

Surrey Newsletter Spring 2013



What I have been doing

Since the last newsletter I have attended the BTO's Regional Network Conference which is where the Regional Reps (RRs) from throughout the country meet up in order to discuss issues and get some prior warning of potential surveys. It was here that I was told about the 2013 Woodcock survey (more on that later) and we also got an opportunity to discuss the Wintering Thrushes survey and the problems some surveyors were having in mapping their squares (including yours truly). As a result of that meeting the BTO has produced some videos which help with the Wintering Thrushes survey. They are really helpful as you can watch on screen as someone maps a route, amends the route and then enters the results. Some things are just so much easier to understand when someone demonstrates what you can do rather than explains it in the written word. Similar videos have now been released which help with the BBS survey. This is also where you can find all the BTO bird ID videos. The latest one compares Little Egret and Great White Egret (www.bto.org/about-birds/bird-id).

You can also find out lots of information about birds through the Birdfacts part of the website where you are given in depth information about all of the 580 species recorded in the wild in Britain. For each bird, BirdFacts provides details of Population and Distribution, Breeding and Survival and Biometrics, along with other fascinating facts (www.bto.org/about-birds).

The RR meeting was up in Carlisle on a Saturday and I was fortunate enough to be able to take a few days off work. My husband joined me at the end of the meeting and we then went up to Caerlaverock on the Solway Firth for three days. Highlights were thousands of Barnacle Geese, a hunting male Hen Harrier, badgers just below the conservatory window (we were staying on the reserve), lots of Redwings and Fieldfares (that is where they all are) and then three Waxwings just as we were leaving to return home. My first Waxwings of the winter although I have been lucky enough to see some others since.

I also attended the BTO annual conference in Swanwick in December. One highlight for me was the talk by Debra Pain, the WWT Head of Conservation, on the Spoon-billed Sandpiper project, which opened the conference. What

really came across from her talk was the importance of the partnerships which had to be put into place in order to achieve anything. One of the partners in the project is BTO.

The other highlight of the BTO conference was right at the end. Three young people spoke about how they had become involved in nest recording and ringing and made suggestions about how to get young people involved (including using social media which I have to admit is still a bit of a challenge for me).

Last month I went to the Surrey Wildlife Trust (SWT) Recorders' Meeting. There I met a number of people who are involved in recording other species in Surrey and there were two projects in particular that drew my attention.

One is the River Warden Project where the intention is to involve people in surveys of sections of the rivers looking for signs of otters, water voles, invasive species and all sorts of other things. It is effectively a pilot project to start with and the plea is for help with the north branch of the River Wey. Firstly, (with my Wetland Bird survey hat on) I thought that it would be helpful if any such surveys could also include a report of any waterbirds seen and secondly, I thought some of you as BTO members/surveyors might be interested in becoming involved. It appears that there are two people who could be contacted. One is Jim Jones from SWT (jim.jones@surreywt.org.uk) and the other is June Chatfield from the Northern Wey Trust (collections@haslemermuseum.co.uk). If you think you could help please contact them directly. If you might be able to survey for waterbirds as well at the same time then contact me.

The other projects which caught my interest are two Bioblitzes. Now I know what one is through listening to the Radio 4 series called Saving Species as there was an article on that program about one of these. The definition is '*A Bioblitz is a large scale event that engages large numbers of people with biodiversity, inviting them to get directly involved in surveying and monitoring their local wildlife and green spaces. During a Bioblitz event scientists and members of the public work together to survey a natural space; seeking, identifying and recording as many species as possible over 24 hours. The majority of events work directly with an environmental records centre or within certain parameters in order to ensure that the data collected will have maximum scientific impact. Previous events have located between 300 and*

1000 unique species, depending on the site and number of people involved'.

Hearing about these proposed Bioblitzes was particularly useful because one of the projects in which I am involved with Surrey Bird Club (SBC) is in inspiring the younger generation to become involved in birdwatching and, for me in particular, in surveying, ringing or nest recording. SBC has decided to support the two Bioblitzes which are taking place this summer. One run by SWT at Pond Farm at Wisley and one run by the National Trust at Rhododendron Wood in Leith Hill. There will be bird walks, ringing, an identification competition involving photographs, nests and feathers and, hopefully, if any nest can be found, a telescope will be set up to show the nest so that any children attending can get a close up view. We are looking for more people to help on either day so, if you would like to help, please do get in contact with me. The dates are 15/16 June and 28/29 June. Remember what I said about the Spoon-billed Sandpiper project – it is all about getting people involved in partnerships and Bioblitzes get lots of organisations into a partnership and it is really important that we get the younger generation involved in 'citizen science'.

