

South-east Scotland Bird Atlas Newsletter Winter 2009

The start of November marks the beginning of the third winter of the BTO-SOC Atlas project.

Atlas Progress

Now that we have two full seasons of data collected, a picture of our progress is emerging that allows us to see where we stand at the mid-way point of the BTO project.

Winter

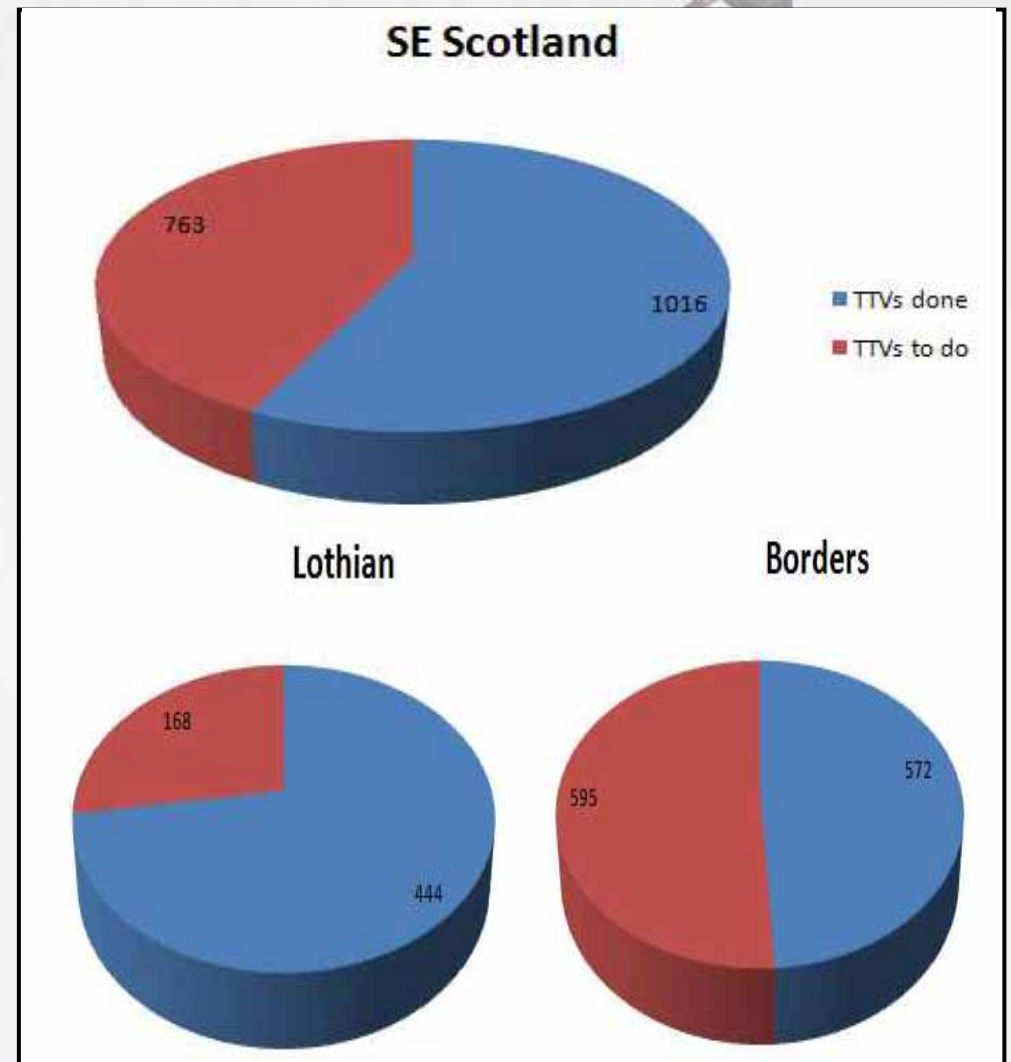
To date, Timed Tetrad Visits (TTVs) have been done in 1,016 tetrads, 444 in Lothian & 572 in Borders. This is about 58% of the 1,756 tetrads in Lothian & Borders.

The graphic shows that, not unexpectedly, progress is better in Lothian than in Borders.

