

WORRYING DECLINES — WE NEED YOUR HELP!

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The latest results from the BTO's Nest Record Scheme show that poorly performing species such as Reed Bunting and Lapwing are not showing any signs of improvement but, for Linnet, a run of better years provides some grounds for optimism. After the problems of Foot and Mouth disease in 2001, we urgently need your help to improve recording effort in 2002. *Humphrey Crick, Andy Simpkin, Peter Beaven and David Glue* report.

DECLIVES PREOCUPANTES – NECESITAMOS TU AYUDA!

Los últimos resultados del Programa de Registro de Nidos del BTO muestran que las especies con bajo éxito reproductivo como el escribano palustre y el avefría no muestran señales de mejoría, pero tras algunos buenos años, el pardillo común parece ofrecer razones para el optimismo. Tras los problemas con la fiebre de las vacas locas en 2001, necesitamos ayuda urgente para mejorar el registro de nidos en 2002. *Humphrey Crick, Andy Simpkin, Peter Beaven y David Glue* informan.

DES DECLINS INQUIETANTS – NOUS AVONS BESOIN DE VOUS !

Les derniers résultats du Nest Record Scheme du BTO montrent que les espèces peu performantes comme le Bruant des roseaux et le Vanneau huppé ne semblent pas s'améliorer. En revanche, pour la Linotte mélodieuse, une série de bonnes années pousse à l'optimisme. Après les problèmes de fièvre aphteuse en 2001, nous avons besoin de votre aide d'urgence pour améliorer la collecte de données en 2002. Un rapport de *Humphrey Crick, Andy Simpkin, Peter Beaven et David Glue*.

BESORGNISERREGENDE RÜCKGÄNGE – WIR BRAUCHEN IHRE HILFE!

Die neuesten Ergebnisse aus dem Nistkartenprogramm des BTO zeigen, dass abnehmende Arten wie Rohrammer und Kiebitz keine Anzeichen von Verbesserungen zeigen, aber andererseits beim Hänfling nach einer Reihe von guten Jahren wieder Anlass zur Hoffnung besteht. Aufgrund der Probleme, die durch die Maul- und Klauenseuche 2001 für die Monitoringprogramme auftraten, rufen wir dringend zur verstärkten Mitarbeit im Jahr 2002 auf. *Humphrey Crick, Andy Simpkin, Peter Beaven und David Glue* berichten.

The BTO's Nest Record Scheme is clearly the best in the world (biggest, most computerised, longest running), but we urgently need to encourage more members to take up nest recording after shortfalls in 2000 and 2001. For those who are not familiar with it, nest recording couldn't be simpler and it is absolutely fascinating! Nest finding is an art that you can

develop, but as soon as you find your first nest, or look into your first nestbox, then you are exposed to a whole new world of the private lives of birds. It is also one of the simplest ways for birdwatchers to help monitor the "health" of the UK's birds.

The main raison d'être of the Nest Record Scheme is to monitor for the UK Government

how well our birds are nesting each year . Each year, the BTO sends “alerts” to the UK’s Joint Nature Conservation Committee about serious declines in the breeding performance of birds so that this information can be used to decide how and where to spend scarce conservation funds.

Currently there are eight species on the Nest Records Alert List (see Table 1). In the latest analysis (1966-2000), just completed, we have found that six show no change in their overall downward trend, but for one, the Linnet, there have been some promising signs of short-term improvement.

SO, WHAT IS HAPPENING TO EACH OF THESE SPECIES?

REED BUNTING

The proportion of nests failing at the egg stage has increased from 11% to 37% since 1968. While this is unlikely to have driven the population decline by itself, this increase in nest losses may be helping to hold back the species’ recovery. The failure rate in 2000 was particularly high (the second highest on record) with just over half (52%) of all nests failing when nests contained eggs.

LINNET

In contrast with Reed Bunting, although the average failure rate of Linnet nests has increased since 1968 from 38% to 53%, the year 2000 was relatively good. In fact, egg-stage failure rates have fallen steadily for the last five years from 37% in 1996 to 17% in 2000, which is the lowest on record.

So prospects for this species are looking better, reflected in a recent slight upturn in its population trend.

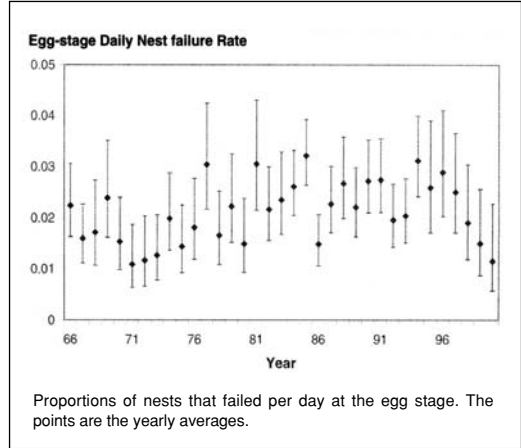


FIGURE 1. Linnet nest failure rates

MOORHEN

Moorhen populations have declined on farmland Common Birds Census plots but have fluctuated widely on waterways monitored by the Waterways Bird Survey and show increases since 1995 on BBS plots. Declines in average clutch size from 6.51 to 6.07 eggs and increases in egg-stage failure rate from 31% to 41% may be indicative of changes in the quality of water bodies where they nest.

LAPWING

A recent detailed analysis of Lapwing breeding performance was described in *BTO News* 239: 10-11. The failure rate of nests at the egg stage has increased from 40% to 49% since 1968, but it is worrying that 2000 was the worst year on record, with 63% failing before hatching. This may have been a reflection of the very cold April weather that affected the UK in that year.

