

## BTO Matters

### 2007-2011 Bird Atlas

I made reference in the last issue of *Birding Surrey* to the forthcoming Atlas of Birds of Britain & Ireland. This is an exciting opportunity to review the wintering and breeding status and abundance of all bird species across Surrey at the same time as contributing to the National atlas.

The BTO has now produced a set of Guidelines for Observers. I have amended these, where appropriate, to describe in more detail the data we will be collecting during this four-year survey. The National guidelines are in ‘normal’ typeface and modifications appropriate to Surrey have been added in italics. Hopefully this will give you a flavour of what is involved, and the chance to select a tetrad (2 x 2km square), or two!, on your local

patch where you might be able to assist.

Although we have four years to complete this survey, I am hopeful of covering the vast majority in the first three years leaving year four to fill in the gaps. I already have volunteers for over 100 of the c.600 tetrads in Surrey, so there’s plenty of choice available. Please send me an e-mail stating your preferences. There is a diagram in the frequently asked question section below explaining the lettering system and how to locate a tetrad.

I am very grateful to Glynne Evans (the Hants. BTO Regional Rep) for permission to modify his instructions to Hampshire Atlas workers.

***Hugh Evans***

# Bird Atlas 2007-11 in Surrey



## **Guidelines for Surrey observers**

The 2007-11 Atlas is *both a county (Surrey Bird Club) and national (British Trust for Ornithology) project*. It is an ambitious but immensely important undertaking. At the start of previous atlases the task has seemed daunting but the publications on your bookshelf are a testament to the hard work of all concerned, and to the enduring appeal of Atlasing.

The aim of this document is to provide guidance on survey work *in Surrey*. *It is all compatible with the national survey and your results will be used both for the local and national projects. But the rules of the game may be slightly different nationally and in other areas, and I have italicised where there are differences.*

## **1. Aims of Bird Atlas 2007-2011**

### **Bird Atlas 2007-2011 aims to:**

- 1 • map distributions of birds in summer and winter
- 2 • map broad scale patterns of relative abundance
- 3 • assess change in distribution and relative abundance
- 4 • produce population estimates

The national project will aim to do this at the 10-km square scale, *whilst in Surrey we'll be aiming for the finer tetrad (2km x 2km square) detail.*

To fulfil these aims we need two things – lots of Roving Records which, as they accumulate, will help to produce virtually complete species lists *for every tetrad in Surrey* (nationally, every 10-km square in Britain and Ireland) – and we need Timed Tetrad Visits (TTVs) in which observers count the individual birds they encounter within a tetrad (2km × 2km square) in order to describe broad patterns of relative abundance. Both of these methods are equally important; we need to achieve *full coverage* (nationally, a sample) with TTVs whilst also gaining comprehensive species lists. Any observer can do either, or both methods. Some brief details about each method are given below in section 2. Some information about how the survey will be organised is given in section 3.

## 2. The Field Methods

Full field instructions will be provided soon but a brief summary follows.

### 2.1. Roving Records

Basically these are casual records and can take many forms, for example:

- 1 one-off records (e.g. a Barn Owl seen from car);
- 2 regular visits to a site (e.g. garden, local wood);
- 3 a trip out birding, perhaps through several *tetrads*;
- 4 a dedicated trip around a square (tetrad ~~or 10-km~~) looking for species;
- 5 any other activity that generates casual records.

Details are still being finalised, but the Roving Records form will have a structure approximately as follows (just 2 rows shown for simplicity):

10-km square				Tetrad	Largest town, village or feature in square	Day	Month	Year	Species name	Office Use	Breeding Evidence
S	K	4	9	H	Rotherham	15	April	2008	Woodpigeon		NE
S	K	5	8		South Anston	12	May	2008	Barn Owl		FF

It will be possible to submit national records at the 10-km square scale, but the tetrad scale is preferable and in Surrey we'd like all records to specify a tetrad. Any and all records of species and levels of breeding evidence can be submitted on these forms. They need to be completed during summer and winter to help produce separate species lists for breeding and wintering birds. Forms will be identical in summer and winter, facilitating ease of distribution of forms, and breeding evidence can be provided 'out of season', for example for early nesters like Crossbill. It's the sort of thing that can appeal to everyone because it can be done at whatever level you choose, from the most casual, to the intensive. Roving Record data can be submitted on paper, or recorded in a notebook and then submitted online. There will also be facilities online for directly entering lists of records for individual tetrads.

