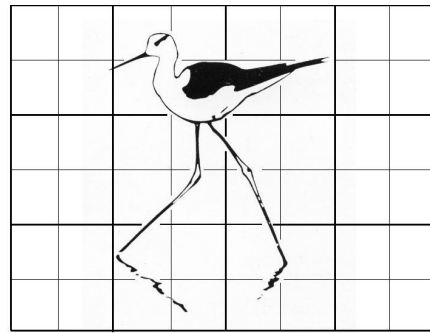


# NOTTS ATLAS

## Newsletter 1

### Spring 2008



#### AN EXCELLENT START

David T. Parkin Atlas Co-ordinator

The first winter season of the Atlas is complete; time to take stock, both nationally and in Nottinghamshire. The BTO Atlas Newsletter for February 2008 reports that 12,000 tetrads have been visited and 24 million birds recorded. Locally, we have also done extremely well, far better than we hoped and a super springboard for the rest of the project.

The next four years will see a massive effort by birders across the British Isles, with the aim of mapping our bird populations in winter and in summer. Along with several other counties, we have decided to take the opportunity to survey the entire county and use the resulting data to produce a new county avifauna. The last one was produced by Austen Dobbs back in 1975. Times have changed, and so have the birds. Some birds like Willow Tits and Tree Sparrows were common and widespread in those days: not so today. Conversely, Little Egret had only been recorded once (in 1970) and Ruddy Duck was a 'rare visitor' – only having been recorded twice. We owe it to the past and future generations to chronicle the current status of our birds, and report upon changes in occurrence, distribution and abundance.

The project will see a major effort to monitor our county's birds, 'on the back' of the BTO Atlas. This is the first *Notts Atlas Newsletter*; we hope and intend to produce one at this time each year through the survey period to bring observers up to date with progress and hopefully encourage more of you to become involved. Readers who know the details of 'atlassing' can skip the first section!

#### THE BACKGROUND

Most of you will know that the British Isles are mapped under a grid system based upon squares, each side of which is 10 Km. Within each 10 Km square there are 25 'tetrads', squares that are 2 Km each side. Wildlife atlases are based upon the 10 Km squares of the National Grid; most local atlases use tetrads. For its latest bird atlas, the BTO is using the traditional 10 Km squares, although data are being collected within tetrads since these are easier for a field-worker to cover in a couple of hours. Ideally, every species that occurs within each 10 Km square will be identified and recorded to produce a comprehensive map of our islands' bird life. Field work will be undertaken in winter and summer to give a picture of the distribution at both seasons. Recording will be at two levels; observers will undertake either 'Timed' or 'Roving' visits.

- **Roving records** will tell us *where* the birds are found
- **Timed records** will give us an indication of *how many* birds there are.

#### Timed Visits

These are the back-bone of the exercise. Recorders choose a tetrad and undertake to make four visits during a twelvemonth period. Two of these will be in winter (November or December *and* January or February) and two in summer (April or May *and* June or July). Each visit should last two hours, these are recorded separately, and every bird using the tetrad should be counted. To show you that it's not as hard as it sounds, John Bartley has written a short piece describing his experiences as a 'timed tetradder'. A typical part of my records from a tetrad near Calverton on a cold New Year's Eve gives an idea of the method of recording (shown above).

Date	Tetrad		SK64E
Species	1st hour count	2nd hour count	Extra/ Breeding
ROBIN	1.1.1.1.1	1.2.1.1.1	
SPARROW	3.2.2	1.1.2.1	
COCK DOVE	1	2.1.2.1.1.3	
BUSH T.	2.1.1.1.2.1	2.2.2.1.1.1.2	2.3.2.1
MASLIN	1.1	1.2	
ALBINO BIRD	1.1.1	1.2.2.1.1.1.1	
WOOD Pk	3.2.1.5.4.0	7.5.10.1.1.10	
WILLOW	1.1	1	
DUNNORSE	1	1	
PHOENIX	1	1.1	
GLASS PT	2.2	2.2.2.1.2	

At the end of the visit, the results can be entered directly into the BTO data base at (<http://www.bto.org/birdatlas>). Alternatively, results can be entered onto paper copies and sent to either the local organiser (Lynda Milner) or directly to the BTO. These results will be transcribed into the computer by a commercial data processing company.