TABLE 1. Nest Records Alert List.

Species	Year of 1st Alert	Reason for alert
Reed Bunting	1991	Increasing egg-stage failures
Linnet	1991	Increasing egg & chick-stage failures
Moorhen	1992	Increasing egg-stage failures & declining clutch size
Red-throated Diver	1995	Increasing egg-stage failures
Lapwing	1995	Increasing egg-stage failures
Ringed Plover	1996	Increasing egg-stage failures
Willow Warbler	1998	Increasing chick-stage failures
Yellow Wagtail	1999	Declining brood size

RINGED PLOVER

The breeding population size of Ringed Plover is not monitored directly by any scheme in the UK and so the Nest Record Scheme provides the only source of information on this species in the summer. It is worrying that its failure rate at the egg stage has increased from 51% to 67%, which may be linked to disturbance by people at its nesting sites. An intensive study on a part of the Norfolk coast has shown that this can be a very important factor.

WILLOW WARBLER

The increase in nesting failure at the chick stage (from 18% to 26%) may be a factor in the current decline of the species. Past declines have been blamed on a reduction in survival rates of birds once they leave the nest and the Constant Effort Sites scheme has shown a substantial decline in productivity in recent years. However, 2000 was actually relatively good for Willow Warbler nesting success with productivity increasing significantly on Constant Effort Sites plots too (*BTO News* 233: 10-11).

RED-THROATED DIVER AND YELLOW WAGTAIL

We are particularly worried that for two of the species, Red-throated Diver and Yellow Wagtail, we received too few records to be able to monitor their breeding performance sufficiently well.

We urgently need BTO volunteers to concentrate on all of the species mentioned in particular and to send in their observations to the Nest Record Scheme. It is the only practical way to ensure monitoring that covers the whole UK.

THINGS CAN ONLY GET BETTER?

For many of the 70 species that are monitored, some aspect of breeding performance has tended to improve since 1968. Clutch size has increased significantly for 13 species, brood size for 27 species, nest survival at the egg stage for 34 species and at the chick stage for 15 species. Some improvements are associated with increasing population size (e.g. Nuthatch and Collared Dove) and the declining influence of organochlorine pesticides, such as DDT, in the environment (e.g. for Sparrowhawk and Buzzard). In some cases positive changes have

occurred as populations have declined (e.g. Yellowhammer and Bullfinch). The latter may be because the species has been lost from poorer areas. The converse argument is likely to be responsible, in part, for declines in nesting success for increasing species such as Mute Swan and Great Tit: as they spread into less suitable areas, overall breeding performance may decline.

MILLENNIUM YEAR 2000

This analysis includes data from 2000. The millennium year was rather tricky for many nesting birds. Having been lulled into a false sense of security in a warm early spring, they were hit with a cold April and mixed May and June.

Eleven species laid significantly earlier, on average, in 2000, with five species recording their earliest average laying date in the series since 1968: Robin, Sedge Warbler, Spotted Flycatcher, Starling and Reed Bunting. Only four species started laying significantly later than normal.

Presumably as a result of the warm early spring, average clutch sizes tended to be large, with six species laying significantly larger clutches on average (with Carrion Crow and Spotted Flycatcher laying their largest over the time series since 1968) and only three species laying significantly smaller clutches than normal. However, average brood sizes appear to have been affected by the cold wet weather a little later in the season. Eighteen species suffered from significantly smaller brood sizes and only two species enjoyed significantly larger broods.

It was amongst the worst years on record (since 1968) for Grey Heron, Meadow Pipit, Pied Wagtail, Grey Wagtail, Garden Warbler, Crow and Greenfinch. Complete failures of nests were generally within expected levels but Bullfinch suffered significantly high failure rates at the chick stage, and Chaffinch (chick stage), Song Thrush (egg stage) and Willow Warbler (chick stage) enjoyed significantly lower failure rates than normal.

WE REALLY NEED YOUR HELP!

In 2000, we became alarmed by a sudden fall in the numbers of nest records submitted to the

BTO. Numbers fell below the 30,000 mark for the first time since 1985 and this decline not only affected commonly recorded species such as Blackbird, Robin and Dunnock, but also those which are recorded less often and for which every card is treasured. Despite the problems caused in 2001 because of Foot and Mouth Disease, the Nest Record Scheme was relatively well supported and suffered only a reduction of about a third in the numbers of records received. However, it is vital that BTO members go out in 2002, find nests and record them.

Every nest is a part of history that is preserved for posterity and adds importantly to the overall picture. Nest recording is a good example of how you can act locally (record a nest) while thinking globally (contribute to national bird monitoring). For example: volunteers in the 1960s who recorded the nests of House Sparrows and Starlings must have wondered whether this was really worthwhile, given that

the species were so common and were considered such pests. But these data are vital now in helping to understand the declines that have occurred since that time.

So, please do go out and record at least one nest, and preferably 10, this year. Each one provides a unique history, whether successful or not and whether it is in your garden or in the countryside. For a free starter pack, including a guide to nest recording and our most recent Nest Record News, please contact Andy Simpkin at BTO Thetford HQ (01842 750050, andy.simpkin@bto.org).

The Nest Record Scheme forms part of the BTO's Integrated Population Monitoring Programme carried out under the BTO/Joint Nature Conservation Committee partnership, and on the behalf of English Nature, Scottish Natural Heritage, the Countryside Council for Wales and the Environment and Heritage Service in Northern Ireland.