

Making the Most of Your Bird Records

The species accounts in the annual bird report are based largely on individual records submitted to the Local Recorder. All records are potentially useful. This is particularly the case for common species, which are sometimes taken for granted and thus under-recorded. In addition, records from areas away from the well-watched coastal strip north of Aberdeen are particularly useful. A few general pointers towards ways in which records can be made more useful are given below:

- Systematic counts of the birds of a specific site, such as an area of water, are very useful.
- Comments such as 'fewer than usual' can be helpful in communicating the significance of a record.
- Breeding birds (all species). Breeding numbers of many species in the recording area are particularly under-recorded.

Grid References are essential for records of conservation significance, especially at less well-known sites, and add value to all records. Without a grid reference, a record cannot be added to the database held by NESBReC and thus used to aid future conservation or planning. Please include grid references for all records – in this way your records have maximum value for bird conservation. Remember that a grid reference defines a square, not an actual point. In most situations, a six-figure grid reference (a 100 m square) is ideal, but a four-figure grid reference (a 1 km square) may be more appropriate in some circumstances, such as for a count of birds spread over a wide area. There are several websites that make it easy to work out grid references (e.g., grid-referencefinder.com).

Submission of Records

Observers are requested to submit records (preferably electronically) to the Local Recorder as soon after the year end as possible. Records received after the end of January of the following year may not be included in the report. It would help speed production of the report if observers participating in routine surveys (e.g. WeBS) could submit a copy of these records as soon as possible after the year end. The inputting of records can be considerably speeded up by the submission of records in electronic format, such as an Excel file sent as an e-mail attachment.

However, the optimum method for submitting records is via the online system, BirdTrack (register at www.bto.org). These records are fully incorporated into the dataset from which this report is compiled. Please assist report authors by entering a recognisable location name for all records. Records can also be emailed to the Local Recorder on a spreadsheet, with one record per row and separate columns for species, quantity, location, grid reference, date, observer and supplementary notes. Please contact the recorder for an example spreadsheet. If sending records on a spreadsheet, please do so once, at the end of the year. Some handwritten records can also be accepted but, for these, it is useful to have monthly or quarterly batches of records. For further guidance on submitting records to the North-East Scotland Bird Report, please contact the Local Recorder.

What Happens to the Data?

All records that include at least the minimum information (species, date, place and observer) are collated into a single spreadsheet containing all the year's records. This is used for writing the Species Accounts in the Bird Report. Data are also used or shared with others in a variety of other ways:

- The collated data form an incredibly valuable resource that can assist with conservation, planning and research. To enable this, the data are passed each year to the North-East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC) which acts a core biodiversity data portal for the region.
- Records may be passed on directly, where appropriate, to the Rare Birds Breeding Panel (see www.rbbp.org.uk for details on how they use the information).
- Records are also loaded by the Local Recorder onto the BirdTrack system (www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/birdtrack/about) which collates the results from both casual birdwatching records and more-systematic surveys into a central national database. The sheer volume of records held means that robust information can be derived on species' status and trends.
- Via BirdTrack, records feed into projects such as national breeding and wintering distribution atlases. Note that records that are loaded straight to BirdTrack by individual birdwatchers are downloaded for use in this report by the Local Recorder so there is no need to send these records in again.
- As well as being published in the paper copy of the Bird Report, the compiled species accounts are made available three years after publication as part of the Scottish Bird Report Online on the Scottish Ornithologists' Club website (see: www.the-soc.org.uk/publications/scottish-bird-report-online).

Specialist Contributions to the Report

The accounts for some species are greatly enhanced by the contributions of dedicated ornithologists with specialist knowledge of a particular species. This is especially the case with raptors and gamebirds, but contributions from observers with a particular interest in any species would be greatly appreciated.

The Editor is always keen to hear from birdwatchers (amateur or professional) conducting studies on specific species for which results would be available to be published within the annual report. Please contact the Editor for more information. Artwork and photographs for possible inclusion are also warmly welcome.

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taken from his book
"Scilly Birding - Joining
the Madding Crowd"
<http://daveyecology.co.uk>