### 2.2. Nocturnal Coverage

One of the criticisms of the previous atlases is that a gap in the distribution map of a nocturnal species (e.g. Tawny Owl) might mean no Tawny Owls occur there, or it could equally mean that no one went to that area at night.

To overcome this we would like to ensure that during the breeding season *every tetrad* ~~10-km square~~ receives at least one Rover style visit at dusk/night to check for nocturnal/crepuscular species, namely Water Rail, Corncrake, Spotted Crake, Quail, Stone Curlew, Woodcock, owls, Nightjar, Nightingale and Grasshopper Warbler. In practice it might be necessary to make specific visits for each of these species, or at least to the relevant habitats. There is no such requirement in winter as there are fewer nocturnal species present. No particular field methods are required and sightings can be logged on the Roving Recorder form.

### **2.3. Timed Tetrad Visits**

The Timed Tetrad Visits method applies in summer and winter. In any given summer or winter a selected tetrad will receive an early visit and a late visit. In summer this means a 1st visit in April/May and a 2nd in June/July. In winter it means a 1st visit in November/December and a 2nd in January/February. The field method for an individual visit is as follows. The observer is asked to walk around the tetrad for ~~either 1 hour, or 2 hours~~, counting all the individuals of each species they encounter. The route taken should cover the range of habitats present in the square, and not just concentrate on the best bits. We are currently finalising the TTV forms but the draft below gives an indication of the general layout of the species recording bit (header section for dates etc not shown). This would be for one pair of visits (either in summer or in winter).

The form will have a full species list (tailored for summer or winter) and provides separate space for the compulsory 1st hour of counting and the (nationally optional) 2nd hour of counting. There is space to list anything additional seen after the timed component (e.g. a new species seen whilst walking back to the car) and in summer any evidence of breeding (standard codes, e.g. FF = carrying food). Finally, there is an ~~optional~~ column for the observer's crude estimate of the number of individuals in the whole tetrad based on their two visits. Here we are looking for very general figures, for example, to the nearest 10 if less than 100, to the nearest 100 if in the hundreds, nearest 1000 in the thousands. ~~We will stress that this is optional as some observers may be uncomfortable making these extrapolated estimates.~~

### **2.4 Evidence of breeding**

During TTVs and Roving Recording observers are asked to provide evidence of breeding. The main point to get across is that this does not require searching for nests of every species because there are many other observations that can confirm breeding. The evidence of breeding codes are copied below:

The general aim is to try and place each species in the highest category Possible → Probable → Confirmed but it is much easier to note down that actual evidence encountered, hence we use the codes. Field instructions will stress that during TTVs it is much better to use the time for counting and not to spend excessive periods trying to raise the level of breeding evidence. Instead, the majority of breeding confirmation will come from Roving Recorder effort or from returning after the timed part of the TTV is completed. There will be articles on this in BTO News and all surveyors will be provided with handy reminder cards listing the evidence codes.

**NON-BREEDER**

Migrant

**M** - Species observed but suspected to be still on **Migration**

Summering non-breeder

**U** - Species observed but suspected to be **summering non-breeder****POSSIBLE BREEDER**

Single bird present

**H** - Species observed in breeding season in suitable nesting **habitat**

Singing/breeding calls heard

**S** - Singing male present (or breeding calls heard) in breeding season in suitable breeding habitat**PROBABLE BREEDER**

Pair present

**P** - **Pair** observed in suitable nesting habitat in breeding season

Territoriality over 1 week

**T** - Permanent **Territory** presumed through registration of territorial behaviour (song etc) on at least two different days a week or more part at the same place. Or several territorial individuals encountered on one visit.