#### Roving Records

Not every recorder will actually find every species that occurs within a tetrad. Some birds like owls, Nightjars and Woodcock are nocturnal; others like Lesser-spotted Woodpeckers, Hawfinches and (alas) Willow Tits are very local and easy to miss. To compensate for this, the BTO would also like records of birds seen within a tetrad outside of the timed visits. Anyone can submit these 'roving records'; you do not have to be committed to timed visits to make roving records. Again, these records can be entered directly, or submitted on paper forms.

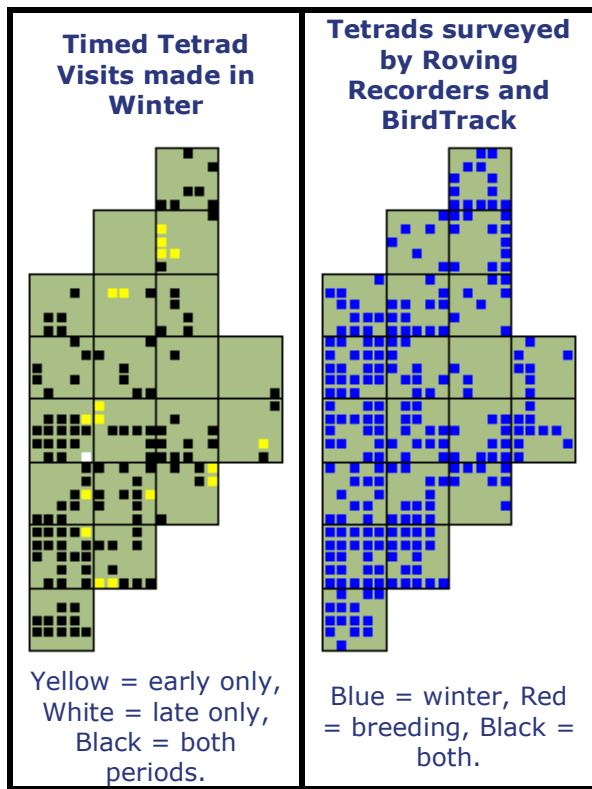
#### The Task

There are **550 tetrads in Notts** and we have four years to complete the field work. These cover a variety of sites from city centres like Nottingham and Mansfield, through the suburbs of Wollaton, Forest Town and Burton Joyce, to villages such as

Woodborough and Church Norton, to the rural expanses of the county. Within these sites, there are a variety of habitats: woodland (both conifer and deciduous), lakes, gravel pits, rivers, heaths and farmland. Everywhere has to be visited, surveyed and recorded. It is a daunting prospect, but there are about 400 members of the Notts Birdwatchers, almost 100 BTO members, hundreds of RSPB members, plus members of wildlife groups. Anyone can play a part – from simply recording the birds that come into their gardens (believe it or not, these are 'roving records') to detailed timed visits to tetrads across the county.

Some of the county's birders already contribute to the BTO Garden Bird Survey, while others routinely add their records to the BTO/RSPB BirdTrack scheme. The data from both of these will be automatically added to the Roving Records database, and the BTO have assured us that we will be given access to these records as well as those from the Timed and Roving observations.

Copies of the forms for roving records and timed tetrads can be downloaded from the Nottinghamshire Birdwatchers website (<http://www.nottsbirders.net>), or you can ask for copies to be mailed to you. We prefer the former to save postage!



**WHERE ARE WE NOW?**

The first winter is over and it is time to take stock. BTO records show 140 tetrads have received timed visits, and 122 of these have been visited twice (shown in the first map). When we add the results to be transcribed from paper records, it will mean that about 220 tetrads have received timed visits: about 40% of the county! This is excellent and means that a similar effort next year will see us three quarters of the way to complete coverage. The final two years can be used to fill in the gaps.