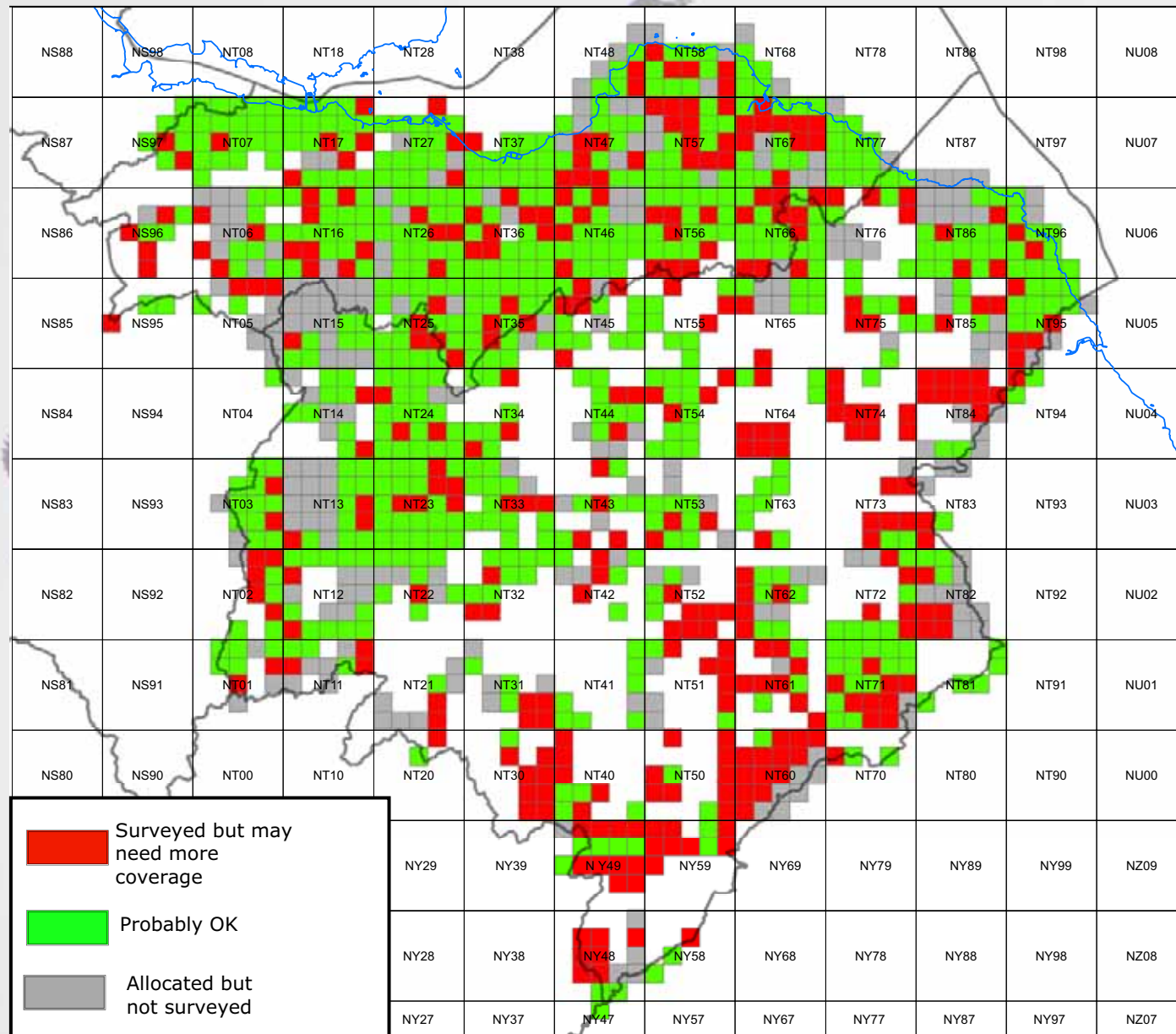
In terms of the BTO project, we have already easily surpassed the 33% target that the BTO set as the required sample of tetrads in any area, a minimum of 8 tetrads having been reached in ALL 10-km squares in South-east Scotland.

Of course, the larger the sample, the better the results obtained in estimating the relative abundance of birds in both the UK & Ireland, on the large scale, and in South-east Scotland, on the smaller scale.

So our target over the 4 years of the BTO scheme will be to do 100% of the TTVs of the area by 2011. Hopefully we will reach well over 80% of the tetrads in winter 2009-2010.



Winter Coverage 2007-08 & 2008-09



As might be expected, most of the tetrads that have received visits so far are those that are the most easily reached. This means that tetrads that are more difficult of access, or in the more remote parts of South-east Scotland, have now to be tackled.

As the map shows, these are mostly located in western West Lothian, and in a swathe across the Central Borders from the Upper Teviot valley east to The Merse. It is in these parts of SE Scotland that we would like to target our efforts in winter 2010.

While some of our volunteers have still to complete their allocated squares, it would be useful if those that have already done all of their original tetrads might consider taking some more on in these areas identified on the map.

