



January 2020

BTO - Manchester Region 2019 Review

Hello and welcome to the 2019 review for the British Trust for Ornithology's (BTO) Manchester Region. 2019 saw odd weather patterns, an odd political situation and plenty of negative news concerning our environment. Amongst other things the BTO revamped its website (a much needed improvement) and were involved in the State of Nature Report 2019 (<https://www.bto.org/our-science/publications/state-nature-report/state-nature-report-2019>).

The report was published in October and pooled data and expertise from 53 nature conservation and research organisations, a partnership unparalleled in UK conservation. It presents an overview of how the country's wildlife is faring, looking back over nearly 50 years of monitoring to see how nature has changed. It assesses the pressures that are acting on nature, and the responses being made, collectively, to counter these pressures.

In the Manchester region we continued carrying out citizen science projects to provide data to inform those policy makers we entrust to bring an improvement in the state of our nature. We have 256 BTO members in the region and many are active in the surveys that are carried out;

We have 86 **Breeding Bird Surveys** (BBS) designated within the region. As of the end of the year 68 surveys had been completed and entered onto the BTO online system. If you still have paper copies of completed surveys, please send them directly to Sarah Harris at the BTO's head office.

The Breeding Bird Survey is a national volunteer project aimed at keeping track of changes in the breeding populations of widespread bird species in the UK. The survey involves two early-morning spring visits to a local 1-km square, to count all the birds you see or hear while walking two 1-km lines across the square. Survey sites are pre-selected from a list of random 1-km squares.

The BTO calculate the 50 volunteers who carry out the Manchester region surveys walked a combined total of circa 275km in 2019! Below is some further interesting data from the surveys;



Region Statistics: Manchester (MANC)

Species Recorded in 2019 ↓

Most numerous species ▾

BBS WBBS

Species	Individuals	Squares	Percentage of all squares surveyed
Black-headed Gull	1760	37	54%
Woodpigeon	1623	66	97%
House Sparrow	1212	53	78%
Jackdaw	1042	52	76%
Starling	1019	58	85%
Blackbird	953	65	96%
Feral Pigeon	769	32	47%
Magpie	716	62	91%
Wren	659	64	94%
Goldfinch	630	63	93%

