

BRENT BIRD SURVEY – INTRODUCTION AND GUIDELINES

(SOUTH BRENT PARISH BIRD SURVEY)

www.brentbirdsurvey.co.uk

INTRODUCTION

Brent Birders are a group of wildlife enthusiasts living in and around South Brent, who are interested in recording and encouraging an interest in local birds and other wildlife. They also organize meetings on a variety of wildlife topics. The idea of a parish survey was first discussed at a meeting in September 2013, and a successful pilot survey quickly followed. The full Brent Bird Survey was launched in January 2014, its main features being:

- **Aims.** a) To provide a record of the birds (and some other wildlife) currently residing in, and visiting South Brent, and
b) To help enhance awareness, enjoyment and knowledge of local wildlife by South Brent's human residents and visitors.
- **Area.** Broadly the parish of South Brent, but more specifically the 52 OS 1-km grid squares which have at least 10% of their area within the parish boundary.
- **Period.** Three years, 2014-2016, for the survey, although the final report will include records and information from before this period.
- **Species.** All bird species in the wild, and (optionally) butterflies, mammals, reptiles and amphibians (the 'non-birds').
- **Records.** Species seen or heard in each 1-km grid square in each month form the basic records, with additional information on maximum numbers and breeding. Records are submitted monthly.
- **Participation.** Open to anyone. Sending in a single record constitutes participation!
- **Output.** Interim output is in the form of monthly summaries, maps and tables, mostly on the website. Annual and final reports will also be produced.

Following the initial three years of the survey when records were made monthly throughout the year it was decided to continue in 2017 and beyond but just to record in January (to record migrants, especially) and in May (to record breeding, especially). However, the aim is still to cover all 52 squares and to record all birds seen.

GUIDELINES (*Paragraphs 1-3 and 13-15 are general, and paragraphs 4-11 apply to birds*)

1. **The Recording Forms.** There are two forms, one for Birds and one for Non-birds (see below), available in both digital (excel and pdf versions) and printed formats (from *artworks*). They can be used to record species either for a single square over several months, or for several squares in a single month. Just make sure that the relevant *month* (Jan, Feb etc.) and *square* (two-digit code from the Parish Map) appear at the head of each column of records. Additional forms can either be copied digitally, supplied on request or downloaded from the website.
2. **Identifying squares.** To find out which square a bird is in (which may be different to the one you are in), the Parish Map should be adequate in most cases, but if close to a square boundary, is best used in conjunction with larger scale maps. Use can also be made of GPS position finders, or apps for smart phones (details available on request).
3. **Accessing land.** Most records will come from observers' gardens, public rights of way, open access land etc. Although some private land can be viewed from these areas, it will clearly be helpful to access more private land. If you are able to gain such access, please let us know so that we can maintain a register, and thereby help prevent landowners being approached by too many eager surveyors. Likewise, contact us before approaching a landowner, to see whether access has already been granted. *Remember, of course, that participation in this survey does not give you the right to enter private land.*
4. **Identifying birds.** There are many books, websites CDs and DVDs available to help identify birds by sight and/or sound. The most useful will depict each species in all plumages (winter and summer, male and female, adult and immature). We may also be able to help with identification, if a good description and/or photo is provided, but if you are uncertain about the identity of a species, either do not include it, or add a question mark, ideally with a comment to explain further. Comments will also be useful for unusual records.
5. **Species list.** The first part of the Bird Recording Form contains a list of the species most likely to occur in South Brent, and in the order used in most modern publications. Additional species recorded after 2014 have been included at the end of the list, in chronological order. Other species will occur, and these can be added in the spaces at the end of the form. *Please do not try to squeeze them in among the other species, or otherwise alter the given list of species.* Another feature of the species list is that the official BTO one- or two-digit codes are given after each species name. These may be useful as a form of shorthand for recording birds seen in the field.
6. **What to record.** In each cell, representing the occurrence of a species per square per month, there will be the following options:
 - Cell left blank – species not recorded;
 - **P** – species Present;
 - **Maximum count** (see below);
 - Highlighting/shading to indicate breeding (see below);
 - **?** – indicates uncertainty about identification of species or which square it is in (ideally backed up with a comment – see below).
7. **No birds?** If a square is visited in a particular month, and no birds are seen or heard, record a zero in the first row.
8. **Maximum counts.** This is an alternative to P. The idea is to record the maximum number of birds of a particular species that you can see *at any one time* per month per square. It is only worth doing for flocking species, or birds gathering on garden

feeders. For species which are fairly solitary, such as Robin, counts are of no value, and a P is adequate. (In the final analysis a P will be regarded as indicating less than 10 birds.) For any species, if you see more than 10 together, please try to count or estimate the number seen.

