

ATLAS SURVEY OF BREEDING & WINTERING BIRDS IN LANCASHIRE & NORTH MERSEYSIDE, 2007-2011

Newsletter No. 2. Spring 2010

Lancashire & Cheshire Fauna Society

British Trust for Ornithology

Chorley & District Natural History Society

East Lancashire Ornithologists Club

Fylde Bird Club

Lancaster & District Birdwatching Society

Rosendale Ornithologists Club

South-west Lancashire Natural History Society



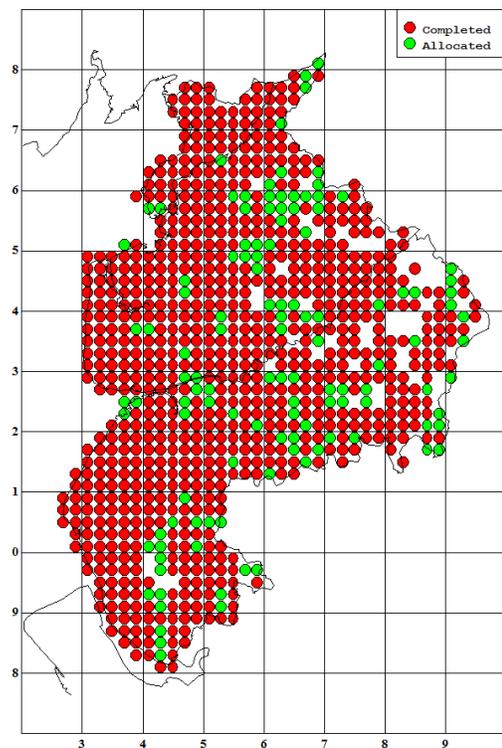
Siskins at Little Crosby (Steve Young)

Progress so far

With most results now to hand we are halfway through the surveys and in a position to assess the progress.

Winter

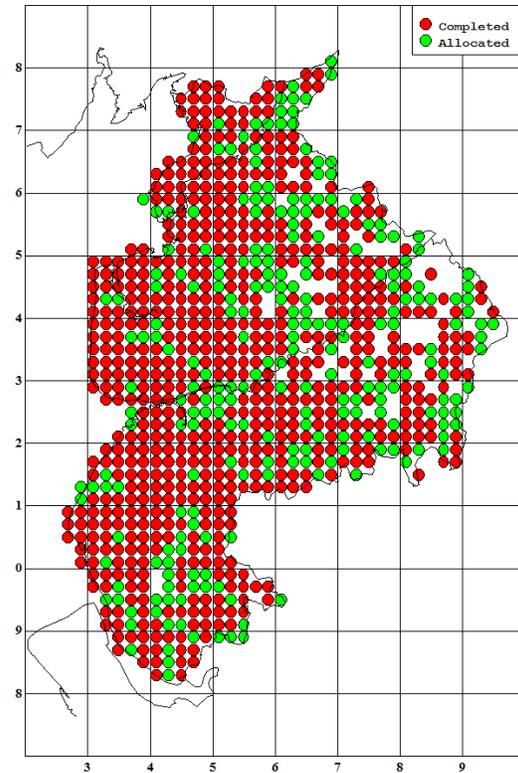
The map shows all tetrads where at least one timed visit (TTV) had been completed or comprehensive species lists constructed from roving records (RRs), together with those that have been allocated to be done during 2010/11.



In all, 760 winter tetrads have been completed out of a possible total of 940 (81%). A further 122 (13%) have been allocated, leaving just 58 (6%) to be allocated.

Breeding season

With two seasons left, 631 tetrads out of 935 (67%) have been completed with a further 243 allocated (26%) and 61 (7%) yet to be allocated.



The BTO requires an absolute minimum of 8 tetrads to be 'TTVed' in each 10km square, but would prefer at least 13. For the purposes of the county atlases we are aiming to get 100% coverage, especially during the breeding season so that we can get a comprehensive idea of changes that have taken place since our first atlas survey of 1997-2000.

So, a final push to get people to sign up for the unallocated tetrads is needed.