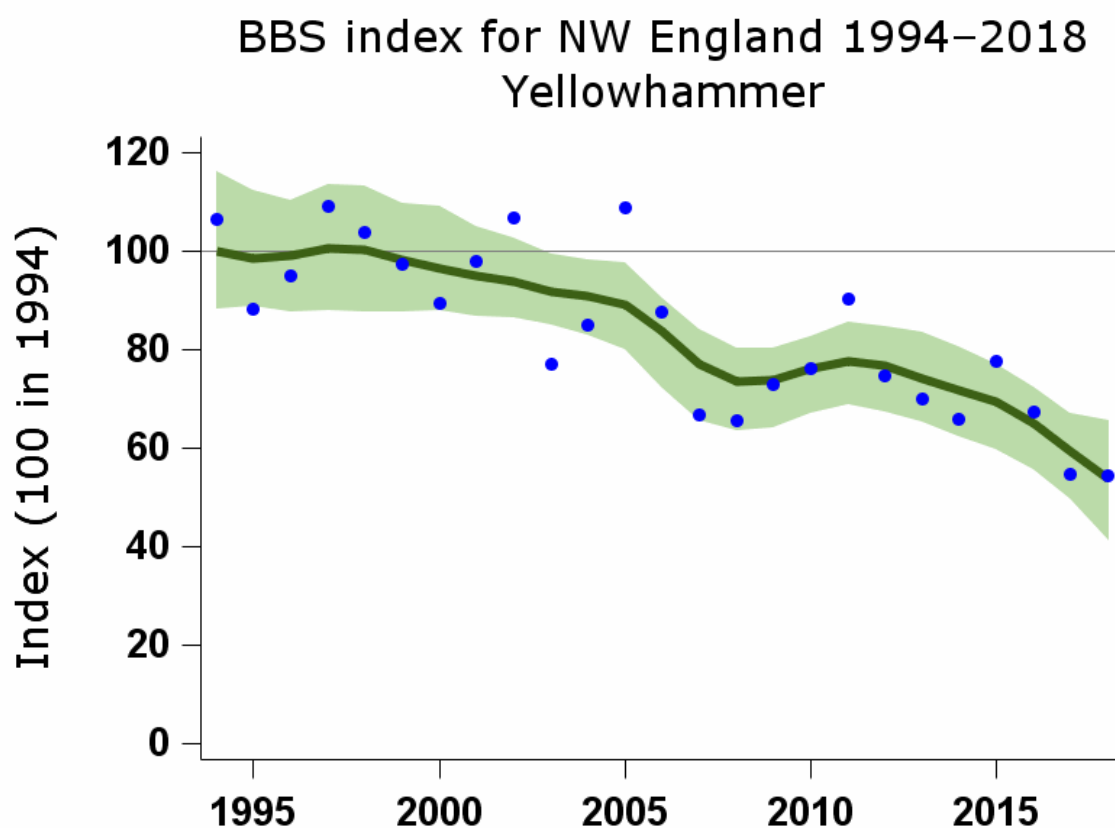
Most widespread species				Rarest species			
<input checked="" type="radio"/> BBS <input type="radio"/> WBBS				<input checked="" type="radio"/> BBS <input type="radio"/> WBBS			
Species	Squares	Percentage of all squares Surveyed	Individuals	Species	Squares	Percentage of all squares Surveyed	Individuals
Carriion Crow	67	99%	624	Hobby	1	1%	1
Woodpigeon	66	97%	1623	Marsh Tit	1	1%	1
Blackbird	65	96%	953	Cetti's Warbler	1	1%	1
Robin	65	96%	579	Tree Pipit	1	1%	1
Wren	64	94%	659	Siskin	1	1%	1
Goldfinch	63	93%	630	Dunlin	1	1%	2
Magpie	62	91%	716	Barn Owl	1	1%	2
Blue Tit	61	90%	533	Kingfisher	1	1%	2
Chaffinch	59	87%	324	Ring Ouzel	1	1%	2
Great Tit	59	87%	316	Little Grebe	2	3%	2

The BBS report for 2018 (and prior years) can be found at the following link;

<https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/bbs/bbs-publications/bbs-reports>

Other interesting resources can be found on the Breeding Bird Survey webpage including population trends and regional summaries (as an example refer to the BBS index for Yellowhammer in the North West, below). There is also data from the Mammal monitoring results that can be done as part of any BBS. This information can be found at the following link;

<https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/bbs/latest-results>



Whilst the 2018 report does not reference individual regions it is always interesting to look at the summary given for the North West; Fifty-seven trends calculated, 34 were significant: 20 increases and 14 declines. Chiffchaff, Blackcap and Nuthatch show substantial increases but Swift, Curlew and, perhaps surprisingly, Starling show substantial declines.

Any species showing an increased trend is encouraging but bird populations are a complicated picture. The BBS data is obviously a very small snapshot in time and the unanswered questions further demonstrate the need for more data. In a period dominated by climate change and our own impact on the planet long term surveys, such as the BBS, are critical to further the understanding of our actions on bird populations.

If you want to look at further information specific to the Manchester region BBS, a summary of bird species recorded between 1994 and 2018 can be found at the following link;

https://app.bto.org/bbs-results/results/county_lists/bbscountylist-GBMA.html

If you are interested in carrying out a BBS there are, at the time of writing, six survey squares unallocated. These are mainly in the west of the region, but you can search for available ones via the below link;

<https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/bbs/taking-part>

We also have 7 **Waterways Breeding Bird Surveys (WBBS)** available in the region. 4 surveys are allocated and were completed in 2019. Rivers and canals are great places for birds and birdwatchers, creating wildlife corridors that strike into the heart of our cities and stretch from moorland to estuary. WBBS provides both a great excuse for a summer morning walk and an effective way to monitor the health of the species that live by our waterways. The WBBS uses transect methods akin to those of the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) but with minor adaptations to a linear habitat. Volunteers walk along from just 500 metres to a maximum of 5 km of waterway, making a note of all of the birds that they see and hear. Surveys are conducted twice a year, between April and June, along with a reconnaissance before that to check the route.

