

BTO/SOC/BWI Bird Atlas 2007-11 and the South-east Scotland Bird Atlas

This is the first of what I hope will be many regular updates for everyone who has volunteered to help with the atlas scheme, both nationally for BTO/SOC and for the local tetrad atlas.

With one month of surveying, we have already made excellent progress both in Lothian and in Borders. There are almost 100 volunteers for Lothian, with much of the central part of the region fully allocated. And many of these have been surveyed already. Remember if you are doing a timed tetrad visit, the first winter visit should be completed by the end of December. Roving Records can be submitted at any time for birds recorded between November and February.

BTO have set up an excellent series of web pages giving feedback and some results. We have our own Lothian page – please have a look: <http://blx1.bto.org/atlas-results/allocloth.html>, and general results can be seen under the “Latest Results” dropdown menu. The link will show you local species maps for ten selected species too.

Well done everyone who has already been out on their plots. Many have remarked how easy the hour (or 2 hour) visit is to do, and quite a lot of you have clearly become hooked as you have been signing up for more, making November a very busy month for me! Remember that the timed visits are only required in one season (two visits in winter and two in the breeding season). We will need extra species records via the Roving Records forms to get the best species lists for each tetrad too. It is getting late to sign up for new tetrads now, as the first visit must be completed by 31st December, but I hope that many of you will be looking for different areas next year to follow on the great success so far.

Following feedback from across the country, the online Roving Records forms will be amended soon to include a count field – this is optional but for many species this additional information means that the record can be useful for the county recorders. Especially interesting records should be submitted directly to the local bird record David Kelly (see SOC website for contact details) so that you can add full details and a 4 or 6 figure grid reference too. You can use the SOC Recording spreadsheet (www.the-soc.org.uk - look at ‘Bird Recording in Scotland’ and go for the spreadsheet link) or submit the record via BirdTrack (link is on the Atlas webpage) the records will eventually reach David or Ray Murray (for Borders records).

Some general guidance on including flying birds. On TTVs, you will be aware that you should not include in your counts birds which are clearly flying over the tetrad. They must be using the tetrad to count: flying between one tree and another, a hovering Kestrel or soaring Buzzard. However, the fly-over birds can be entered as Roving Records as they are likely to have been using the 10km square somewhere. These should be added to Roving Records with an “F” in the code column. Otherwise, for the winter season, the code column should not be used unless there is genuine breeding behaviour (nest, young) to report – more likely for the late visit and for Crossbill and Raven for instance. Crossbills seem to be quite numerous this year, so we could be in for some local breeding next year. Keep a look out for this, especially in plantations with lots of cones in February.

It was pleasing to see many of you at the SOC meeting at Aberlady in November. You may be interested to know about the SOC Lothian Discussion Group which meets at Waterston House each month where we talk about local fieldwork and surveys, especially, at the moment, the Atlas. All of you are welcome to attend; we start at 7.30 and finish between 9.30 and 10pm, with a break in the session for tea and cakes provided by members of the group. We ask for £2 per session to cover the cost of room hire and these refreshments. The next meeting is THIS WEEK on Wednesday (5th December) at the SOC’s Waterston House, 7.30pm. I hope to meet some of you there and hear of your experiences in the field.

Good atlasing

Mark Holling
(Atlas Regional Organiser for Lothian)
3 December 2007