Birds and Garden Berries Study' will identify which fruits (both native and non-native) are used at different points throughout the winter. It will also establish whether birds show preferences for particular types or colours of berry. A free survey pack, which includes advice on improving your garden's attractiveness to birds, is available from Birds and Garden Berries Study, BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk, IP24 2PU, or by calling 01842 750050.

Mike Toms, Head of Garden Ecology at the BTO, has said *'We are really keen to involve gardeners and garden birdwatchers in this new project and need their help to build up a national picture of which fruits and berries are available and which birds are using them. In addition to some simple weekly recording throughout autumn and winter, we also need some people to carry out some more detailed work by participating in timed counts of birds eating berries.'*

• By increasing the number of Nest Recorders

The BTO provided me with a list showing how many people in Surrey record nests and I was slightly shocked at the low number, particularly when you consider how many birdwatchers there are in the county.

In a recent year's results there were only 13 nest recorders and only 279 records of nests supplied to the BTO. I know this is not a good time of year to ask you to get involved in nest recording but, if you are interested, you could start learning more about the subject in readiness for next spring (although do remember that Woodpigeon and Collared Doves can nest throughout the year).

More information about the scheme is on the BTO website at www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/nrs

If you do not have internet access, then please contact

me and I will send you the information. By the way, I can strongly recommend the BTO book *A Field Guide to Monitoring Nests*. Why not ask for it as a Christmas present!

Helping finalise Surrey's results for The Bird Atlas 2007–11

(or 2012 so far as Surrey is concerned) text courtesy of Hugh Evans

'Time runneth out'...

You may recall that Surrey Bird Club (SBC) elected to extend the national Bird Atlas 2007–11 survey by one further year in order to gather additional observations (technically referred to as gap-filling) for our Surrey local atlas. It is amongst about 30 other county bird clubs taking advantage of the BTO Atlas database facility to achieve this. Sincere thanks to everyone who responded to my earlier appeal by targeting tetrads with low species counts both to boost totals and to upgrade breeding status from Seen >Possible > Probable > Confirmed where possible. Significant improvements have been achieved in 2012. There will inevitably remain some tetrads where the finer detail is lacking, but, even over the five-year period, there simply has not been the manpower to cover all 575 Surrey tetrads as thoroughly as we would have liked. That said, we have achieved much greater coverage than seemed possible back in 2007. Please check through your notebooks and submit any additional observations for Surrey up to 31 October 2012, as these will be very welcome. The deadline for the entry of any records for the Surrey Atlas will be 31st December 2012. These can be entered online via www.birdatlas.net as Roving Records, or on paper forms which should be returned to me for inputting (not to BTO HQ as was the case for the national atlas). Forms can be downloaded from the Atlas website or from me by post. If you have internet access you can view current progress at both the 10-km square and tetrad levels on the BTO website. Alternatively you can visit the SBC website www.surreybirdclub.org.uk and click on the NEWS tab and select the Revised Winter Atlas Maps 2007–11 item which also includes the latest Changes in Breeding Distribution maps since the previous Surrey atlas in 1988–97. Examples of these were shown in the spring issue of *Birding Surrey* published by the Surrey Bird Club

There is 'Life after Atlas'...

If you have been an active user of the BirdAtlas.net site over the last five years please consider converting to the BirdTrack.net website as a means of recording your observations. The two systems have been developed in parallel and share much in common as far as transactions are concerned. I would thoroughly recommend you read the *BirdTrack Newsletter* recently published online, (www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/birdtrack/about/birdtrack-news or paper copies from me), as this summarises progress achieved so far, and the benefits to conservation that follow from it. Last, but by no means least, on behalf of both BTO and SBC I would like to thank everyone who has contributed in any way to the Bird Atlas. Take comfort from the fact that there is life after Atlas, as we still need observations in databases in order to conserve birds and their habitats, not just in Surrey, and your records will help ensure the future of both.