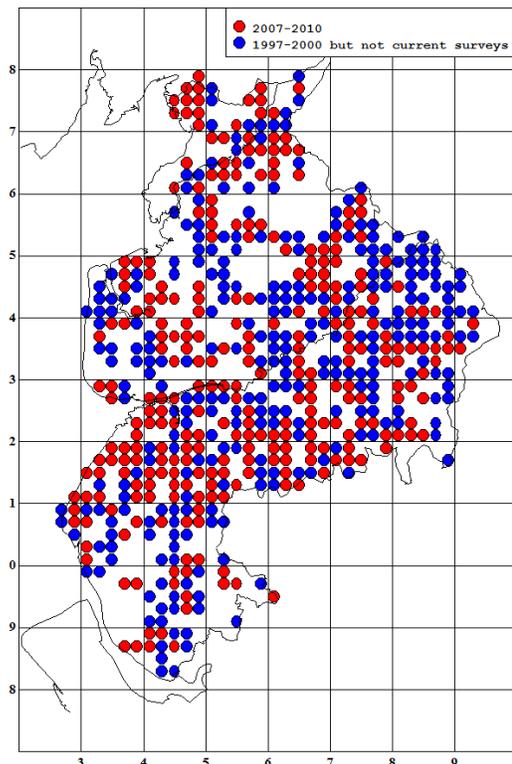
The overwhelming majority of unallocated tetrads are in east Lancashire, with particular problems in SD75, SD83, SD84 and SD85, and birders from the west who could help with coverage here would be most welcome – please sign up on the BTO website www.birdatlas.net or contact Tony Cooper anthony.cooper@talktalk.net.

Nocturnal and crepuscular species

Reporting rates for most owls and Woodcock are very low, to the extent that there is a danger they might be registered as absent from entire 10km squares in the national atlases.

This is obviously a result of very few being detected on daytime TTVs and means that we need to put a concerted effort into collecting evening roving records for these species.

The map below shows the extent of the problem. It compares the distribution of Tawny Owls during the breeding season in 1997-2000 (474 tetrads) with that during summer and winter combined in 2007-2010 (291 tetrads).



Although it is possible that Lancashire's Tawny Owl numbers and range have declined over the past

ten years, the up to 40% decline implied by the results so far seems very unlikely.

Species recorded

A total of 298 (Categories A & C) species and recognised sub-species has been recorded so far, including 207 in winter and 249 in the breeding season (including migrants and summering birds).

Breeding species total 151, three of which were escapes. Four others were logged as 'possibly breeding' only (Black Guillemot, Roseate Tern, Pallid Swift and Melodious Warbler), leaving a more realistic total of 144, two fewer than in 1997-2000. The two species 'lost' being the one-off nesting of Spoonbills and the extinction of Turtle Doves in Lancashire. So far, no new breeding species has been recorded, although surely Little Egrets will do so before the end of the survey. Kittiwakes, however, have colonised the mainland for the first time.



*Nesting Kittiwakes, Liverpool Docks.
(Mike Jordan)*

Species richness

An average of 47 species has been recorded per tetrad in winter and a remarkably similar 48 during the breeding season (although the latter includes significant numbers of migrants and summering birds).

Winter totals range from just three to 118, and summer ones from 7 to 134. Unsurprisingly, the highest totals so far have been recorded at familiar birding hotspots: SD33M (Marton Mere), SD34D (Rossall Point), SD41H (Martin Mere), SD44E (Pilling Lane Ends), SD45M (Conder Estuary), SD47R (Eric Morecambe Complex), SD47S & SD47X (Leighton Moss), SD61T (Belmont Reservoir), SD75I (Stocks Reservoir), SJ39D (Seaforth & Crosby Coastal Park) and SJ49R (Prescot Reservoirs).

Number of records

Compared with the 1997-2000 breeding atlas, the number of records received is staggeringly enormous: nearly 85,000 in winter and more than 82,000 in the breeding season. It is likely that the total number of records accumulated when the survey concludes will be around a quarter of million.

Of course, the majority of these records are 'duplicates' in the sense of not providing additional information on species' presence and abundance in any tetrad. Nonetheless, 27,944 winter and 25,824 breeding season records have contributed to providing this information so far.

Mapping distribution and abundance

The purpose of doing atlas surveys is to produce maps!

