

HERONRIES CENSUS — RESULTS FROM 2000

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John Marchant reports on the current status of the Grey Heron in the UK and on the Heronries Census, now in its 74th season.

CENSO DE COLONIAS DE GARZAS – RESULTADOS DE 2000

John Marchant informa sobre el estado actual de la garza real en el Reino Unido y en el Censo de Colonias de Garzas, ahora en su temporada número 74.

RECENSEMENTS DE HERONS – RESULTATS DE 2000

John Marchant décrit le statut actuel du Héron cendré au Royaume-Uni et les recensements de hérons, maintenant dans leur 74ème saison.

GRAUREIHER-KOLONIEERFASSUNG – ERGEBNISSE AUS DER BRUTSAISON 2000

John Marchant berichtet über den derzeitigen Status des Graureihers in UK und die Ergebnisse aus der 74. Brutsaison in der Graureiher-Bestandserfassung.

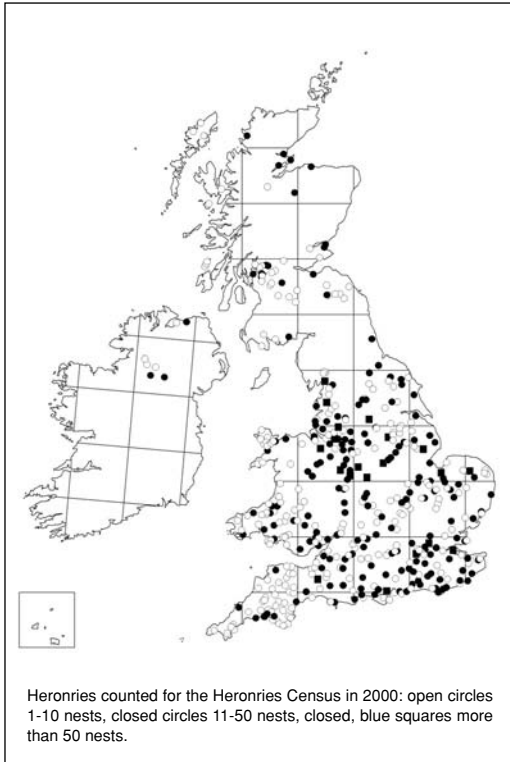
The Heronries Census involves fewer observers than other long-running BTO surveys but the results it produces document the population changes of its target species with high precision, and over a longer period than for any other breeding bird survey in the world.

The survey operates through the BTO's Regional Representatives, or other regional organisers, who ensure that, through their local network of volunteers, as many as possible of the active heronries in each UK region are visited each breeding season and a count made of the active nests. Counts are then returned to Thetford where, thanks to a recent grant from NERC, we have built a database of counts and information about the colony site that houses all the information we hold and can be easily interrogated for a variety of purposes. Periodically, the BTO has augmented the ongoing annual series of counts with a full national survey. The most recent of these was in 1985 and another is now due.

The data returned for 2000 cover 7,250 nests in

477 colonies. Although a little lower than the 1999 totals, these figures continue the welcome growth in participation in the Heronries Census since 1991, when the number of colonies counted had fallen to 301. More nests are counted now than in any previous year, except 1985 when 7,528 were counted in a full UK survey: this reflects both the population growth of the Grey Heron in England & Wales, estimated at 26% during 1988-98, and the higher proportion of UK colonies that are now counted annually.

We are hoping that the scope of the Census can widen still further in the next few years, and we have a number of possible developments in mind. Regular counting of more colonies will help to clarify trends both nationally and regionally. Little Egrets, now nesting in a number of southern heronries, add a new and unexpected dimension to the Heronries Census, and many observers supply nests counts for the Cormorants that are also invading many heronries. The map of sites for 2000 identifies



Heronries counted in 2000.

the parts of the country in which more support is particularly needed, but we would urge

anyone who knows of a heronry to check that it is counted for the BTO census by sending details to the Regional Representative or to me at The Nunnery.

Where heronries were counted in both 1999 and 2000, their results can be used to assess population change between two seasons (see Table).

The picture is essentially one of little change and of numbers remaining high, except that in Scotland, where the sites monitored are few and perhaps unrepresentative, there was an increase that reversed last year's 9% drop. The current high level of the Grey Heron population shows that the birds have been able to cope well with recent winters, and also reflects habitat creation and the active protection of many key sites. A paper describing the national trend in Heron numbers and its calculation has been submitted for publication.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks are due to the Heronries Census counters, organisers and others who support the scheme. I would like to record a special acknowledgement to the late David Andrews of the Strangford Lough Wildlife Scheme who provided many counts from Northern Ireland during 1988-99 and whose influence is sadly missing from this report.

Heronries counted in both 1999 and 2000

Species	No. of sites	1999 total	2000 total	% change 1999-2000
England	316	5,597	5,550	-1
Wales	59	624	606	-3
Scotland	40	358	396	+11
Northern Ireland	2	59	55	(-7)