Courtship and display

**D** - Courtship and **Display** (judged to be in or near potential breeding habitat; be cautious with wildfowl)

Visiting probable nest site

**N** - Visiting probable **Nest** site

Agitated behaviour/Anxiety calls

**A** - **Agitated** behaviour or anxiety calls from adults, suggesting probable presence of nest or young nearby

Adult with brood patch

**I** - Brood patch on adult examined in the hand, suggesting **Incubation**

Nest building/excavating

**B** - Nest **Building** or excavating nest-hole**CONFIRMED BREEDER**

Distraction display/injury feigning

**DD** - **Distraction-display** or injury feigning

Recently used nest/egg shells

**UN** - Used **Nest** or eggshells found (occupied or laid within period of survey)

Recently fledged/downy young

**FL** - Recently **Fledged** young (nidicolous species) or downy young (nidifugous species). Careful consideration should be given to the likely provenance of any fledged juvenile capable of significant geographical movement. Evidence of dependency on adults (e.g. feeding) is helpful. Be cautious, even if the record comes from suitable habitat.

Adult at occupied nest/incubating

**ON** - Adults entering or leaving nest-site in circumstances indicating **occupied nest** (including high nests or nest holes, the contents of which can not be seen) or adults seen incubating

Adult carrying food/faecal sac

**FF** - Adult carrying **Faecal sac** or **Food** for young

Nest with eggs

**NE** - Nest containing **Eggs**

Nest with young seen/heard

**NY** - Nest with **Young** seen or heard

## 3. Organisation

### 3.1. Roving Records

For the distribution maps in the final Atlas to be as complete as possible, and so we can make comparisons with previous Atlases, we need to aim for species lists to be generated for every tetrad *in Surrey* (10-km square in Britain and Ireland). Although TTVs will contribute to the species list, we expect that the

bulk of the breeding evidence records will come from Roving Records. There will be huge numbers of paper Roving Record forms. There will be loads distributed to volunteers, local groups, and so on. It's the sort of thing that all birdwatchers can do, so there is no limit, and you can participate even if you're completely new to bird surveys. There will probably also be copies distributed with *BTONews and Birding Surrey*, and further copies will be available for download from *both the SBC website (<http://www.surreybirdclub.org.uk>) and the national Atlas website ([www.birdatlas.net](http://www.birdatlas.net))*. It is anticipated that there'll be a huge number of Roving Records, and therefore observers will be encouraged to submit these records online – it will be much cheaper and allow quicker feedback. Rapidly updated online summary maps will show the coverage attained and species lists that have been amassed (at least at the 10-km squares level, *and we anticipate also at the tetrad scale*), allowing you to easily see where there might be gaps in coverage, or where expected species have not yet been found.

### **3.2. Nocturnal Coverage**

*Not yet clear how we might keep track of nocturnal coverage at the tetrad scale.*

### **3.3. Timed Tetrad Visits (TTVs)**

*All tetrads should be visited in summer and winter. So as to avoid a 'free for all', and end up with many tetrads not covered, observers are required to "sign up" for TTVs of specific tetrads, and each tetrad will normally only have one TTV observer. (If need be, the winter observer could be different to the summer observer, but in Surrey we won't normally do this.)*

There will an online 'Tetrad Management System' where the Regional Organiser (*Hugh Evans in the BTO Surrey region*) records who is signed up to which tetrad, and online maps will be automatically generated to show which tetrads have been allocated and enable everyone to see where there are gaps.

## **4. Links with existing surveys**

As in the previous atlases, the Atlas will make full use of existing BTO schemes, and where records are submitted for one scheme we can extract those records as Roving Records for the Atlas. So there is no need, for instance, for someone who sees a Barn Owl during their Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) to also submit this as an Atlas Roving Record as we will capture the record automatically. However, a BBS visit cannot count as part of a TTV (see below).

### **4.1. BBS and TTV**

BBS will continue alongside the Atlas, and for the long-term consistency of BBS, there must be no one-off adjustment to BBS methods to accommodate Atlas fieldwork. Likewise, there should be no adjustment of the Atlas fieldwork methods to fit into the BBS methods.

