



January 2017

BTO - Manchester Region 2016 Review

We finished the year with 297 BTO members in the Manchester region, an increase of 27 within the year.

We have 88 **Breeding Bird Surveys** (BBS) designated within the region. The status of the 2016 survey season as of the 31/01/17 was;

63 = volunteers uploaded data direct to the BTO website.

6 = volunteers returned paper copies.

14 = surveys were not completed.

5 = survey area is currently inaccessible.

The BTO have already produced a preliminary report on the 2016 breeding season, see link:

https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/nrs/results/nrs-preliminary-results-2016?dm_i=NXN,4OSVL,3GK57T,HJ0M8,1

Some highlights that I noted in the report;

Chiffchaff was recorded in the greatest numbers since 1983, when the survey began, and survival rates were also the highest on record, indicating that they fared well over the winter months. Warmer than average conditions across much of the Northern Hemisphere in winter 2015–16 may have helped to bolster survival rates for this species, that winters around the Mediterranean basin and North Africa, and may also have benefited Blackcap. The increased abundance of Lesser Whitethroat, Sedge and Reed Warbler may be related to the wet growing season in the Sahel during 2015, which also produced good harvests for farmers in the region.

Only Whitethroat exhibited a statistically significant decrease in abundance. This is the fourth consecutive season that numbers of this species have fallen significantly below the five-year average. Although recent declines may be exaggerated by an exceptionally good year for this species in 2011 which will have inflated the five-year mean abundance figures; the long-term (1983–2015) CES abundance trend shows that Whitethroat is declining, albeit with large annual fluctuations.

2016 was a poor year for Blue and Great Tits, the former in particular exhibiting a significant drop in abundance nationally, driven by reductions in northern and western UK. As with Whitethroat, it is possible that the mean for this species is still inflated following a particularly good year in 2011.

I can certainly relate to the lack of records for Great and Blue Tits on my surveys. My biggest surprise of the year was finding a Wood Warbler singing on my first visit to a new survey square I had taken on in Priory Woods, Sale. The pleasure of finding an unexpected bird is certainly one driver for me in doing any of the BTO surveys.

To assist with the BBS the BTO have put into place a couple of initiatives;

- There are three online videos available for BBS. Links to all three are available on the BBS website homepage under 'Submitting BBS data for 2017': www.bto.org/bbs.
- A new Twitter account: [@BBS_birds](https://twitter.com/BBS_birds) has been set up to share news, vacant square information, research and tweets from volunteers on their squares.

We also carry out 6 **Waterways Breeding Bird Surveys (WBBS)** and at the end of the year 5 had been completed and data entered.

2016 saw me participate in my first **Heronry Census** when I assisted the historical surveyor in the count for the Botany Bay Wood site. What an experience this proved to be, struggling through the challenging under-storey of the wood left me disorientated and took quite some physical effort. In our region we have 32 Heronry surveys live on the system with around 17 being "active". Initial results are that breeding numbers are decreasing but I certainly have an increased level of respect for those hardy souls who do this survey. I will be doing the Botany Bay count in 2017 and am already "in training"!

The latest available national census results and graph, up to 2015, are available from the Grey Heron page in the BTO's Bird Trends report;

<https://app.bto.org/birdtrends/species.jsp?s=grehe&year=2016>

2016 was the second year the **House Martin Survey** took place. The Manchester region had 11 observers who watched 16 sites, containing 47 nests. The result was 28 young were recorded. On a national level 737 observers watched 1,003 sites, containing 4,666 nests and 1,759 young. All figures are as yet un-validated but to my un-trained eye this seems a very poor return. Again this highlights the concerns for this diminishing breeding species and the importance of collecting data that conservation bodies can use to understand the drivers behind this decline.

The BTO reports that House Martin numbers have declined in England by 65% between 1967 and 2011. Effectively meaning two thirds of our population has disappeared. And we still do not know exactly where House Martins spend the winter. I find this fact, with the technological advances in our society, simply astonishing!

The **Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS)** monitors non-breeding waterbirds and is carried out throughout the year (with a core count period of September to March). Monthly counts take place on circa 73 bodies of water in the Manchester region. WeBS is run by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO). It is a partnership funded by the BTO, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC).

Nationally, the top 10 most recorded species were Mallard (present on 27,637 WeBS sector core count visits between July 2014 and June 2015), Mute Swan (17,940), Black-headed Gull (17,624), Moorhen (16,601), Coot (16,346), Cormorant (14,786), Tufted Duck (14,561), Grey Heron (14,548), Teal (11,847) and Canada Goose (11,218). These generally ubiquitous species are simple to identify which makes a WeBS survey a relatively easy survey for new volunteers.

Jamie Dunning has managed this survey over the last few years but is due to hand over to a new organiser in 2017. To aid a smooth transition can all volunteers endeavour to submit up to date records as soon as possible please. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Jamie for all his work in organising the Manchester region WeBS.

If you don't currently contribute to any of the surveys previously mentioned then the easiest way to start contributing to our work is by recording the birds you see on BirdTrack (www.birdtrack.net). You simply register on-line and then you can enter any bird you see or hear, anywhere, anytime. In addition to keeping your bird sightings safe for your own future reference, records from BirdTrack feed into many of the other core surveys to help build the 'bigger picture'. Thinking about some of the birding highlights in the Manchester region over 2016 how many people officially recorded the Kentish Plover, in May, at Audenshaw Reservoirs or the White-winged Black Tern, in September, at High Rid Reservoir!

A couple of BTO related issues that have caught my eye in 2016;

Congratulations to local BTO member George Dunbar who picked up The Martin Garner Spurn Young Birder of the Year award in September 2016. This was an impressive effort and a full account can be found on the below link;

<https://www.bto.org/news-events/press-releases/martin-garner-spurn-young-birder-year>

It is very heartening to see young bird watching talent active in our hobby. Encouraging the next generation of bird recorders is just as important as carrying out the surveys themselves, I believe.

I'm glad to see the decline of the Turtle Dove is getting some much needed publicity. When was your last record in the Manchester region, you will do well to remember! I think mine was at Rixton Clay Pits over 20 years ago (if we had Birdtrack back then I would be able to tell you exactly!) A 93% decline nationally is shocking, further details and an action plan can be found here;

<https://www.bto.org/news-events/press-releases/turtle-dove-population-tailspin>

If anybody has any outstanding data from 2016 (or even before) to provide for any of the surveys please do not hesitate to send it through. I will be in contact with all the relevant BBS, WBBS and Heronries surveyors in the near future to make arrangements for 2017 surveys. If you are not going to be able to make the commitment to carry out survey work in 2017, for any reason, please contact me as soon as possible (to allow me to arrange an alternative volunteer).

Thank you for your continued support.

Nick

Nick Hilton, BTO Regional Representative, Manchester Region