

This email is being sent to everyone who has volunteered to take part in the BTO/SOC/BWI Atlas in the Lothian area and who has an email address.

Firstly, many thanks for volunteering to do this work. I am confident that you will enjoy it and you will make new discoveries for yourself and for our collective local knowledge.

Fieldwork for the winter season can start as early as next week, on 1st November. Many of you have already used the BTO's Atlas website www.birdatlas.net and have chosen your tetrads this way. You will also be able to use this website to enter the data you collect after each timed tetrad visit, or those additional "roving" records from other sites, from that date. Please try to do this if you can, rather than returning your completed sheets to the SOC at Aberlady. We will have the results of your work much sooner this way and it spreads the load of checking. The website contains copies of the detailed Instructions and Roving Record Forms. If you would like a copy of the TTV form, you can pick one up from the SOC's centre at Aberlady, or contact me and I'll post one or more out to you. But the forms won't help you in the field – you'll need to use a notebook for this. However, it is useful to see one before you go out into the field, so have a look at the forms on the website from 1st November. I will bring forms to all Lothian SOC meetings over the winter.

As you know, we are running a local, tetrad based, atlas in Lothian & Borders alongside the national project. We have designed the local survey to be closely compatible with the national survey, so the fieldwork is essentially the same. However, we have compiled some additional guidelines (attached) which explain this further and I hope also will help you with the fieldwork in general. If you have any questions, please get back to me. Remember that there are a lot of tetrads to be covered further afield in Borders, so if you fancy four days out over the course of the next year you could choose an area and select one or two tetrads there. Use www.birdatlas.net to locate the area you fancy and you will be connected with the Atlas Organiser for Borders, Ray Murray.

You may also be interested in a meeting about the Atlas which will be held at the SOC centre, Waterston House in Aberlady. This is part of the season of winter talks organised by Lothian SOC, and in November will feature Graham Appleton of the BTO talking specifically about Bird Atlas 2007-11. I will be there too so please come along and introduce yourself. The meeting is on TUESDAY 13th NOVEMBER, starting at 7.30pm.

In addition, Lothian SOC holds a monthly "Discussion Group" which meets in Waterston House on the first Wednesday of the month to discuss and plan fieldwork. The Atlas is a key part of this meeting this winter and there is plenty of opportunity to share experiences and ask questions. Everyone is welcome – 7.30 pm start, with a break for tea and cakes at around 9pm. Contact me for more details. We are aware that meetings in East Lothian are not convenient for many of you though. If those of you to the west of Edinburgh would be interested in an Atlas focussed meeting, please let me know and we'll try and arrange something.

Many thanks. Enjoy atlassing!

Mark Holling
26 October 2007

Bird Atlas 2007-2011 **And a new tetrad atlas for Lothian & Borders**

You may be aware that alongside the fieldwork for the new national BTO/SOC/IWC Bird Atlas, there will also be a new local project to map the birds of Lothian and Borders at a finer scale – 2km x 2km (a tetrad) rather than at 10km square level for the national (“BTO”) atlas.

The Breeding Birds of South-east Scotland (published 1998) mapped the distribution of birds in 1988-1994, so this new project will allow direct comparison of local bird distributions over a 20-year period. And never before have we been able to map winter distributions at this scale. Exciting times indeed! A team of 9 local birders has been set up to run this project, led by Ray Murray (Atlas Organiser for Borders) and Mark Holling (Atlas Organiser for Lothian).

To participate in the local atlas project, at this stage all we ask is that you do the planned fieldwork for the BTO Atlas, using the same forms (on-line or paper) and as described on the Atlas website www.birdatlas.net or on the Introduction and Instructions sheets which we can supply. All data submitted to the BTO scheme will be made available to our project to map the birds of SE Scotland. There are just a few small points to be borne in mind to ensure the usefulness of the data for the local atlas.

Additional Guidelines for SE Scotland Tetrad Atlas – Winter Fieldwork

The national atlas aims to get the best species list for every 10km square. For the local atlas we aim to get the best species list for each TETRAD and at the same time to get full coverage of the Lothian & Borders regions. To achieve this, we would ask you to follow these guidelines.

