

# Hertfordshire Bird Atlas



Mapping the distribution of Hertfordshire's birds

## Volunteers' Newsletter

Issue 6 - October 2010

Having now completed three years of breeding season fieldwork and three years winter fieldwork we have assessed the feasibility of completing this project in our intended four years. We are well on track to complete Timed Tetrad Visits in all Hertfordshire tetrads within the four years, finishing the outstanding winter counts this winter. However, the breeding status data is still accumulating at a slower rate than we had hoped, so for the Hertfordshire Bird Atlas, we will be continuing into a fifth year. The national project - Bird Atlas 2007-11 will still finish at the end of the 2011 breeding season. Our aim is to make the best contribution to that by completing Breeding Season Timed Tetrad Visits in 2011 and then to use the 2012 season to concentrate on finding that remaining tetrad-scale breeding evidence.

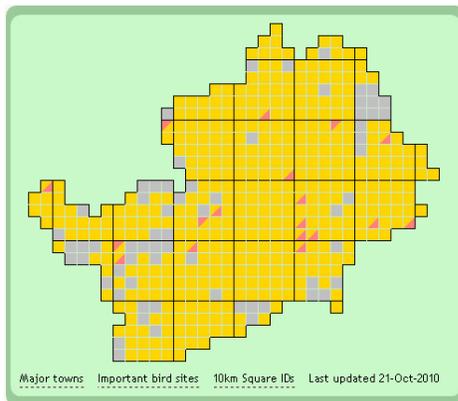
### The Hertfordshire Bird Atlas

The Hertfordshire Birds Atlas is a tetrad scale distribution atlas project for both winter and breeding seasons and is running alongside Bird Atlas 2007-11, the new atlas for the whole of Britain and Ireland being organised by the British Trust for Ornithology in collaboration with the Scottish Ornithologists Club and BirdWatch Ireland. In Hertfordshire we are aiming to survey all 491 tetrads (2km x 2km squares) which include part of the county in both the winter and breeding seasons.

Once again I'd like to express a big "thank you" to everyone who has given their birding time to support this important project. An amazing 600 people have contributed results from Timed Tetrad Visits (TTVs) or provided Roving Records (RRs) through the Bird Atlas 2007-11 website ([www.birdatlas.net](http://www.birdatlas.net)) or on paper, or have mapped their BirdTrack ([www.birdtrack.org](http://www.birdtrack.org)) sites to a specific tetrad.

Fieldwork for the fourth winter season starts on 1 November 2010 spanning the months of November to February inclusive, and will continue during those months in 2011/12.

### Plans for the Fourth Winter Season



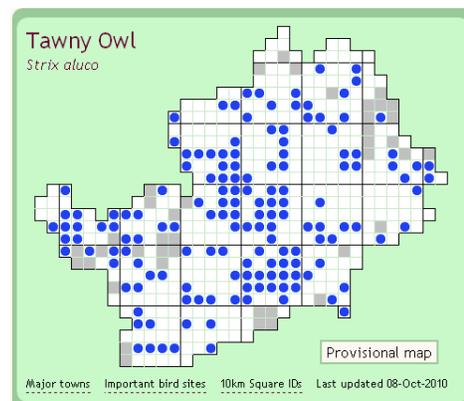
With the arrival of some late data from last season, the number of tetrads with both winter TTVs completed now stands at 408, representing 83% of the target total (yellow squares in the map on the left). A further 18 tetrads have data available for one of the visits (yellow/pink triangles). The target is still to get paired two-hour winter TTVs done in all 491 Hertfordshire tetrads, and we would like to get the remaining TTVs carried out this winter.

All winter data entered by 8 October is available to view on the Hertfordshire Bird Atlas website. In all there are 15,215 unique species records from TTVs and a further 6,386 records from Roving Records or derived from BirdTrack lists. Every tetrad has at least one atlas record and as might be expected, the major wetlands in the Lee and Colne valleys, as well as East Hyde and Tring have the largest numbers of species. The squares with fewer than 30 species are mostly those that have had little coverage, so this threshold ought to be achievable for all tetrads.

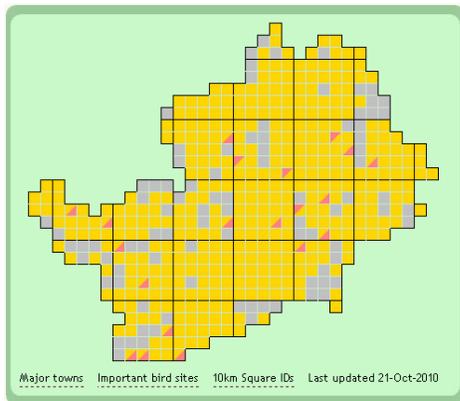
The first priority this winter is to complete TTVs in the remaining tetrads. If you have taken on a tetrad, but not yet completed both the timed counts (one in

Nov/Dec and one in Jan/Feb), then please carry out the outstanding ones this year, or let us know if you are unable to do so. Secondly, please take a look at the winter species list for your tetrad(s) and attempt to add any missing species. That may mean making visits to habitats that you were not able to cover in the TTV. If you have not already recorded owls, then please make a dusk or evening visit to listen for them as we believe them to be under-recorded (see Tawny Owl map on right).

