

# Hertfordshire Bird Atlas



Mapping the distribution of Hertfordshire's birds

## Volunteers' Newsletter

Fieldwork for the national project - Bird Atlas 2007-11 has now ended. This has been an incredible achievement with over 180,000 Timed Tetrad Visits completed. Almost 4 million Roving Records have been augmented by 4.4 million records from BirdTrack. In both the winter and breeding seasons at least 99.7% Timed Tetrad Visit coverage was achieved, based on the target of 8 tetrads in each 10-km square.

Thank you to everyone who has made this possible.

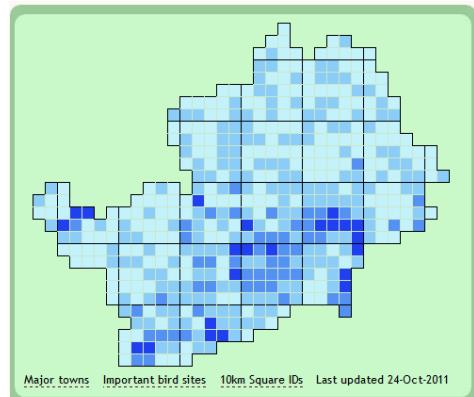
Final validation of the data is underway and is due for completion by the end of the year. Any county rarities are, of course, being assessed by the Herts Bird Club Rare Birds Panel.

We have completed Timed Tetrad Visits in almost all Hertfordshire tetrads within the four years, with many of the outstanding breeding season counts being carried out this past summer.

In Hertfordshire, a total of 700 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 fifth winter season starts on 1 November 2011 spanning the months of November to February inclusive, and the final breeding season fieldwork will take place in 2012.

### Plans for the Fifth and Final Winter Season



visits to habitats that you were not able to cover on the TTV. If you have not already recorded owls, then please make a dawn or dusk visit to look and listen for them as we still believe this group of species to be under-recorded (see Tawny Owl map on right).

If you are confident that you have as complete a species list as possible, please consider targeting your birding to other areas with low species counts. We are considering ways of making the coverage gaps easier to detect with new maps on the Hertfordshire Bird Atlas website, so please remember to check the home page where these will be announced.

To unify the quality of the data, a small number of Timed Tetrad Visits are being repeated this winter, where we believe weather conditions or the timing of the visit resulted in fewer species being recorded than expected. This will give us greater confidence in the relative abundance estimates that we are aiming to produce for some species at the tetrad level.

## Issue 8 - November 2011

### 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.

All winter data entered by 24 October is available to view on the Hertfordshire Bird Atlas website ([www.hertsatlas.org.uk](http://www.hertsatlas.org.uk)). In all there are 17,771 unique species records from TTVs and a further 6,807 records from Roving Records or derived from BirdTrack lists. As anticipated, every tetrad has now recorded at least 30 species and as might be expected, the well-watched wetland sites of Tring, Tyttenhanger and Amwell have each accumulated over 100.

In the map on the left, higher numbers of species are represented by darker blue shading. The palest blue indicates a tally of between 31 and 45 species, some of which, in the southern half of the county, are probably deserving of more work this winter. Some are missing winter Thrushes and Goldcrest which might be easier to find early in the winter.

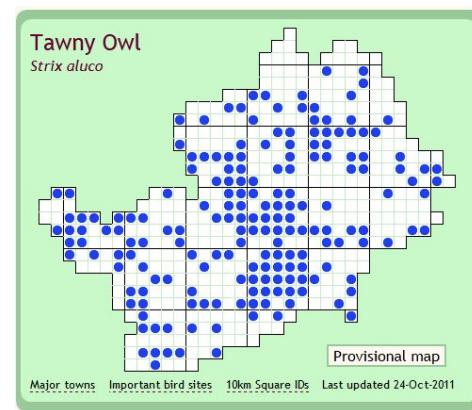
Please take a look at the winter species list for your tetrad(s) and attempt to add any missing species. That may mean making

visits to habitats that you were not able to cover on the TTV.