TIMED TETRAD VISITS

The overall fieldwork method for these tetrad-based counts is the same as described in the BTO instructions. However, we would ask you to plan your local fieldwork in this manner:

- As per the BTO guidelines, over the course of your two timed visits (Nov/Dec and Jan/Feb), aim to visit all habitat types within the tetrad. This will help maximise the species list for the tetrad.
- Only count and record the birds for ONE HOUR. Use the “1st hour count” column for these records.
- After the first hour, you can remain in the tetrad for as long as you like in order to add new species to the tetrad list. These can be entered on the form as a tick in the Extra () column. You will have to be the judge how long you stay, based on the variety of habitats in the tetrad and the rate at which you are finding new species.
- We would rather you limit your time in each tetrad in this way so that you can make best use of the limited daylight hours in winter by moving to another tetrad to do another TTV or to collect “Roving Records” elsewhere.
- Over the course of the two visits, regardless of how much time you have spent in the tetrad, you will have gained some idea of the numbers of each species in the tetrad. Only an approximate estimate is required, and this field is optional if you are not confident. You should base your estimate on the highest figure

recorded after your two visits, and make allowances for areas of the tetrad which were not visited. If you think there are between 1 and 10 individuals, enter the actual number; if between 10 and 100, enter the estimate to the nearest 10 (e.g. 30), and above that to the nearest 100 or 1000.

You will probably find it easiest to use your notebook to record species found in each tetrad and the counts you make in the first hour. To assist you, we can provide a species list (for coastal or non-coastal tetrads) which gives you an idea of which species to expect in SE Scotland in the winter. Or you could use it to log your counts, estimates and each species recorded. Alternatively you could use the Atlas notebook supplied at £2 each. Please contact your Regional Organiser if you would like any of these additional aids.

ROVING RECORDERS

All records within your chosen 10km square should be submitted together with the TETRAD that you saw/heard the bird in included. The forms say that this field is optional, but for the local atlas it is essential.

Records can be written up in a notebook while in the field and then the species and tetrad added to the online or paper form back at home.

Filling in the forms

NB Please use the BTO's online system if you are able.

Timed Tetrad Visit form – Winter

Tetrad information (front of the form – your name and address and the tetrad you are reporting on, plus the dates of your two timed visits).

Species information (main part of the form – one line for each species).

For each species, for both early and late visits:

1st hour count column – this is where you write your own count, i.e. the total number of all individuals of the species you saw and/or heard within the first hour of your visit.

2nd hour count column – leave this blank (unless you actually did do 2 hours of counts, but remember we would sooner you did only one hour and then move to a different tetrad).

Extra () column – put a tick in this column for every other species you see or hear in the tetrad after your timed count (*).

Tetrad Popn Estimate column – this is for the estimate you make of the total numbers of this species present in the tetrad based on your two timed visits. Remember to round the total to the nearest 1 (if less than 10), to the nearest 10 (if between 10 and 100) and to the nearest 100 (if between 100 and 1000), etc. Use the highest count from your two visits. Further information on this is provided on page 3 of the Instruction sheet for Timed Tetrad Visits.

* Any additional species recorded in a tetrad outside your timed visits should be submitted as Roving Records or via BTO's BirdTrack. Therefore if you do visit a tetrad more often than the two timed visits, you may find it useful to keep a separate tetrad species list and use this to submit your records, to make sure all species are included.

Roving Records form – any season

Each form requires your name and address to be completed at the top of the form.

Then there is one line for each record, each record requiring the following:
10km – the 10km you recorded the bird. This consists of 2 letters, usually NT in Lothian & Borders but some are prefixed NS or NY instead, and then 2 numbers. Thus much of Edinburgh is in NT27, Aberlady Bay is in NT48 and Selkirk is in NT42.
Tetrad – this is essential, and it will be a single letter. The forms help you identify tetrad letters for all locations.
Town, village or feature in tetrad (or 10km square) – this is a name from the map for the tetrad, it enables the organisers to check the tetrad ID given.
Day/Month/Year – date of the record.
Species Name – name of the species.
Code – this is for breeding evidence and the codes are given on the forms and instructions. They are not generally used in the winter season, but if you do come across definite signs of breeding (nest, young, territory etc) then please include it as this information will be included in the breeding atlas.

We will be detailing more on our own website later this winter (details to be supplied in due course) but at this moment, please enjoy your winter fieldwork and submit your results promptly as soon as you are able after the end of February, but no later than **31st March**.

Further guidelines will be circulated for the Breeding Season fieldwork which starts on 1st April.