It's perfectly acceptable for a BBS observer to do an Atlas TTV in the tetrad containing their BBS square. However, they must do their TTV at a different time to their BBS, and use a route that covers a range of the habitats present in the tetrad. They must not simply follow their BBS route, or confine themselves to the BBS square.

#### **4.2. WeBS**

Waterfowl and wader counts will be extracted from WeBS forms to use as 10-km scale Roving Records, *but to capture for Surrey's tetrad-scale atlas, they will probably need to be submitted as Atlas Roving Records*. Where it would not compromise WeBS counts, WeBS counters could also double up on effort and do a TTV at the same time as their WeBS count provided they also survey the non-wetland habitats within the relevant tetrad.

#### **4.3. BirdTrack**

The Atlas online system and BirdTrack will be completely joined up. Casual records and lists submitted to BirdTrack will be used in the Atlas. So people already using BirdTrack do not need to submit their records in any other way. Likewise, Roving Records submitted to the Atlas will feed through to BirdTrack so there is no need to submit records twice. The two online systems will allow people to move freely between them, enabling Rovers who have produced a list for a square to submit this as a BirdTrack list if they wish.

### **5. Online registration – PLEASE USE**

We would like to encourage as many observers as possible to consider using the Atlas online system. There are many benefits to be gained. It will provide an easy means of keeping track of who is doing which tetrads and how well the targets for coverage are being met. It will make coverage maps 'live' which should significantly help other people see where they can help. The Bird Atlas online facilities will make this Atlas quite different to previous Atlases. It will be possible for more observers to participate, for much greater volumes of data to be processed at no additional cost, and will provide much more rapid feedback.

If you have not already registered for a BTO online username please go to: <http://blx1.bto.org/btologin/>

### **6. Return of paperwork and validation of records**

Both online and paper data will be validated locally (ie. *within Surrey*).

The BTO expect to provide full reporting 4 months after the end of each season's fieldwork, but to achieve this and allow time for both the local validation and subsequent BTO input, it's going to be essential for paper records

to be returned (*to Hugh Evans in Surrey*) on time - by 30th April (winter forms) and 31st August (breeding forms).

## **7. Frequently Asked Questions**

**Below is a list of some frequently asked questions. These will be posted on the web, and updated as and when more issues arise.**

- 1 Does my TTV survey route through the tetrad need to be the same on my two visits?  
There is no restriction – it can be the same or you can change it.
- 2 Does my TTV survey route through the tetrad need to be the same in summer and winter?  
There is no restriction – it can be the same or you can change it.
- 3 Are we expecting to do TTVs in *all tetrads in Surrey*?  
Yes
- 4 What about coastal tetrads?  
The TTV results would be meaningless in tetrads with relatively little land. Therefore, we will not do TTVs in tetrads where the centre of tetrad is below low water mark. Roving records are though, all the more important in these tetrads.
- 5 *If the national target for TTVs is for only 8 tetrads in each 10-km square, will all 25 tetrads get properly processed by BTO?*  
*Yes – the national target is a minimum, and BTO are hopeful that most areas of Southern England will have much higher levels of coverage (Berkshire., Hampshire., Kent, London and Sussex, are also aiming for 100%). The online system will accept all these records.*
- 6 Is Roving Recorder effort allowed in tetrads already surveyed?  
Yes, Rovers can go anywhere as many times as they like.
- 7 Can a tetrad receive TTVs in more than one summer or more than one winter?  
No. (though exceptionally, by agreement of both local and national Atlas Coordinators).
- 8 Can a BBS observer also do a TTV?  
Yes, but their survey route should be based on the whole tetrad and not simply follow their BBS route, or be confined to their BBS square.
- 9 Is it necessary to record confirmed breeding of common species like Wrens?

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Yes, but remember that evidence other than nests constitutes confirmed breeding, and its likely for a common species such as Wren that you'll see at least one pair carrying food or see/hear fledglings.