Please check the BTO website to see if the 'blank' squares here are still available.



Wren

One of the most ubiquitous species in SE Scotland

This map also indicates (in red) tetrads that still have a bit of work to do to reach the number of species that we suspect might be present in winter. The formula used to predict the number of species present considers factors such as the altitudinal variation and coverage to date (including number of roving records) but it is only an approximate guide.

What to do in winter 2009/10

1 Complete your tetrad TTVs. These are the ones you have already signed up for. Complete at least one hour in an early visit and another hour in a late visit.
See also point 4 (below).

2 Volunteer to do TTVs in unallocated tetrads (white tetrads on map, but check www.birdatlas.net for the current availability)

3 Take part in "blitz" visits where 1-2 car-loads fan out across unallocated tetrads in areas of poor coverage (Borders and West Lothian) – see separate note on page 6

Barn Owl

A good bird to enter as a Roving Record, often visible on snowy days



Goosander

Widespread but thinly distributed on the river systems in winter

4 Top up your tetrads with roving records. If you have completed single-hour early and late TTVs it is still likely that there are unrecorded species in your tetrad.

It is worth spending an extra hour or so visiting new areas or particular good areas with the aim of adding new species. On the tetrad species lists, P indicates which species have been recorded in two or more adjacent tetrads. This may give you an idea of what to look for (this is indicative only – there may not be the same habitats of course).

You can also top-up a tetrad by upping the maximum count of a species for that tetrad.

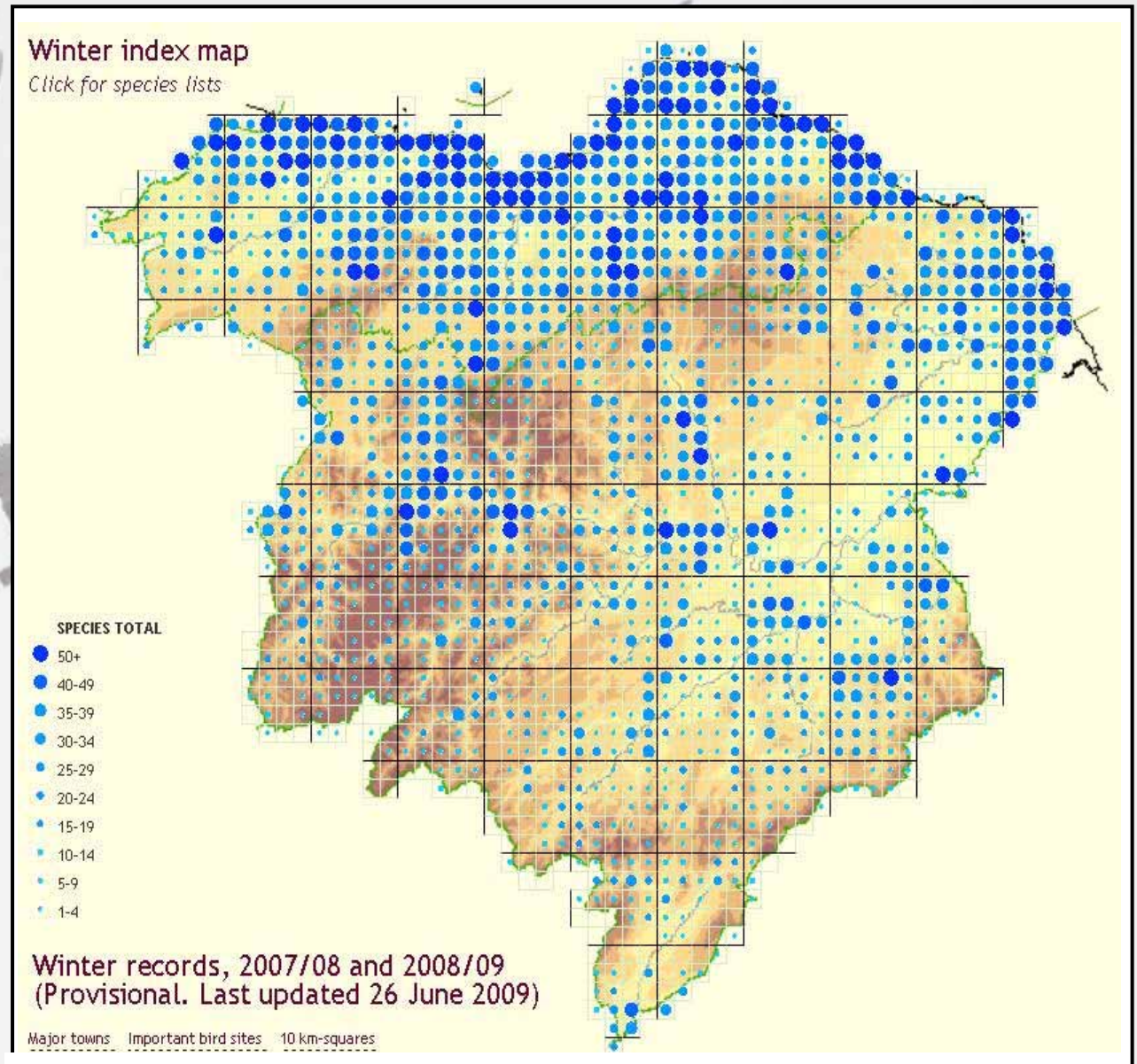
5 Do some roving in under-recorded tetrads, maybe taking on a 10-km square. You can add roving records to any tetrad.