Current surveys

Remember that it is often just as important finding out that a species is not present as finding it is. Also it is extremely important that the more common birds are recorded so that any reductions in their numbers are known.

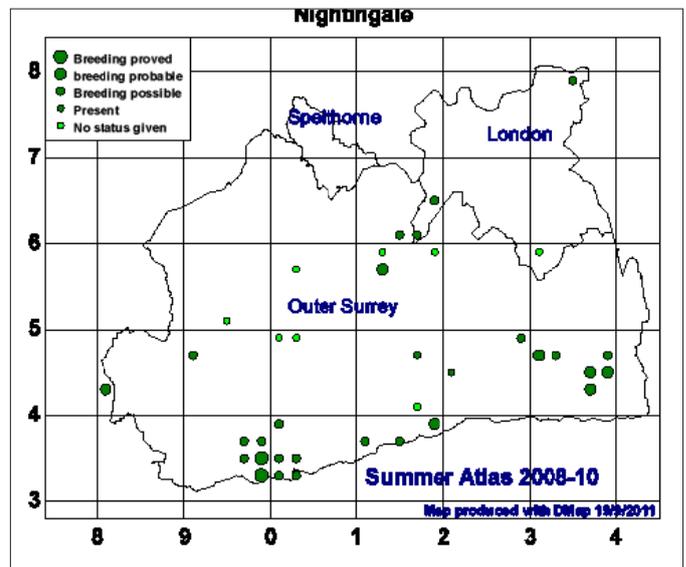
The Winter Thrushes survey

I had a wonderful response to my appeal for surveyors to cover the sites selected by the BTO for coverage. As far as I am aware all sites were covered during the 10 day period chosen by the BTO although a couple of surveyors still have to enter their results. However lots of you have chosen your own sites and visited them many times. Thank you very much for getting involved in this survey. It is running until the middle of April so there is still time to select a site and do some walks and record all the thrushes that you see. Also the survey is going to run next winter as well (although there may be a few minor changes to the methodology). If you were put off when you read the initial instructions, please do have another go. There are now, as I have mentioned above, training videos on the BTO website. The most important aspect of these training videos (in my opinion) is that they show how easy it is to edit anything that you have entered, if you discover you have made a mistake.

The Nightingale Survey

Due to the poor weather last summer the BTO are going to have some more sites surveyed for nightingales. They are going to concentrate their efforts on Essex and Suffolk but have asked, if any high priority sites in Surrey which was not covered in 2012, could be covered this year instead. I had thought, before the survey period started, that I had all my sites covered but, unfortunately, six of them could not be covered (or only had one visit) due to unforeseen circumstances.

The sites are: SU93B (Haslemere) SU93T (SE of Hambledon) TQ03V (Pensfold Furzefield) TQ03X (Rudgwick) TQ24K (Roband Electronics) & TQ03Y (Pollingford Manor). So, if you could offer to help with any of these sites, please let me know. Only two daytime visits are required, the BTO are not asking for any night-time visits this time.



The Bird Atlas 2007–2011 (or 2012 so far as Surrey is concerned)

The Breeding Bird Survey

This survey runs every year and I still have a few sites which need covering. It only involves three visits, one as a recce and checking out the habitat and then two others one between 1 April and 15 May, the other between 15 May and 30 June. The list of vacant sites is kept up to date on my website. If you do not have internet access do give me a ring if you are interested. I know some of the sites are in quite residential areas (the squares are randomly selected) but, in my experience, you get to count many more birds there! Some of the other sites are in the AONB part of Surrey which has to be a good reason to get out and survey them.

The Woodcock survey 2013

This is a repeat of the 2003 survey where a total of four visits is required if woodcock are present:

April: one evening recce to establish the best place to locate the count point.