9. **Fly-overs.** The flying-over category F has now been abandoned, except for Herring Gull. For this species there are now separate entries for birds flying over and birds landed (in fields, on roofs etc.). If possible, please record the maximum number for both. For all other species record P, or maximum count, even if the birds are in flight, but if they definitely look as if they're just flying through, please add a comment to this effect.
10. **Evidence of breeding.** As well as knowing which birds occur in the parish, we would like to know which ones are breeding – and where. If you do observe any evidence of breeding (see list below), simply highlight or shade the relevant cells on the recording form, and if possible, add a comment to indicate the evidence observed. The code letters may be useful for this.
11. **Bird Recording Form for Devon Birds (aka DBWPS).** It is hoped that at least the more interesting records will be separately recorded and submitted to Devon Birds (www.devonbirds.org) at the end of each year, or ideally at more frequent intervals. These can either be submitted directly to the County Recorder recorder@devonbirds.org along with your other Devon records, or to Mike Goss or Peter Reay for forwarding to the recorder after extracting any parish records.
12. **Non-birds.** Please use the Non-birds Form if you are interested in recording mammals, reptiles, amphibians and/or butterflies in the parish. Add comments if you have identified the actual species of bat, mouse, shrew, vole or newt. Blank spaces are also available for any additional species. Note that for some of these groups you may not actually see the animal alive, but will rely on road-kills and other corpses, or signs such as otter spraints, other poo, badger sets, mole hills, deer tracks, sloughed snake skins, frog spawn, etc. For 2015, we would like you to record these on a monthly basis, as with the birds, so the new recording form is now in an identical format to the bird form. This should add interest to this aspect of the survey, and will make the records more useful to outside bodies such as Butterfly Conservation www.butterfly-conservation.org. If you are recording non-birds, please send your records in on a monthly basis, as with the bird records.
13. **Adding comments.** The recording forms do not allow much space for additional comments, but these can be inserted in Excel (highlight cell, click Insert, then Comment), or written on the back of paper recording forms. Comments will be particularly useful in cases of uncertainty, or to provide further details for more unusual records.
14. **Returning forms.** Please try to return forms within a week of the end of each month, in order to help us provide up to date monthly feedback, though we are also happy to receive forms and casual records, any time up to the end of the year. *Paper forms: send to Peter Reay, or leave in artworks (indicating if you would like your form returned and including a postal address). Digital forms: email to both Mike Goss and Peter Reay, or send to brentbirdsurvey@gmail.com.* If forms are not for you, or if you just happen to see an interesting bird, then contact us either by email or phone with your records (minimum of species name, when and where).
15. **Website.** Don't forget to make use the website www.brentbirdsurvey.co.uk on which are posted Recording Forms, Guidelines, the latest Monthly Summary, news items and survey results (including a parish map for each species). If you'd like to see any of your photos, news or latest observations on the website there's a feedback form on the site, or just send them to brentbirdsurvey@gmail.com.

EVIDENCE OF BREEDING

Probable breeding

PR Pair observed in suitable nesting habitat in breeding season.

T Permanent territory presumed through registration of territorial behaviour (song etc) on at least two different days, a week or more apart, at the same place.

D Courtship and display (judged to be in or near potential breeding habitat).

N Visiting probable nest site.

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

B Nest building or excavating nest-hole.

Confirmed breeding

DD Distraction-display or injury feigning

UN Used nest or eggshells found (occupied or laid within period of survey)

FL Recently fledged young, especially if still dependent on parents for feeding. (Bear in mind that fledged young and families may have already moved away from the breeding site.)

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.

FF Adult carrying faecal sac or food for young.

NE Nest containing eggs.

NY Nest with young seen or heard.

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