Concentrate in tetrads which are red on the map as these are the ones most likely to have additional species to be found.

Websites for the Atlas

In comparison with previous atlas projects we are very fortunate in having all sorts of online resources which provide a comprehensive picture of where we're up to, both locally and nationally. These are already revealing fascinating details on the current status and highlighting many interesting changes. But they are also a great resource in supporting the successful completion of the project, revealing the areas where further work is needed and identifying deficiencies in our knowledge of breeding status. Regular checks on the atlas webpages can be illuminating and generally beneficial, here are a few tips.

Please check the local atlas website (<http://www.the-soc.org.uk/se-atlas/>) to get an idea of coverage in your area(s) and current progress. Tetrad maps are already available for all the main species for winter and breeding season (these are updated regularly, winter being fully up-to-date and breeding reflecting online submissions to 1 June 2009). If you go to the Winter index map (to right) you can see the species total for each tetrad, and clicking any dot you get the complete list for that square, with an indication of species possibly missing via a grey P symbol (these are species which have been recorded in at least two neighbouring tetrads). The equivalent maps for the breeding season also include a direct comparison with species recorded in the last tetrad atlas.

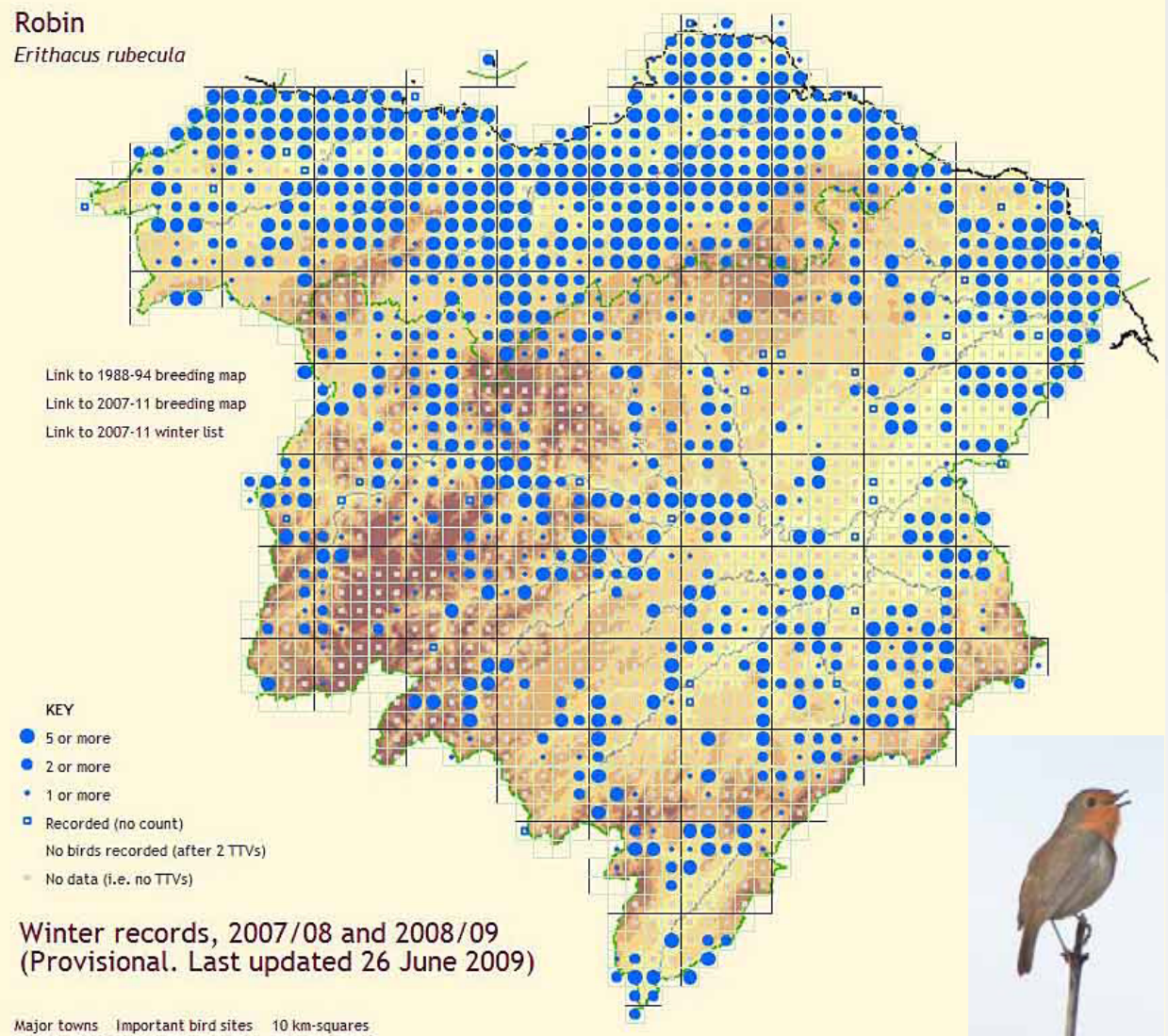


Winter Index Map on the South-east Scotland website

It is also worth checking the [national atlas website](#) regularly. One important reason for this is that any validation queries are only visible to you when you log on (no direct emails are sent). The validation team are aiming to complete checking of all records by November so it will be very helpful if any queries arising from that process can be cleared up as soon as possible. Note, *only you* can change records, validators can only flag up things for checking, so until you have confirmed (or changed) a record a query will remain on it. Another check worth making from time to time is having a look at the Location map for all your records (link at bottom right of the "My square summary" page). It is not uncommon to find one or more of your records out in the sea or somewhere you've never been, i.e. resulting from a small slip in tetrad name entry [various tools to assist in finding tetrad labels and for checking the exact boundaries of tetrads, via aerial photos, are also available on the [local atlas website](#)].