If you have not already recorded owls, then please make a dawn or dusk visit to look and listen

for them as we still believe this group of species to be under-recorded (see

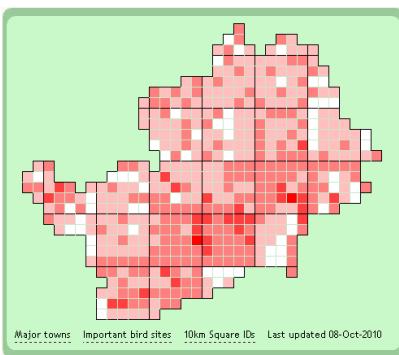
Tawny Owl map on right).



## Fourth Breeding Season Achievements

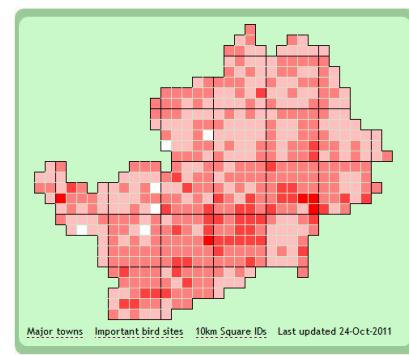
With a small number of exceptions, we now have paired Timed Tetrad Visit counts (one in April/May and one in June/July) for almost all of the 491 Hertfordshire tetrads.

Of the 23,904 tetrad-species registrations, 45% are of confirmed breeding: a fantastic amount of recording effort put in during the first four breeding seasons. At this stage of fieldwork for the previous (1988-92) county breeding bird atlas, 49% were at this level, so improving this percentage will be a key element of the fifth breeding season.



Coverage has improved with the fourth year of fieldwork. The map on the left shows the numbers of species recorded in each tetrad after three breeding seasons, brighter red indicating more species. After four years (right) only six tetrads have recorded less than 30 species (white squares).

We are conscious of the artefacts that have arisen through organising effort along 10km square boundaries. These are especially noticeable along the northern and western borders of TL30 and on the eastern border of SP90. We hope to be able to address these in the final year.



## The Hertfordshire Bird Atlas Website

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 24 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.

Remember that species that are missing from the tetrad but are present in 4 of the 8 surrounding tetrads are shown on tetrad species list pages with a four-way arrow (☒) and on the customised recording forms with the text "Adj.". This should give you a clue as to which habitats it might be worthwhile visiting.

In April it was decided to relax some of the mapping restrictions that had been applied when this website was first launched. There was concern that by restricting maps to the 10km scale, we may be losing tetrad records for some species. The list of species was reviewed by the Herts Bird Club Scientific Committee and the risk of revealing the tetrad-level breeding status was assessed. Consequently, the breeding season maps for the following species now show records at the tetrad level: Gadwall, Shoveler, Pochard, Little Egret, Red Kite, Barn Owl, Kingfisher, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and Cetti's Warbler.

## 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 the record.

## Call for Outstanding Data

If you still have completed Timed Tetrad Visit forms or any paper Roving Records for the 2011 breeding season (or indeed any previous season), could you please let me have them as soon as possible. The deadline for submission of records to be included in the national atlas is the end of this year. 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 you have already established.

## Publications

Clearly, the enormous amount of data that has been collected for Bird Atlas 2007-11 is going to take some time to analyse and organise into a digestible form. Detailed planning for how this will be presented, including distribution, change and abundance maps, is already underway. The new book, which will be published by the BTO, is expected to be available in autumn 2013.

In Hertfordshire, we are intending to publish a complete avifauna in the same style as the recent HNHS publications covering Moths, Flora and Geology. A significant part of this book will be distribution maps, but with data from two previous county breeding atlases, we also plan to show change maps where appropriate, as well as incorporating trend information from the Breeding Bird Survey and Constant Effort Scheme. No date has yet been set for publication.

## 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