The second map shows the distribution of winter records from roving recorders and from BirdTrack. Some of these will be detailed records from a serious day's birding, others will simply be individual records of birds: a Sparrowhawk flying across the road, or a Tawny Owl calling in the evening. But no matter how many or how few, all these observations help to fill in the picture, and will be used to map the winter distribution at the end of the survey.

**THE NEXT STEP**

Recording the breeding birds starts in April

**Timed tetrads** are vitally important to allow us to estimate the relative abundance of our birds across the county. If you think that you can help with timed tetrads, it is not too late; there is no reason why recording a tetrad has to begin in winter. You can start the field work in April and continue it through until next February. Have a look at the BTO website to see which tetrads are still available and make your choice – or ask Lynda and she will direct you towards a square near where you live. I say 'square' in the singular, but there is no reason why you have to do only one! And remember that you only have to visit the tetrad four times: you do not have to return every year.

**Roving records** are especially important during the breeding season. Those of us who are doing tetrads cannot expect to connect with every species that is breeding in a square. Some species are shy or secretive and easily missed. Others like owls, Nightjars, Woodcock need special visits at night. There is the added bonus of recording the state of breeding for each species in each tetrad. The criteria are as follows:

<b>Non-breeder</b>	<b>F</b>	Flying over
	<b>M</b>	Migrant
	<b>U</b>	SUMmering non-breeder
<b>Possible breeder</b>	<b>H</b>	Observed in suitable nesting Habitat
	<b>S</b>	Singing male
<b>Probable breeder</b>	<b>P</b>	Pair in suitable nesting habitat
	<b>T</b>	Permanent Territory (defended over at least one week)
	<b>D</b>	Courtship and Display
	<b>N</b>	Visiting probable Nest site
	<b>A</b>	Agitated behaviour
	<b>I</b>	Brood patch of Incubating bird (from bird in hand)
	<b>B</b>	Nest Building or excavating nest hole
<b>Confirmed breeder</b>	<b>DD</b>	Distraction Display or injury feigning
	<b>UN</b>	Used Nest or eggshells found from this season
	<b>FL</b>	Recently FLedged young or downy young
	<b>ON</b>	Adults entering or leaving nest-site in circumstances indicating Occupied Nest
	<b>FF</b>	Adult carrying Faecal sac or Food for young
	<b>NE</b>	Nest containing Eggs
	<b>NY</b>	Nest with Young seen or heard

It is obviously important for us to confirm breeding for as many species as possible in as many tetrads as possible. All ringing data will automatically be transferred to the summer atlas data base. Results from the BTO Nest Record and Garden Bird schemes will be added. We are going to need every observation to be submitted; it is better for proof of breeding to be reported twice than not to be reported at all.

**So, please keep every record and submit them either on line or as paper copies to the BTO.**

If you are lucky enough to find a rare breeding bird, what should you do? Records for bird monitored by the Rare Breeding Birds Panel will be 'suppressed' by the BTO. This means that only the finder, the county recorder (Andy Hall) and the BTO Regional Representative (Lynda Milner) will be able to see them. No one else will be told and your records will not 'leak' from the Atlas organisers. At the end of the exercise in 2012, we will start to analyse the results for our book. Rare breeding birds will be handled sensitively: something like 'Nightingales bred successfully at six different sites in Notts during the field work for the Atlas'.

### SOME RESULTS

We are already beginning to get a picture of where our birds are in winter. There are six maps showing different species. The first two maps show two 'common' garden birds. Notice how less widespread is House Sparrow compared with Blackbird.