Finally, another useful approach to checking your records is via the "Overall species lists" accessible via the "View/Edit my records" when logged in to the national atlas. Select either "winter" or "breeding season" and scan down the page – anything you've not seen should be quickly apparent and may have resulted from an error in species name entry. A more detailed look may also reveal any erroneous submissions of high numbers via the "Max counted entered column".

If you have any "out of season" entries, i.e. records with breeding codes outside the April to July recording period, there will also be a separate link for this under the Breeding season heading – it is worth clicking on each of these to check that they were intentional, not accidental use of codes on winter records! Any checks you can make yourself will be of great help.



The **Robin Map** on the South-east Scotland website shows the extent of coverage in the first two years of survey work

Tetrad Blitzes One method that helps to get cover for the more remote, or difficult of access tetrads, is to do a 'blitz'. It's quite simple, rather than working at the tetrads on your own, a group of birders work an area as a team.

This has a number of advantages:

Car travel is shared, and the cost provided by the atlas funds

Pick-ups and drop-offs mean that less walking is needed and time can be used more efficiently when the need to return to the start point is removed

The pick-up system also means it is possible to do several tetrads, especially walking over hills into a neighbouring valley, taking away the need to climb over the hills again

It's much more social!

The plan for 2009-10 is to arrange at least one car to travel away each weekend, led by one of the atlas working team, who will arrange the strategy to tackle as many tetrads as possible during the day.

A timetable is being drawn up with probable destinations where a team will be able to plug one of the gaps in coverage. A car load of four people can manage as many as 12 one-hour visits in winter, weather permitting. That's half of a 10km square!

The first of these is on 15th November, starting at Smailholm village hall (NT647364) at 9 am. Malcolm Ross will be the leader and the targeted area will be to the east of the village towards Kelso in NT63 & 73.

Other blitzes will take place every weekend, weather permitting, after that. Please contact Mark Holling or consult the SE Scotland website for details of the timetable.

Atlas Facts

To date, before the second breeding season data update from the BTO, something over 153,000 records have been uploaded to the BTO website (including BirdTrack records) from Lothian & Borders.

In addition there will probably be another 5-10,000 records held by the Lothian & Borders Bird Recorders submitted by non-Atlasing birders since November 2007, that will eventually be uploaded into the system.