10 Should data be entered into Atlas that is already submitted into BirdTrack?

No, we will capture roving records automatically so no need to submit records twice.

11 If visiting a site regularly, which visit should be used for the TTV?

It doesn't matter provided the visits fall in the early and late periods and are at least two weeks apart. Consider submitting the other visits as BirdTrack lists, or looking further afield and doing another tetrad.

But in any case, remember that the TTV should cover a whole tetrad, and this may not fit with the "site".

12 Will all information be available to non-BTO members?

All BTO News articles relating to Atlas issues, especially training type articles will be posted online, and progress maps will be visible on the Web in the same way as BirdTrack maps.

13 Can a TTV observer also submit roving records?

Yes, anyone can submit Roving Records from any tetrad (including one where they may have done a TTV) in any of the four years of the project.

14 Do volunteers need to register in order to participate in the Atlas.

No, anyone can do Roving-type surveys and submit Roving Records, and there is no need to register in advance. However, to use the online system, people will need to register on the BTO Atlas website.

To do a TTV, volunteers need to register and agree with the Regional Organiser (*Hugh Evans for Surrey*) which tetrads they're doing.

15 If my TTV tetrad overlaps the county boundary, should I be visiting both sides of the boundary?

Yes, TTVs should be for a whole tetrad, even if it's part in one county and part in another. *However, if you encounter any rare or localized species, please keep a note of which county they're in, and inform the relevant County Recorder.*

16 *Will data submitted online to the BTO website, also be available for a Surrey tetrad atlas?*

*Yes, we are expecting that all data submitted to BTO, online or on paper forms, will subsequently be available to Surrey Bird Club (in the same way that BirdTrack data are made available).*

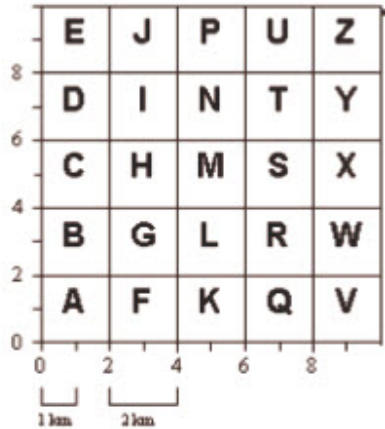
17 *Will records submitted to the SBC Recorder be automatically made*

available to the Atlas projects?

*Yes, if your records are on the standard Atlas forms. However, if the records are in other formats (on paper or electronic) the Recorder will probably not have the resources to input them to the Atlas, or the systems to convert them automatically. Therefore, for the moment and subject to further discussion, you should not rely on this route for inputting records to the Atlas unless you use the standard forms.*

18 What is a tetrad?

Like many BTO surveys the Atlas will use the Ordnance Survey National Grid as a means of identifying locations of bird records. There are various scales of resolution, but for the Atlas we are working with 10-km squares and tetrads. A 10-km square as its name suggests is a square 10 km by 10 km. A tetrad (from the Greek tetras meaning four) on the other hand is a collection of four 1-km squares arranged into a 2 km by 2 km square. There are 25 tetrads within each 10-km square and these are labelled A to Z, excluding O (to avoid confusion with zero), from bottom left (SW) to top right (NE). The figure shows this diagrammatically. A tetrad is then given its full reference as the 10-km square code followed by the tetrad letter (e.g. TF73G).



19 Do I need maps?

We strongly recommend you get an up to date map of the area you propose to survey. Part of the fun of Atlas projects is poring over maps, deciding on the best route to take you past this pond, or that promising-looking wood. Ordnance Survey Landranger maps (1:50,000) or Ordnance Survey Pathfinder maps (1:25,000) are perfect for this purpose.

Reading grid references

Correctly reading grid references is crucial for many BTO surveys. A correct grid reference does not include the map sheet number. All British grid references should begin with two letters, those in Ireland starting with one letter, and followed by a series of numbers (and/or the tetrad code). Correct examples of grid references are:

TF73 - identifies a 10-km square in Britain

TF7233 - identifies a 1-km square

TF722336 - identifies a point to the nearest 100 m