

HERONS IN 1999

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BTO members have kept Grey Heron numbers under annual surveillance for most of the 20th century. *John Marchant* reports on the latest developments.

GARZAS EN 1999

Miembros del BTO han llevado a cabo muestreos anuales de garza real (*Ardea cinerea*) durante la mayor parte del siglo XX. *John Marchant* informa sobre los últimos hallazgos.

LE HERON EN 1999

Les membres du BTO ont suivi annuellement les effectifs de Héron cendré durant une grande partie du 20ème siècle. *John Marchant* expose les derniers développements.

GRAUREIHER 1999

Fast über das gesamte 20. Jahrhundert hinweg wurde der britische Bestand des Graureihers von Mitarbeitern des BTO konstant ermittelt. *John Marchant* berichtet über die jüngsten Entwicklungen.

When Max Nicholson reported on the *British Birds* census of heronries in 1928, he could hardly have anticipated that both he and the census would still be going strong at the end of the century. Since 1933, it has been BTO observers who have charted the ups and downs in numbers of Herons by means of annual counts at as many colonies each year as possible. These counts monitor in effect not only Grey Herons but also, because the species is a top predator at freshwater margins, the general health of the UK's freshwater ecosystems.

REVIEWING THE TREND

1999 was an especially rewarding year for the Heronries Census, because a research grant from

NERC has enabled the BTO to catch up with some much-needed curation work. We have used the grant to re-organise the way the survey's information is held on computer and to prepare the data for a more modern way of calculating the long-term population trend. The completeness, reliability and versatility of the computerised data-set have been much improved.

A paper describing the revised population trend in England and Wales is nearing completion. The overall pattern of long-term change has been of shallow increase interrupted by sharp decreases, and a few years of recovery, after an especially icy winter, the last of which was in 1984/85. The population climbed to unprecedented levels during the 1990s. This increase continued in 1999 (see table).

Numbers of Heronries and Heron

Species	No. of sites	1998 total	1999 total	% change 1998-99
England	274	4833	4981	+3%
Wales	47	465	523	+12%
Scotland	36	310	281	-9%
Northern Ireland	16	244	297	+22%
Isle of Man	6	37	37	no change

The data that are tabulated are from a subset of 379 sites that were counted both in 1998 and in 1999. All English and Welsh counties are represented, with the exceptions of Sussex, Northumberland, Radnor, Montgomery, Flint, and Denbigh. Coverage is patchy but improving in Scotland and Northern Ireland. In all, 433 colonies were counted for the Heronries Census in 1999, and 6,888 nests found; the total nest-count is second only to the full national census of 1985, when 700 heronries were counted. The current high population reflects the increased availability of feeding sites for herons, as well as the recent lack of severe winter weather.

PLEASE REPORT NEW HERONRIES

Thanks to the survey's keen counters and efficient regional organisers, more heronries are

being counted annually now than ever before. This is good news for monitoring, because with over three-quarters of the estimated English & Welsh population counted each year there can be little room for error in measuring population change. However, we do not want our sample to be biased in any way, for example towards large or long-established sites. To avoid this, we need to be constantly on the alert for new heronries and others that are uncounted.

If you know of a heronry but are not sure whether it is already included in the BTO's census, please send details to your BTO Regional Representative, or to me at The Nunnery. Including more sites, particularly in presently under-represented parts of the UK, will be an effective way of enhancing the already high value of the Heronries Census data.