The third and fourth show Skylark and Meadow Pipit; who would have thought that Meadow Pipts would be more widespread? The fifth shows that Oystercatcher is pretty rare in Notts during the winter, being restricted to a few gravel pit sites. No doubt there will be many more recorded during the summer. Finally (and perhaps less seriously), despite the efforts of conservation agencies across the county to recreate the lowland heath that used to be so extensive, we still have no Red Grouse in Notts!

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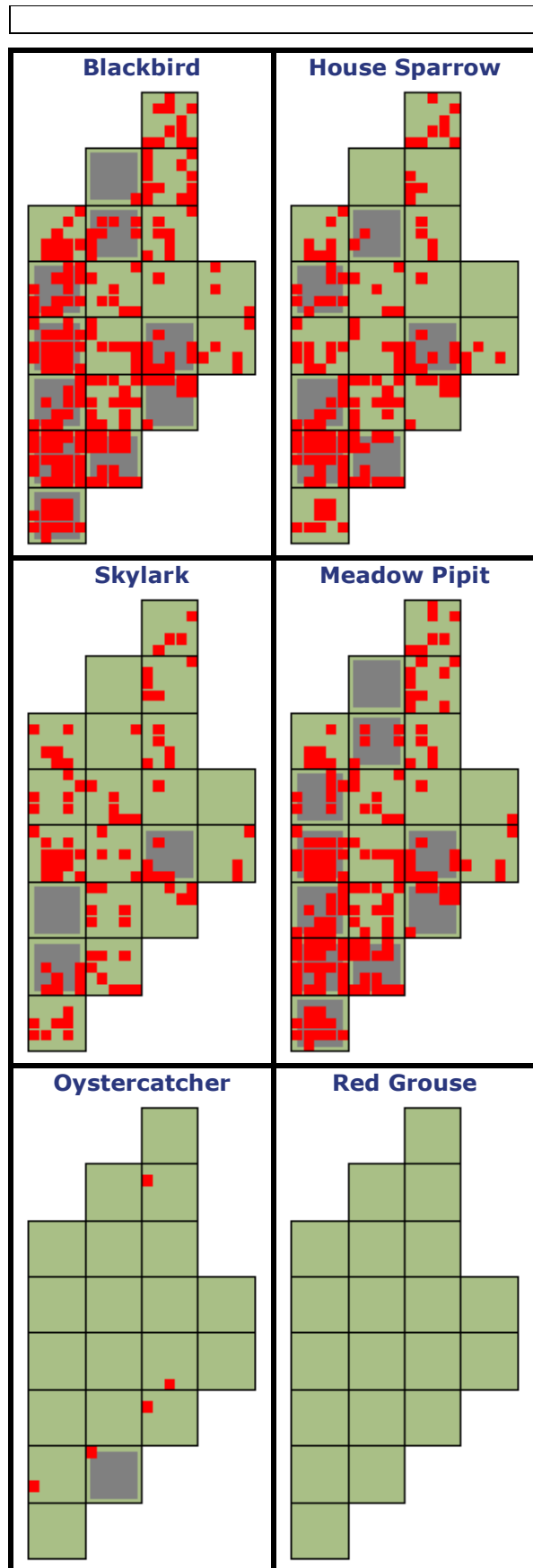
#### Contributors:

Dr.David Parkin

Andy Hall - County recorder

John Bartley - BTO member and surveyor

Angela Rymell – Editor



## **TRIBULATIONS and TRIUMPHS of a TIMED TETRADER.**

*John Bartley*

I first got involved in bird survey work as long ago as 1989 – in those days it was a Common Bird Census plot in Lancashire. Within days of a move in my job to Nottinghamshire in 1991, I got a telephone call from the BTO representative for the county, Lynda Milner. Like many another mere mortals, this lady “persuaded” me that I simply had to contribute in Nottinghamshire and she “gave” me a Breeding Bird Survey plot near to home.

It is a quite simply awful plot – intensive arable farming near Newark on the Notts/Lincs border with much noise pollution. I have come to know it as the “Balderton Badlands”.