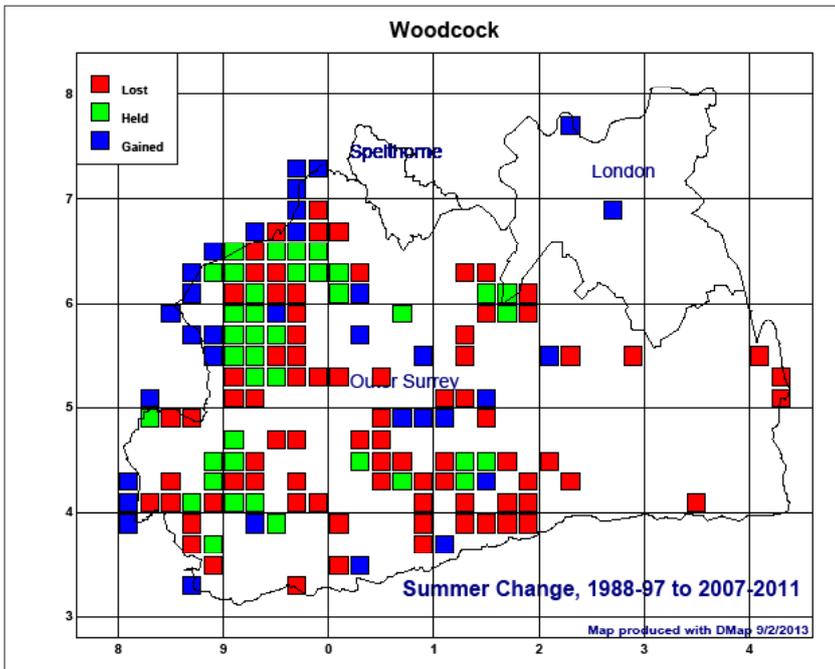
May to June: three visits to the count point at dusk, at least one week apart, between 1 May and 30 June. However, if no woodcock are recorded on both of the first two dusk visits, there is no need to make the third visit. And, to make life easier for you, the BTO will have a list of the sunset times.

Visit time and duration and what to record

Counts should start 15 minutes before sunset and finish 60 minutes after sunset, giving a total survey duration of 75 minutes. All observations of Woodcock (in flight), both by sight and sound, will be recorded to the nearest minute and logged. You will also be asked to provide some information on the habitat and on the presence of any deer seen during those two or three visits.

How to recognise Woodcock

In order to be able to record Woodcock you will need to know the sounds that they make whilst in flight (roding) in case one is flying around but you do not manage to see it. The BTO has some recordings on their website and the examples cover all the main calls likely to be encountered. These can be found at (www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/woodcock-survey/resources). And here is a map which shows where Woodcock were recorded in Surrey during the Atlas period 2007-11.



now I not only record the birds for which I am specifically looking (if it is that sort of survey *eg* Wintering Thrushes) but also everything else I see. Everything I have seen then gets reported through BirdTrack. If you set up a site as a regular spot that you visit, the program will show your species list for that site which means you only have to enter the number of each species you have seen plus any new species. It is fantastic. Also (and this was mentioned at the SWT Recorders' meeting I attended in February) you can enter any Dragonfly sightings that you have. This information then gets passed to SWT who are collecting all the records for the National Dragonfly Society. It could not be easier.

At the time of writing this article I have been told by the BTO that even more improvements are being made to BirdTrack with a new homepage being launched later this week. I am told it is going to make the records submitted the focus of the online application. An interactive map and graph tool are at the centre of the page,

encouraging visitors to see what has been added, and go on to submit their own records. Go and have a look and please do start using BirdTrack if you do not do so already.

Nest recording

Remember the BTO love to receive records of nests that you find in your garden even if the nest is not successful. You can enter the information through their website under the survey called "Garden Nesting Survey". As I am writing this a Collared Dove is flying past my window with nesting material so there is one I will have to watch.

BirdTrack - Recording your sightings

If you have not got around to using it yet I have to recommend to you the BTO's BirdTrack facility. Whenever I do a survey

Other help needed

Mole Valley

I have been approached by a couple who have been representing the interests of birds on the Mole Valley Conservation Group. They are now standing down and they asked me if I could take on that role. As I do not live in that

Woodcocks – non-allocated sites

10-km	1-km	Site Name	Priority Type	Count Point
SU84	SU8149	Ewshot	Low	
SU84	SU8447	Farnham Park	Low	
SU84	SU8843	NE Tilford	High	SU882430
SU93	SU9132	East of Haslemere	High	
SU93	SU9432	South Ramsnest Common	Low	
SU93	SU9930	West of Plaistow	High	SU997305
SU94	SU9946	Peasmarsh	High	SU994464
SU95	SU9650	Broadstreet Common	High	SU964502
SU95	SU9656	West Hill (Golf course?)	High	SU964569
SU96	SU9664	West side of Chobham Common	Low	
TQ03	TQ0230	South of Ifold	High	TQ024303
TQ03	TQ0532	NW of Loxwood	High	TQ056324
TQ04	TQ0840	West of Ewhurst	High	TQ083406
TQ06	TQ0862	St George's Hill	Low	
TQ14	TQ1246	South of Wootton House	High	TQ128464
TQ14	TQ1840	East of Capel	Low	
TQ16	TQ1362	Esher Common	Low	
TQ25	TQ2651	Quarry Hill	Low	
TQ35	TQ3353	South of Caterham	High	TQ344533
TQ35	TQ3756	Woldingham	High	TQ371571

