

BTO – 2023 Manchester Region Review

Hello and welcome to the 2023 review for the British Trust for Ornithology's (BTO) Manchester Region. In 2023, the BTO celebrated its 90th year. The organisation is nothing without its volunteers and each and every one of you have played a part in its success. In 2023, the BTO refreshed its strategy using our data and its science to help secure a better future for birds, for nature and, ultimately, for us. The strategy centres around enabling everyone, everywhere, to feel they belong in the natural world and in what the BTO does.

The below link takes you to a short film on some of the BTO's highlights in 2023;

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qbglukp61c4>

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. At the end of 2023 we have 244 BTO members in the region and many are active in the surveys that are carried out.



We have 84 **Breeding Bird Surveys (BBS)** designated within the region. As of the end of the year 67% of the 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 James Heywood 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 BBS also allows us to record mammal and butterfly species whilst recording the birds, and many volunteers complete these sections of the survey.

Below is some interesting data from our 2023 surveys in the Manchester region.

Most numerous species for BBS

Manchester in 2023

Species	Individuals	Squares	Percentage of all squares surveyed
Black-headed Gull	1342	22	49%
Woodpigeon	1109	41	91%
Starling	678	33	73%
Blackbird	560	41	91%
Jackdaw	553	35	78%
House Sparrow	480	31	69%
Feral Pigeon	475	20	44%
Wren	408	40	89%
Carrion Crow	402	45	100%
Magpie	372	39	87%

Most widespread species for BBS

Manchester in 2023

Species	Squares	Percentage of all squares surveyed	Individuals
Carrion Crow	45	100%	402
Woodpigeon	41	91%	1109
Blackbird	41	91%	560
Wren	40	89%	408
Magpie	39	87%	372
Robin	37	82%	336
Goldfinch	37	82%	292
Blue Tit	37	82%	239
Jackdaw	35	78%	553
Song Thrush	35	78%	148

Rarest species for BBS

Manchester in 2023

Species	Squares	Percentage of all squares surveyed	Individuals
Indian Peafowl	1	2%	1
Cuckoo	1	2%	1
Redshank	1	2%	1
Great Black-backed Gull	1	2%	1
Common Tern	1	2%	1
Little Egret	1	2%	1
Red Kite	1	2%	1
Short-eared Owl	1	2%	1
Tawny Owl	1	2%	1
Merlin	1	2%	1

Most encountered mammals for BBS

Manchester in 2023

Species	Squares	Percentage of all squares that recorded mammals
Grey Squirrel	25	76%
Domestic Cat	9	27%
Rabbit	8	24%
Roe Deer	8	24%
Brown Hare	5	15%

The latest BBS report (for 2022 and prior years) can be found at the following link;

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

There are many interesting resources that can be found on the Breeding Bird Survey webpage including population trends and regional summaries. This information can be found at the following link;

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

If you want to look at further information specific to the Manchester region BBS, a summary of bird species recorded between 1994 and 2021 can be found at the following link;

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

The Manchester region needs new volunteers to take on a Breeding Bird Survey. If you are interested in carrying out a BBS there are circa 17 survey squares in the region without a current volunteer. 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. 5 surveys are allocated and all were completed in 2023. 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 another 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.

Below is some interesting data from our 2023 surveys in the Manchester region.

Most numerous species for WBBS

Manchester in 2023

Species	Individuals	Stretches	Percentage of all stretches surveyed
Canada Goose	257	5	100%
Mallard	152	5	100%
Woodpigeon	130	5	100%
Blackbird	96	5	100%
Jackdaw	91	5	100%
Feral Pigeon	90	2	40%
Wren	87	5	100%
Carrion Crow	78	5	100%
House Sparrow	78	4	80%
Robin	68	5	100%

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**. In 2023, we undertook the third national survey (previous surveys in 2003 and 2013), to provide updated population estimates and investigate the causes of the ongoing decline in breeding Woodcock numbers. The majority of the breeding population now appears to be centred in northern England and Scotland.

A stratified random sample of around 1700 1-km survey squares across the UK was prioritised for coverage in 2023, as high coverage is needed to provide the most accurate population estimate. The results are available at the below link;