So when the BTO announced plans for the Bird Atlas 2007-11, I recognised the chance to do some recording in other areas in the county – I’ve had to keep the BBS square in the Badlands, of course, but at least recording absences does not take up too much time. Already, having completed the Atlas winter visits in my first three tetrads, I am impatiently waiting to get on with the breeding season visits.

I have found the freedom of choice that you have within a tetrad, as to route, timing etc, most welcome but it does raise a few problems. Why, I often wonder, do we have a choice of a one hour or a two hour visit and why must they be recorded separately? It’s probably something incomprehensible to do with statistics, I imagine. Frankly I think that only in the case of a tetrad that is, in habitat terms, a total monoculture would a one hour visit really be worth doing. The tetrads I have visited thus far are pleasantly mixed and visiting a sample of each different habitat in an hour would be impossible.

The value of estimating the total number of birds of a species within a tetrad, based on what was found in a sample habitat, is something I am very wary of – especially in winter when large flocks of winter visitors congregate and personally I haven’t tried this thus far. However, after the breeding season visits, when I believe that most species tend to stay closer to their breeding territory/nest I will have a go at this.

Something of a mixed blessing whilst walking around is the interest of other people about what you are doing. It’s a bit like the perennial question put to anglers “any luck?” Naturally, I try and explain what I am doing and hope that some sympathy at least for bird conservation will result. There are always people who want to tell you about some incredible species they get in their garden – most seem to be unknown to science. One bird-loving farmer told me that “his” swallows would be alright this year as he had just shot the pair of “Brown Owls” that took all the nestlings in his barn last year.

My early expectations that tetrad visiting would be enjoyable and ultimately very worthwhile have so far been more than realised. It’s a pleasant way to get to know a different bit of the County and the paperwork is minimal. If anyone thinks otherwise, I will gladly swap the Balderton Badlands for one of their tetrads

## **RECORDING RARE OR SCARCE BREEDING BIRDS**

*Andy Hall* County Recorder

Part of the enjoyment of taking part in the Atlas must be logging breeding birds during “Timed” visits or as “Roving Records” and occasionally, you might be lucky enough to come across a rarer bird showing signs of breeding. Maybe you will find a ‘crexing’ Corncrake in some set-aside or a singing Nightingale in a remote wood in the county.

Data recording will necessarily involve evidence of these rare breeding birds, and the BTO are aware that this might cause genuine concerns for observers in terms of the visibility of the records on the internet or in published form. If they are generally available, they might fall into inappropriate hands: egg-collectors, over-zealous photographers, or maybe just local birders anxious to bulk up their ‘county list’. Ideally, the details of these records should only be accessible to the observer, the County Recorder and the Regional BTO Organiser.

In order to provide a means of recording and mapping such records the BTO have devised a policy for sensitive breeding records. This is a three tier system:

- Nationally scarce or locally rare breeding species will only be mapped at the 10km level. This includes species such as Hobby, Peregrine and Hawfinch.
- Very rare breeding birds will only be mapped at the 100km level. This includes species like Marsh Harrier, Ruff and Stone-curlew.
- Ultra rare breeding birds like Red-necked Phalarope, Serin and Bee-eater will not be mapped at any level.

Currently, there is no provision for breeding records of species that are nationally relatively common or widespread, but may be locally rare. In Nottinghamshire, this means species such as Nightingale or Raven would be mapped at the same levels as Blackbird and Blue Tit. Nottinghamshire Birdwatchers are not the only county to have made the BTO aware of this anomaly, and we are assured that they will be able to accommodate this for a group of local scarcities. These will not be available to the general public, and, once the necessary adjustments have been made, will only be mapped at a 10 Km level. However, if you are still reluctant to submit your records for electronic inclusion, then you should send the details either to the Recorder (Andy Hall) or to the BTO Regional Representative (Lynda Milner). It is important that we have the information, but understandable that you may wish a degree of confidentiality.

Finally, if anyone has any concerns or questions of rare breeding birds for the Atlas they should contact the Recorder.