If you are interested in taking part in this survey further information can be found at the below link;

<https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/wbbs/taking-part>

The Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) and the BTO jointly sponsor the **Woodcock Survey**. Data from the 2013 breeding Woodcock survey estimated a population of 55,241 male birds in the UK which represented a decline of 29% since 2003. The current survey continues work in monitoring the changes in this breeding species. The survey consists of standing at the allocated spot for over an hour around sunset and counting the number of flypasts by roding birds.

There are 10 surveys allocated in the Manchester Region with only 3 currently allocated. Our volunteer surveyor in the east of our area has carried out his survey for the last three summers. He confirms he connected with male roding Woodcock on each of the scheduled visits. Unfortunately, weather conditions were not favourable on each visit and three roding males were less than the previous year. There are potential areas in the Manchester region that are not currently surveyed (e.g. Etherow, Hollingworth), if you are interested in engaging in this survey please review the information on the below link;

<https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/woodcock-survey>



Tim Wilcox, our Manchester region **Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS)** organiser provides the following update for 2019;

The UK network of WeBS volunteers' numbers over 3,000 and the monthly core counts provide essential data for assessing the conservation and habitat needs of over 100 water bird species. By co-ordinating with other long-term international monitoring schemes, the BTO's WeBS database contributes to the global understanding of changes in the numbers and distribution of water bird species. In 2019 the WeBS area of the BTO website was redesigned with lots of new features for counters and for casual visitors alike making it easier to input and retrieve the wealth of data.

As a land-locked county Greater Manchester is most significant for over-wintering wildfowl and most sites are surveyed from September to March although some of the larger sites which also attract waders are surveyed all year round. The WeBS survey year runs from July-June so we are currently in the 2019-20 season and most records for autumn 2019 will be directly inputted by counters or submitted on count forms to the Organiser by June 2020.

The January Winter Wetland Bird Blitz Survey, with volunteers co-ordinated by Mike Beard, has continued to carry out good work on the River Irwell. The Irwell is a WeBS priority count area across its various reaches through the north of the county due to its importance for over-wintering Goosander and Goldeneye. More of Mike's volunteers have now become full WeBS counters and one former volunteer, Gillian Birtles is now the WeBS Counter Network Organiser for the BTO taking over from Heidi Mellan.

Amongst the highlights that have made it onto the database for 2019 through the priority core counts so far have been: up to 7 Scaup present at Elton Reservoir from Jan to March; single Pintails at both Shell Pool, Carrington and Abram Flashes on 20/1; A total of 10 Dippers along the Irwell recorded during the Winter Wetland Bird Blitz with a further 2 on the Mersey at Wilmslow Road Bridge; Wintering Green Sandpipers at Hope Carr NR and Cutacre CP; regular Cetti's Warbler at Wigan Flashes with a high count of 14 on 23/3; both Glaucous and Caspian Gulls counted at Heaton Park Reservoir on 21/1 with a Yellow-legged Gull there on 16/2; A Kittiwake at Shell Pool on 24/3; Black Tern at Pennington Flash on 16/9 and a Bittern at Scotman's Flash on 23/3.