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

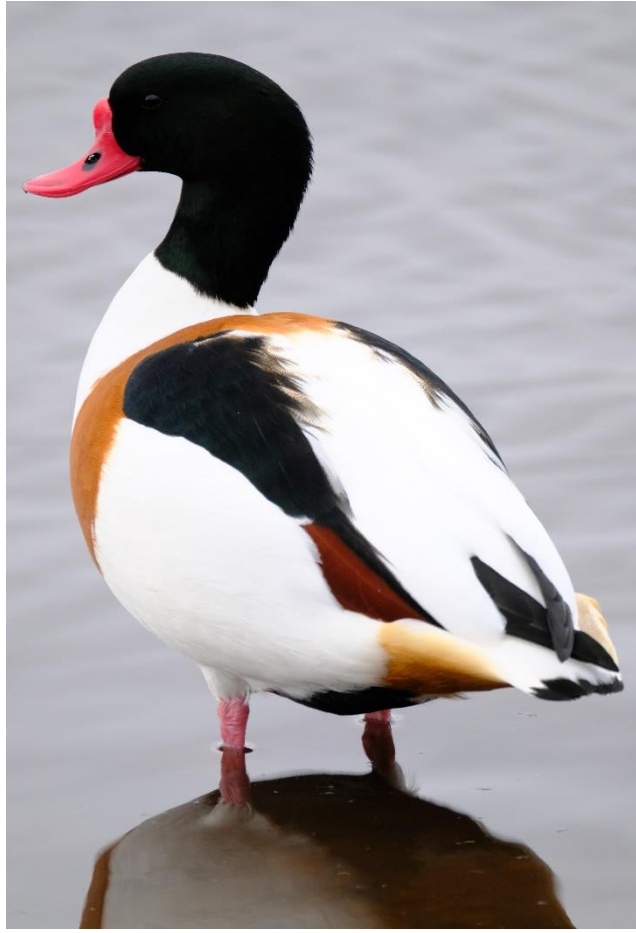
13 survey sites were covered in the region, many thanks to those volunteers that took one on. If you are interested in participating in 2024, we will be resuming our annual monitoring surveys at a smaller subset of sites. If you want to engage in this survey, please review the information on the below link;

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

Tim Wilcox, our Manchester region **Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS)** organiser reports an increase in new volunteers in 2023 and we now have great site coverage across the region. Thank you to all those that have taken on a survey.

Sadly in 2023 there were many reports of birds dead from avian flu in the WeBS counts especially amongst the swan and geese species.

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 waterbird 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 waterbird species.



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 2022-23 season and most records for autumn 2022 will be directly inputted by counters or submitted on count forms to the Organiser by June 2023.

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



The BTO's **Garden BirdWatch Survey** is easy and fun to participate in. To take part, you simply record the species of birds and other wildlife present in your garden once a week, for as many weeks as you can during the year, via the BTO website. This valuable information is used to monitor populations of bird species that visit our gardens. The more people who take part and the greater diversity of gardens, the more valuable the data is. You'll receive regular updates including useful advice to help you learn more about your garden birds, [join Garden Birdwatch today](#).

Chris Wood is the Manchester Region ambassador for the Garden Birdwatch and provides the following personal observations from her garden in the Wigan area.

Last year I reported that the bird life in my garden had changed after a very dry spell. Even after rain the garden has not reverted to the usual species. I have been rewarded. From my dining room I have been able to observe bird behaviour that I never expected to see.

The jackdaws still visit every day whatever the weather. I knew that corvids were intelligent, but I never expected to see at first hand their problem-solving skills. There is a hanging feeder close to a platform from which jackdaws and rooks were able to peck at the fat balls in the feeder. One jackdaw pecked at the bottom ball. Every so often it swung the feeder but the fat ball was too big to fall through the mesh. Eventually the ball was small enough to fall through the mesh. The bird then started to push the feeder with its foot until it swung through ninety degrees and the ball fell to the ground to be quickly retrieved by the bird.

I put out small fat balls in a ground feeder. They are small enough to fit in a magpie's beak and occasionally a jackdaw will take one. One morning I put the fat balls out at first light and watched as a grey squirrel took all of them one after the other. I thought that was it as I rarely get squirrels in the garden, but it turned its attention to the bird table and feasted on the seeds I put there.

The smaller birds have returned but not in the numbers I am used to. I was blessed with two goldcrests feeding on small insects and spiders in the yew tree outside my kitchen window. Like coal tits they are oblivious to my presence on the other side of the window. Long-tailed tits dive bomb the roof of one of my sheds, stealing trapped insects from the spiders' webs at the edge of the roof.

Chaffinches have returned. I am pleased to say they appear healthy with no sign of disease. Some of them have slightly different plumage and I am wondering if they are winter visitors from further north. In October I saw my first greenfinch for almost a year. It was a male with bright plumage and, like the chaffinches, looked very healthy. Very unscientifically, I cross my fingers. Some days I am rewarded by the elegant sound of goldfinch in the trees.

The bird table is popular with the resident pair of dunnocks. It has a removeable tray which I can highly recommend. Twice I have seen a dunnock taking sunflower hearts from a hanging feeder. In the sixteen years I have been watching this garden, I have never seen this before. On two occasions when it has been frosty, I have had a visit from a pied wagtail, a rare visitor feeding on dried mealworms scattered onto the grass.



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 25 Heronry sites identified, with around 15 being active and surveyed in 2023.

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.

This survey covers other colonial nesting species such as Cormorants and Little Egrets. Further information can be found at the below link;

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

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'.