If you have completed both winter TTVs and are confident that you have as complete a species list as possible, please consider taking on one of the unallocated tetrads this winter, by contacting the atlas organiser (Chris Dee) or your local 10km square co-ordinator. The Bird Atlas 2007-11 website ([www.birdatlas.net](http://www.birdatlas.net)) is the best indicator of where tetrads are available, although the tetrad allocation map on the Hertfordshire Bird Atlas website ([www.hertsatlas.org.uk](http://www.hertsatlas.org.uk)) is updated as more tetrads are allocated. The tetrad allocation map is on the Status page, and square co-ordinator contact details are on the Contact Us page.



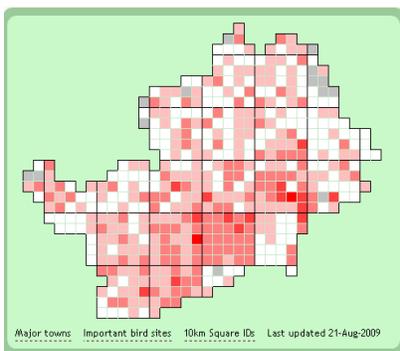
## Third Breeding Season Achievements



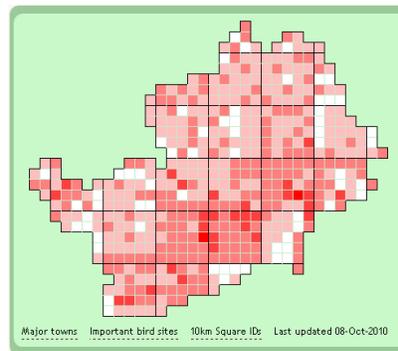
With the data entered on the Bird Atlas 2007-11 website, we have paired counts (one in April/May and one in June/July) for 381 (78%) of the 491 Hertfordshire tetrads - shown by the yellow squares in the map on the left. The counting element of the fieldwork is complete for those tetrads - TTVs do not need to be repeated. In a few tetrads (shown as yellow/pink triangles), one or other of the two counts has not been done and should be completed in 2011. Both TTVs need to be carried out in the grey squares.

These timed count results will be used for the national atlas to calculate relative population estimates, although different analysis techniques will probably be used for different species. We are also hoping to be able to do some analysis of these data at a local level and the BTO is providing useful advice to county atlas organisers on how to best achieve this.

Of the 21,164 tetrad-species registrations, 40% are of confirmed breeding; a fantastic amount of recording effort put in during the first three breeding seasons. However, at this stage of fieldwork for the previous (1988-92) county atlas, 48% were at this level, so extra attention will need to be paid to this.



Coverage is still a little uneven across the county, but this is improving with each year. The map on the left shows the numbers of species recorded in each tetrad after the first two breeding seasons - brighter red indicating more species. After three seasons this is looking more even with only 62 tetrads having recorded less than 30 species (white squares). The species totals represented on this map do not include some scarce breeding species and recent colonists, the locations of which are not being revealed at the tetrad level. This policy will be reviewed before publication.



## The Hertfordshire Bird Atlas Website

In contrast to the previous atlases, the availability of the internet provides a major opportunity to provide on progress and focus attention on under-recorded locations and species.

The Hertfordshire Bird Atlas website ([www.hertsatlas.org.uk](http://www.hertsatlas.org.uk)) is being regularly updated with the accumulating results for the current atlas project. All winter and breeding season data that was available on 8 October is now included. During the fieldwork periods, new data loads are announced on the home page and the updated total numbers of records are shown on the Status page.

We have also made a change to the tetrad species list pages (and the customised recording forms), to indicate species that are missing from the tetrad but are present in 4 of the 8 surrounding tetrads. This should give you a clue as to which habitats it might be worthwhile visiting.

The website also provides access to the tetrad-scale maps and species lists from the previous two breeding atlases and 10km results for the 1981-84 winter atlas.

## Data Validation

It is important both for Bird Atlas 2007-11 and the Hertfordshire Bird Atlas that we only include records of birds that have been correctly identified. For local rarities, the Herts Bird Club has a well-established review mechanism - the Rare Birds Panel - which examines descriptions of species which are unusual in the county and makes judgement on the basis of the evidence provided. The species for which this process is applied are listed in the annual Hertfordshire Bird Report, on the Bird Club's website ([www.hertsbirdclub.org.uk](http://www.hertsbirdclub.org.uk)) and are indicated as such on the online atlas maps. Records of these species submitted for the atlas will undergo the same level of scrutiny, so if you are lucky enough to see something rare please provide a description to the Hertfordshire Bird Recorder. Whilst undergoing review these records may show up as Queries on your Bird Atlas Data Home page, and if you are notified that your record was "not proven", please help us to keep the underlying database clean by deleting it.

## Call for Outstanding Data

If you still have completed Timed Tetrad Visit forms or any paper Roving Records for the 2010 breeding season (or indeed any previous season), could you please let me have them as soon as possible. Timely submission of your results allows us to better establish how work is progressing and minimises the risk of effort being expended on obtaining species records or breeding evidence that we already have.

## How to Contribute

If you are not already helping with this important project and would like to get involved, please contact me by email at [hertsbto@hotmail.com](mailto:hertsbto@hotmail.com) or by telephone on 01279 755637.

Chris Dee - Hertfordshire BTO Regional Rep. and Hertfordshire Bird Atlas Organiser