It is hoped that, in exchange for them eventually being provided with our records, our two local records centres (Lancashire Environmental Records Network and Merseyside Biobank) will be able to produce far more sophisticated maps than those in the last Lancashire atlas or this newsletter.

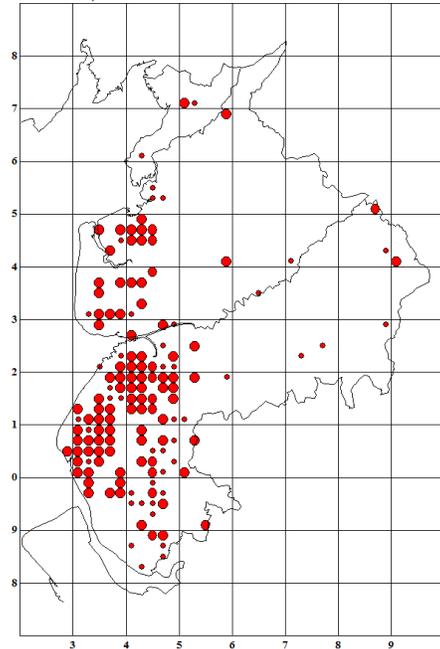
As well as straightforward maps of species' distribution, we will be able to produce others showing abundance by tetrad, and changes in distribution between winter and summer and between the 1997-2000 and 2008-2011 breeding seasons.

A few samples follow – but bear in mind that the surveys are only around two-thirds complete.

a) Barn Owl – an increasing species

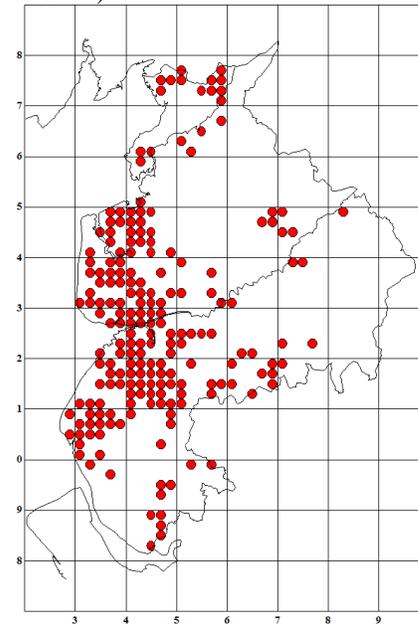
The two following maps show the changes in distribution between 2000 (breeding season) and 2010 (breeding and winter), demonstrating a significant increase in the county range of Barn Owls.

Barn Owl 1997-2000 (recorded in 145 tetrads)



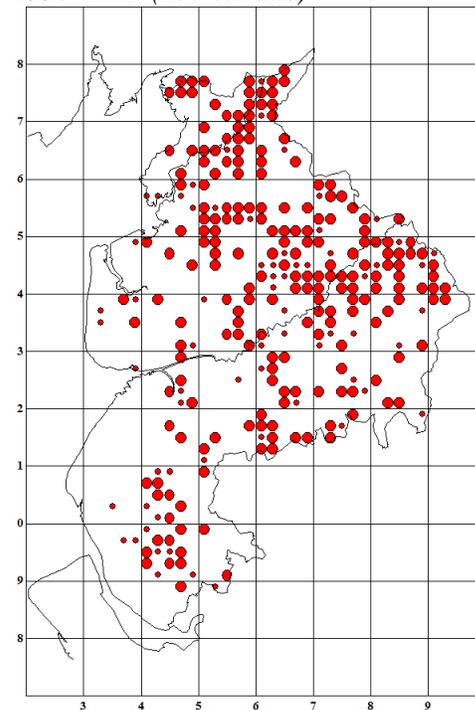
The main features of this change are a consolidation within the historic core area of West Lancashire and North Merseyside, an ‘infilling’ of the range in the Fylde peninsular and central Lancashire and, most spectacularly, a dramatic expansion in the West Pennine Moors, north Lancashire and, to a lesser extent, east Lancashire.

