

WATERWAYS BREEDING BIRD SURVEY PROGRESS

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1999 was the second season in which BTO volunteers used BBS-style transect methods to census breeding birds along a random selection of waterways in the UK. Pilot work continues in the coming spring. *John Marchant* presents a progress report.

AVANCES DEL MUESTREO DE AVES REPRODUCTORAS EN CURSOS ACUATICOS

1999 fue la segunda temporada en la que voluntarios del BTO utilizaron métodos de transecto tipo BBS para censar aves reproductoras a lo largo de una muestra aleatoria de cursos acuáticos en el Reino Unido. Las actividades piloto continuarán esta primavera. *John Marchant* presenta un informe de los avances hasta el momento.

AVANCEMENT DU WATERWAYS BREEDING BIRD SURVEY

1999 a été la seconde saison au cours de laquelle les bénévoles du BTO ont réalisé des transects de type BBS pour dénombrer les oiseaux nicheurs sur une sélection aléatoire de cours d'eau au Royaume-Uni. Ce travail pilote va se poursuivre ce printemps. *John Marchant* présente un état d'avancement.

FORTSCHRITTE IM FLIEßGEWÄSSER-BRUTVOGELMONITORING

Im zweiten Jahr wurden 1999 die britischen Brutvögel entlang zufallsausgewählter Fließgewässer mit einer BBS-ähnlichen Transektmethode erfasst. Dieses Pilotprojekt wird im folgenden Frühjahr fortgesetzt. *John Marchant* berichtet über die Fortschritte.

Waterways are conspicuously important elements of the countryside for birds and other wildlife, and also serve many other interests, including navigation, fisheries and flood prevention. BTO members have for many years been censusing breeding birds along waterways, and relating the results to elements of the habitat, through the mapping method of the Waterways Bird Survey (WBS). It has rarely been possible, however, for bodies such as the Environment Agency that have management responsibilities for rivers and canals to make use

of the BTO data on birds in assessing conservation priorities.

The arrival of the BTO/JNCC/RSPB BBS in 1994 and the subsequent adaptation of its simple transect census methodology for use along rivers and canals have opened up an opportunity for breeding bird data along rivers and canals, collected by BTO volunteers as part of an ongoing UK-wide scheme, contributing not only to monitoring population levels of waterbirds (as WBS has since 1974) but also, through links to the Agency's River Habitat

Survey (RHS), directly to the conservation management of waterways. So far, the Agency has funded a pilot project in 1998 and a continuation in 1999-2000, with final reports due in spring 2001. Future funding after this year's field season is still to be finalised.

Aims and some initial results of the 1998 work were presented in *BTO News* 221: 8-9. In brief, the pilot work in 1998 was highly successful. It established that volunteers could be found for such surveys and that the numbers of birds counted were high enough to form a valuable monitoring sample. In all, stretches were surveyed in the first pilot year. Far more waterbirds were found than on equivalent numbers of BBS squares, confirming that WBBS could be valuable as a supplement to the national population monitoring function of BBS. In a separate part of the pilot project, links were demonstrated between RHS habitat variables and bird numbers; this confirmed the value of WBBS in augmenting the conservation function of RHS, although the study sites were all canals and were not a representative sample of waterways in general.

WBBS PHASE 2

The main aims of the continuation of pilot work for a further two years are:

- to investigate the power of WBBS for measuring population change, in comparison with the results of WBS and BBS; and
- to make a more thorough investigation of the links between WBBS counts and RHS habitat data, using a large random selection of waterway stretches.

To these ends, two sets of BTO observers were asked to contribute to WBBS in 1999 and to participate again in 2000. First, the BTO's regional organisers were asked to find observers

to cover a random set of stretches that includes all those surveyed in 1998 and a few more. We are still looking for new observers to cover many of these in 2000. Second, all observers who currently contribute to the mapping WBS have been asked also to provide a set of WBBS counts for their stretch. In addition, the Environment Agency is arranging for all stretches surveyed for WBBS in any of the years 1998-2000 also to be surveyed for RHS by their accredited surveyors.

By the end of Phase 2, we hope to have a large sample of random WBBS stretches covered for two or sometimes three successive seasons. These will provide estimates of population change, and information on the precision of these estimates, that can be compared with the data provided independently by WBS and BBS. WBS observers using both methods on their plots will provide special insight into the WBS-WBBS comparison. We hope there will also be RHS and WBBS data, even if only for one year, from a high proportion of the 260 random stretches.

CAN YOU HELP?

Like BBS itself, WBBS requires a habitat-recording visit and two bird counts, one early and one late in the breeding season. Mammal counting is also encouraged. If you have already been involved in WBBS counting, we would like you to consider it high priority to continue with it in 2000. Many thanks indeed for your contribution so far! New observers are also needed, to cover stretches that have not yet been surveyed. A single year's coverage in 2000 will be very useful. Please offer your help to your BTO Regional Representative, as soon as possible, or if necessary direct to me at The Nunnery.