Hugh Evans (Atlas RO Surrey)

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• **Entering more Records through BirdTrack**

The aim of BirdTrack is to encourage birdwatchers to record your sightings each time you go out into BirdTrack. Now I decided to do this when I go to do some specific surveys, such as my WeBS. Using WeBS as my example, the waterbirds I see are entered through WeBS online but what happens when I then go to BirdTrack in order to enter the other birds that I have seen during the same visit? When you do this there is a question 'is this your complete list?' Do I enter the waterbirds again in order to say yes which means duplication? I asked this question of Nick Moran at the BTO and his reply was '*Strictly speaking, a BirdTrack complete list should include everything you identify, including WeBS species. However, this would mean duplicating your data entry for those species, which is something we don't want to inflict anyone. For this reason, I would suggest submitting an incomplete list for the remaining species. In future I am hopeful there will be a better linkage between WeBS and BirdTrack - perhaps giving the option to go straight through to BirdTrack at the end of a WeBS submission to record non-WeBS species.*'

Volunteer to enter paper records into the BTO Database for me

One request I make of my surveyors is that, where they can, they enter their results online. Some surveyors do not have internet access and some that do struggle so I am still sent quite a few results on paper forms. I know the BTO would like me to enter those results for them but it is something, at present, that I do not have the time for as I still have a paid job as well as being the Surrey RR. If anyone would be willing to help me by entering the results online then I can arrange with BTO that you are given additional access so you can enter the results for me. Therefore, please do contact me if this is something with which you can help me.

• **Helping me with**

1. Becoming a Square steward – one is still needed for each of SU95, TQ03, TQ04 and TQ14.
2. Becoming a WeBS surveyor (see my website or contact me for a list of vacant sites)
3. Becoming a BBS surveyor (see my website or contact me for a list of vacant sites) I have some good ones – one surveyor who cannot carry on said '*I will really miss it - both of the transects are fantastic.*'

How I might be able to help you Asking me a Question

Now it may be that you have a question like the one that I asked of Nick Moran that you would like to have answered. You can of course contact me and, if I do not know the answer, I will know a person at the BTO who does.

Setting up a Yahoo Group question and answer session

However, I have also thought about setting up a yahoo group to which Surrey BTO members and surveyors can have access and therefore ask questions and see the replies to questions asked by other members. If you subscribed to the group you would get to see all the email exchanges between members of the group (if the email is exchanged via the group). I know Helen Crabtree (Sussex Regional Rep) runs such a yahoo group and has a lot of subscribers. Setting up a group would take a bit of time but I am more than willing to do this if some of you think it would be a good idea, so please let me know your views.

Coming out on a survey with me

If anyone would like to come along with me on any of my surveys in order to see what is involved (Chobham and the Jubilee River near Windsor) do let me know. If these places are too far away but you would like to go out with a surveyor let me know and I will see what I can organise.

Coming out on a Field Trip with Surrey Bird Club

The BTO in partnership with Surrey Bird Club and the Club has agreed that I can invite BTO members and surveyors to the Club's field meetings. If you are going to join the Club at such a meeting please could you let either me or Kevin Duncan (who leads the trips) know and we can let you have further details such as the meeting time. Kevin Duncan can be contacted on email at kevinpduncan@hotmail.co.uk

These are the field trips for the next eight months:

- 14/10/2012 Wimbledon Common
- 11/11/2012 RSPB Pulborough Brooks, West Sussex
- 09/12/2012 Barnes Wetland Centre
- 12/01/2012 Papercourt Water Meadows near Ripley
- 10/02/2013 Farlington Marshes Kent
- 10/03/2013 Staines Reservoir
- 14/04/2013 Pennington Marshes
- 05/05/2013 Bookham Common for the Dawn Chorus
- 08/06/2013 Crooksbury Common for Nightjars

Meeting me

14 June 2013 – Epsom & Ewell RSPB Group
I am giving a talk called 'A Year in the Life of a BTO Regional Rep'. It will not just be about the surveys I organise but will also include slides from my birding trips over the year.

Reminders

- If you are on email and have received this newsletter by post please let me have your email address.
- Please remember to tell me if you change your email address.
- If you do not want to read this *Newsletter* please save the BTO some money by letting me know either by email to penny@waxwing.plus.com or by telephone. Just leave a message on the answerphone and I will take you off my mailing list.

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Since preparing this newsletter quite a few of the Wintering Thrush 1-km squares listed have been 'sold'. I can ask for more but remember you can always select any square that appeals to you and do not have to choose one on my list (as long as someone else has not taken it already). I will be away for three weeks from 2 October and will not have access to my emails so please do not think I am ignoring you if you contact me during that period. I will be in touch with you as soon as I have time upon my return (as I am back at work the following day).

THANKS AND HAPPY BIRDWATCHING!