Barn Owl 2007-2010 (recorded in 198 tetrads)



b) Spotted Flycatcher – a declining breeding species

Spotted Flycatcher breeding range 1997-2000 (273 tetrads)

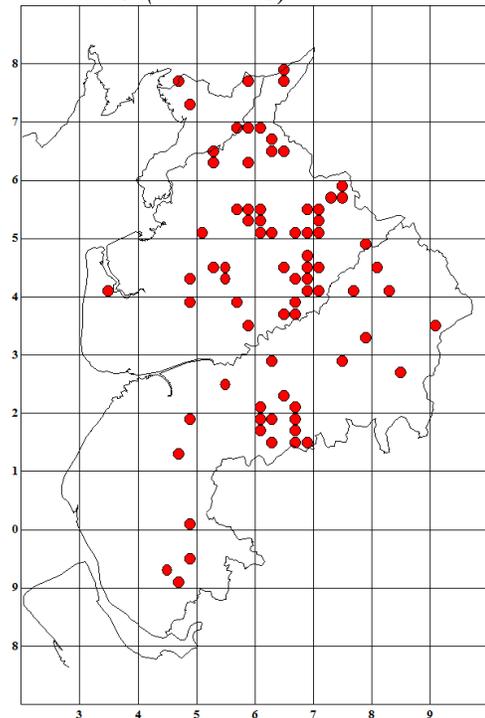


Roughly half of the 1997-2000 breeding range of Spotted Flycatcher has been resurveyed so far.

Comparison between the current and previous distribution suggests that the species has been lost from approximately 40% of its range over the past decade.

Apparent losses have occurred throughout the county but most spectacularly in North Merseyside and West Lancashire, where Spotted Flycatchers appear to be heading for early extinction.

Spotted Flycatcher breeding range 2008-2009 (77 tetrads)

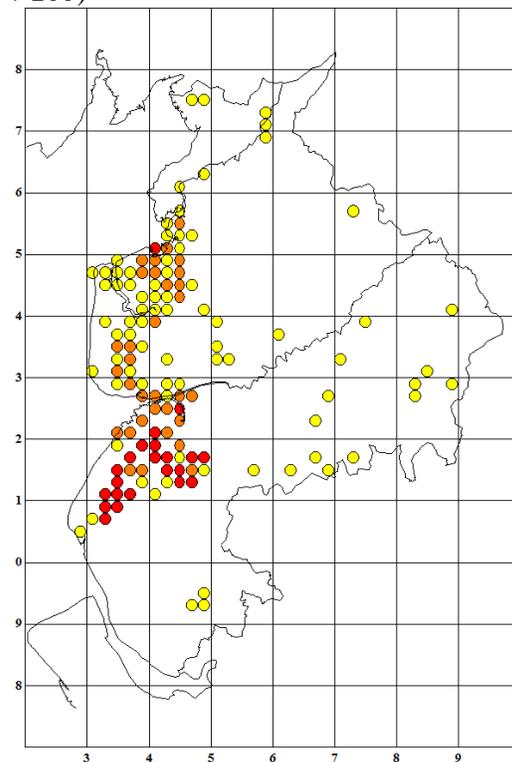


c) Relative abundance of wintering Whooper Swans

The number of Whoopers in Lancashire has increased enormously over the past decade or so. Their broad wintering range is similar to that of Pink-footed Geese but the distribution of the largest flocks is far more restricted.

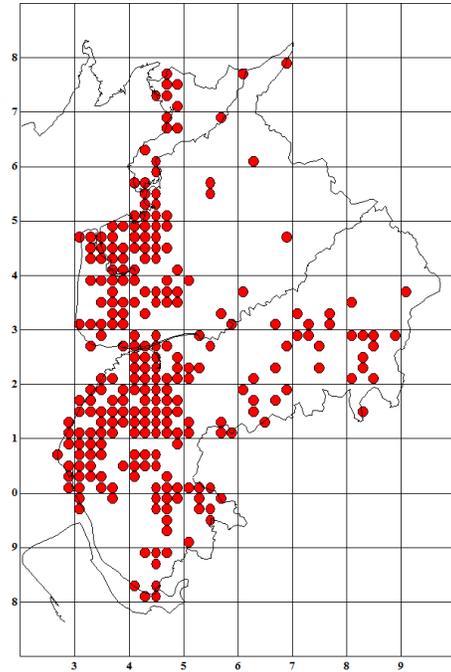
The largest numbers occur on the south-west mosses, roosting at Martin Mere, with smaller concentrations centred on the Ribble and farmland in Wyre. Occurrences further north and east are more sporadic, often involving very small numbers of birds.