In early December 2023, the BTO launched an update for the BirdTrack app for mobile devices. This fantastic enhancement allows you to go deeper into your records than ever before. You can review year lists for all of the sites you've visited, find out which month you saw the most species, and compare what you saw this year to last. You can also look at a map of every place you've been, as well as a list of species seen at each location. This list can be for a single month, a year, or all time, giving you an abundance of data to delve into.

If you are an existing BirdTrack user, you will have received an interesting email from the BTO in January. This feature provided you with a summary to all your BirdTrack records in the previous year, the places you had visited, your rarest birds (seen by fewest other BirdTrack users) and a timeline of species recorded. It made for interesting reading and the graphic supplied could be shared on social media. The BirdTrack App was updated in Autumn 2022 and I found myself using it frequently during 2023 given the simpler operating system.

In addition, I also input all my Greater Manchester records into the Greater Manchester Local Record Centre (GMLRC) Swift system. For further details on the GMLRC recording system, please click the below link;

https://gmlrc.org/wildlife_recording/

My 2023 BirdTrack summary:



My 2023 BirdTrack year



2162 records, 228 days, 162 bird species

Top birds:

Seen by fewest other birders

- 1: Crested Tit
- 2: Willow Tit
- 3: Hawfinch

Most visited places:

(Number of visits in brackets)

- 1: Davyhulme (243)
- 2: Dersingham Bog NNR (36)
- 3: Sandringham PE35 6EA, UK (30)

150 places:



Timeline: species per day



Year list accumulation



www.birdtrack.net

All the places I went birding in Britain & Ireland in 2023 are shown on the map above. My most frequently birded site was Davyhulme (which isn't surprising, as it is where I live!), for which I made 243 uploads and recorded a total of 44 species. My "Top birds" were, unfortunately, not seen within the Manchester region.

Around 75% of county bird clubs use data from BirdTrack for their reports. They also compile records of scarce breeding species to pass on confidentially to the Rare Breeding Birds Panel to improve knowledge and conservation of our most sensitive species. A great way to improve the value of your birding observations is to add breeding evidence, such as signs of territoriality and nesting behaviour. In 2023, 31% of my breeding-season records had breeding evidence. I also submitted breeding evidence for 6 RBBP species in 2023.

Bird Identification Training

Throughout the year, the BTO offers a range of courses to help you improve your birdwatching skills. During March and April, there are two courses. The first is on how to Improve your bird identification and birdwatching skills and learn how to put these to good use in some exciting BTO-led projects. The second is aimed at helping you develop your songbird identification by sight and sound and learn how to use technology to help you.

Bird ID: Three online sessions, taking place 5/6, 12/13 and 19/20 March, £36.

Songbird ID: Three online sessions, taking place 9/10, 16/17 and 22/23 April, £36.

There is a choice of three time slots for the Bird ID and Songbird ID courses – Tuesdays 7pm | Wednesdays 10am | Wednesdays 7pm – and places can be booked here: <https://www.bto.org/develop-your-skills/training-courses>

Update from BTO Youth Team

The BTO are proud to announce that within a few days' tickets for this year's Youth in Nature Summit in Cambridge have officially sold out. A huge well done to our working group, made up of our Youth Advisory Panellists as well as those from RSPB and WWF youth groups, for working extensively on the planning of this weekend-long event. There was also ~30 of the BTO's youth volunteers present at the event - a great opportunity for them all to network and share this experience. Final planning around the programme is well underway and details will be shared via [our designated youth page](#) soon.

Following the departure of three of the BTO's Youth Advisory Panel members, the BTO are planning to recruit around five more to contribute to decision-making and project planning (amongst a large number of other things) across the youth programme. The advert will go live 02/02/2024 and closes on 03/03/2024, followed by shortlisting 4-8th and finally interviews 11-15th March. If you can help share this opportunity with your contacts, any young volunteers, and those looking to be a part of a team of future leaders.

The BTO's Youth Representatives have already started planning lots of events early in 2024, including guided birders and wildlife walks, WeBS demonstrations, spotting large birds of prey, and wildfowl species IDing. You can find out event details on the [youth events page](#).



That's about it for 2023! If anybody wants further information on the BTO in the Manchester region or the BTO in general, or anything else bird related then please reach out and contact me via the email address below. I will endeavour to assist where I can.

If anybody has any outstanding data from 2023 (or even before) to provide for any of the BTO 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 2024 surveys. If you are not going to be able to make the commitment to carry out survey work in 2024, 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

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BTO is the UK's leading bird research charity. A growing membership and up to 60,000 volunteer birdwatchers contribute to BTO's surveys, collecting information that underpins conservation action in the UK. BTO maintains a staff of 100 at its offices in Thetford, Stirling, Bangor (Wales) and Belfast (Northern Ireland), who analyse and publicise the results of surveys and projects. BTO's work is funded by BTO supporters, government, trusts, industry and conservation organisations. www.bto.org