area, and have so many other commitments, I do not feel I can take on that responsibility but wonder if any of you might be interested in taking on that role. I understand that the role involves three evening meetings in Dorking each year and 'field meetings' in connection with proposed development if required and any back up input regarding planned activity in the area. In connection with the last namely input re planned activity in the area, the Surrey Bird Club committee would be willing to help on this where appropriate. If you could help please let me know and I will put you in touch with the couple who are standing down.

I am told the field meetings vary in number – there was one about two years ago to do a trail of a nature walk in Leatherhead which has since been made into a handout by MVDC. At present there are three or four planned to develop a series of separate walks in the Dorking area which will be made into another handout by MVDC. Generally there are no regular 'field meetings'.

Headley Heath

I have met the warden of Headley Heath which is a National Trust piece of land. Although he and his volunteers carry out some bird survey work he has indicated that he would like some independent surveys to be carried out there. I have not spoken to him in detail about what he would like but, if you might be interested in helping, do contact me and I will then put you in contact with him.

Training

I am always willing to take anyone out with me when I do a bird survey if you feel you would like some mentoring. As well as doing the BTO Woodcock, BBS and WeBS surveys I help with some surveys of heathland for Natural England (daytime for Dartford Warbler and Woodlark) and evening for nightjars so do contact me if you would like to go out with me. The nightjar surveys always need more surveyors as large areas of land are covered all on the same evening. At the moment I do not have the dates for this year's surveys but I will put them on my website when I get them under Meet me/Training. The surveys are usually at the end of May/beginning of June on either a Wednesday or Thursday evening and you get access to army land that you are not normally allowed onto.

However I can also thoroughly recommend the training provided by the BTO and they have two training courses being run this summer in Surrey both at Juniper Hill FSC near Dorking.

Fri 10 May–Sun 12 May - Learn about bird surveying - Led by Su Gough.

Fri 26 Apr–Sun 28 Apr - Learn about Bird ID - Led by Steve Piotrowski.

Meeting me

I love putting faces to names so do come along to meet me if you can.

I am giving a talk at Epsom and Ewell RSPB in June. The talk is called 'A year in the life of a Regional Rep' However I will not only be talking about all of the surveys that I carry out and organise, I will also be talking about my holidays in Madagascar and Bhutan.

I am at the SBC AGM on 27th June at East Horsley Village Hall where Keith Betton will be giving a talk called 'The return of the Red Kite'.

I will be at the SBC Field Trip to Hersham Ringing Group at Queen Mary Reservoir in July.

If you want more details, as you would be welcome at any of the events, contact me.

The BTO Atlas

I am sure you will be hearing soon from the BTO with details of the publication of the results of the Atlas for 2007-11. As that Atlas covers the whole of the UK, it will show results by the 10-km area. Surrey has decided to publish its own local atlas which means that every 2-km square in Surrey has been surveyed although, in order to ensure that all the 2-km squares were covered, the survey did run for one extra year. It is intended that the results of the Surrey Atlas will be published and, once the format is known, and when it might be available, I will let you know. In the meantime, however, you can see lots of maps showing some of the results on the Surrey Bird Club website (www.surreybirdclub.org.uk/news.html).

This newsletter

I have intended to send out a newsletter twice a year (especially in view of the very positive comments I have received from some recipients) but, with the cost of postage and stationery increasing substantially, from now on I will only be producing a Spring newsletter to go out by post once a year. This is because I have to send out nearly 300 newsletters by post (about another 700 do go by email). I do not mind stuffing the envelopes and sticking on the stamps but the cost to the BTO, as you will appreciate, is high. However, I will still produce a short update on surveys in the autumn which will go to those members/surveyors who have given me an email address. If you like receiving the newsletter, and are on email, and have received this one by post do please contact me and let me have your email address. Equally, if you do not want to receive the newsletter, please do let me know so that we can reduce the BTO's costs.