If you are interested in taking part in WeBS please contact Tim on; tim.wilcox0@gmail.com

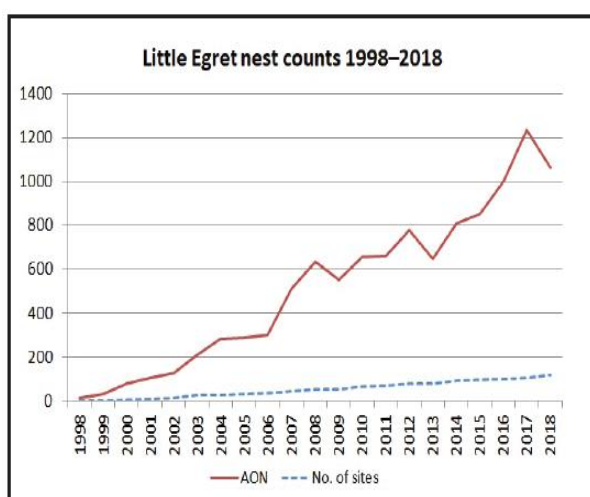
The BTO's **Heronries Census** has gathered nest counts annually since 1928. This is the world's longest running bird survey. The number of active heronries counted in the UK is now well over 500 each year. In the Manchester region we have 17 active Heronry surveys. Data has been received for all 17 sites in 2019. The information is not yet verified but the number of estimated active nests has increased by one in the period to 144.

Whilst still a relatively widespread species Grey Heron numbers substantially decreased from 2005 to 2013. There is some evidence numbers have stabilised in the last five years, but this is not conclusive. Further evidence of the importance of gathering data and carrying out these surveys.

Further information can be found at the below link;

<https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/heronries-census/results>

Included in this information is an interesting graph showing the explosion of Little Egrets nest counts. The information is from the whole of the UK. For those of us that were birding in the last century the Little Egret was a rarity worthy of a twitch! Now relatively common and widespread will this species soon be nesting in the Manchester region?



17 volunteers carried out the **English Winter Bird Survey** for the BTO in 2019. The purpose of this survey is to investigate how wintering birds and Brown Hare benefit from using Agri-environment scheme (AES) options in winter. This work will complement existing studies that have successfully evaluated the effects of AES options on farmland birds and will further our understanding of why many breeding farmland birds are still in decline. The survey used the entire network of Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) 1-km squares and their survey transects during winter. Unfortunately, at the time of writing, no data or results have been released.

In September 2018 the BTO released a survey concerning Tawny Owls, the **Tawny Owl Calling Survey**. This involved listening for 20 minutes during at least one evening between September 2018 and 31 March 2019. You listened from your garden, local park or woodland. 228 individuals registered in Greater Manchester for this survey on the BTO's website. 40 – 60% of people who entered records confirmed Tawny Owls calling (I wasn't one of them!).

New surveys to look forward to in 2020 include the **Breeding Waders of Wet Meadows**. The purpose of this survey is to assess the importance of both existing and new wet grassland and also other breeding wader habitats in England (as provided by agri-environment schemes) for declining breeding birds such as Curlew, Lapwing, Redshank and Snipe. The survey will re-visit sites from the 1982 and 2002 surveys, including sites from the 2009-10 RSPB targeted areas, as well as other new sites since 2002. Further information can be found at the below link;

<https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/breeding-waders-wet-meadows>

If you don't currently contribute to any of the BTO surveys then the easiest way to start contributing to our work is by recording the birds you see on BirdTrack (<https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/birdtrack>). You simply register on-line and then you can enter any bird you see or hear. In addition to keeping your bird sightings safe for your own reference, records from BirdTrack feed into many of the other core surveys to help build the 'bigger picture'.



If anybody has any outstanding data from 2019 (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 plan for the 2020 surveys. If you are not going to be able to make the commitment to carry out survey work in 2020, for any reason, please contact me as soon as possible (to allow me to arrange an alternative volunteer).

For those of you that weren't aware the BTO has a series of videos on YouTube. I find it an excellent resource, the I.D. workshops are especially good. Usefully, there are also lots of videos providing instructions to assist with doing the full range of BTO surveys. Please click the link below to access;

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1t-goRaF_qrFwwyxipvwow

They also do a BTO Highlights 2019 video review (don't expect me to produce one for the Manchester region, that is well beyond my skillset!).

Thank you for your continued support.

Nick

Nick Hilton, BTO Regional Representative, Manchester Region

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