Relative abundance of Whooper Swans, 2007-2010. (Yellow dots 1-40 birds, orange dots 41-200, red dots >200)

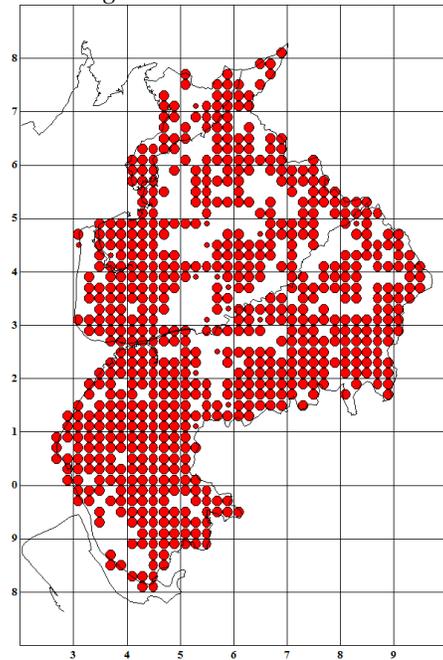


d) Changes in distribution of Skylarks between winter and the breeding season

Winter distribution 2007-2010



Breeding distribution 1997-2000



Comparison of the current (incomplete) winter range of Skylarks with the breeding range during the last atlas period gives a striking picture of their winter desertion of upland areas for the arable farmland of the Lancashire Plain.

This would undoubtedly be even more marked if relative abundance was taken into account.

Population estimates

Observers have estimated tetrad population estimates for about a third of all TTV records in both winter and the breeding season.

Although it needs to be done with extreme caution, this gives us an opportunity to estimate county populations of the more common species with a little more confidence than previously.

A very preliminary attempt to do this for one species-pair follows, based on calculating the relationship between the peak day count in each tetrad with the population estimate (linear regression) and extrapolating this for tetrads where no population estimate was given.

	Blue Tit	Great Tit
Winter	42000	27000
Breeding	26000	18000

The ratio between Blue Tit and Great Tit numbers in winter is 1.5:1 and 1.4:1 in summer. Comparisons between winter and summer for Blue Tit are 1.6:1 and for Great Tit 1.5:1.

A lot more number-crunching remains to be done!

Publication of the atlases

No final decision has been taken yet but, unless some wealthy benefactor comes forward, it's unlikely that we shall be able to afford to produce a book(s) that would do justice to the amount of information available.

We are therefore looking into the possibility of going digital – publishing on interactive DVDs along the lines of BBi and BWPi. Whatever the outcome, the surveys will be published, hopefully in 2012 or 2013.

Please keep those roving records coming in

Although timed visits have now been completed (or will soon be) over much of the county, it remains vital to keep sending in roving records.

Roving records are proving invaluable by filling in gaps in the timed visit data and are especially useful if they include counts and breeding status information

To give just one example, the two TTVs on SD47W (Warton Crag) produced 47 species with 22 proved breeding. Subsequent RRs have increased that to 64 species with 41 proven breeders.

Rrs can be submitted online on either the BTO atlas website www.birdatlas.net or Birdtrack www.birdtrack.net, or sent directly to Steve White. stephen.white2@tesco.net

All records sent in for use in the Lancashire, Fylde, Chorley, Rossendale and East Lancashire Bird

Reports will be incorporated into the county atlases and passed on to the BTO. They are most useful when locations are clear cut, preferably with a tetrad or other grid reference.

The importance of recording breeding status

Although at first glance the plethora of breeding status codes used by the BTO can be a bit daunting, gathering information on breeding status is crucial. Perhaps oddly, under-recording of breeding status is often most prevalent for common resident species – if you hear a dozen Robins singing it's a safe bet they're breeding! So please code them as 'territorial' which upgrades the record from 'possible' to 'probable' breeding.

For the Lancashire atlas we will be treating 'probable' and 'proven' breeding as a single category but the BTO will not. So, it's doubly important to send in every record of a fledgling Blackbird you see – don't assume someone else is going to do it!

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