

Recording of breeding evidence and rare breeding birds.

With the breeding season now in full swing, many of you will be using BirdTrack to record numbers of breeding pairs and evidence of breeding at your sites. For this, you can make use of the optional details section of the records form (whether part of a species list or a casual record). Especially relevant to breeding birds are the tabs labelled Age/Sex and Breeding.

For the rarer breeding birds, such extra details are especially important because they enable county bird recorders to get a fuller picture of any breeding attempts and thus provide a more complete annual return to the Rare Breeding Birds Panel (RBBP), who collate all such records and produce an annual report of the numbers of breeding pairs by county in the UK, published by *British Birds*.

Of course, observers should be mindful of the need to avoid disturbing breeding birds, and the special protection afforded to rare breeding birds under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981). It is an offence to intentionally or recklessly disturb these species at or near the nest.

The RBBP reports annually all species with fewer than 2,000 breeding pairs in the UK, and there are around 75 such species which breed most years, plus a similar number which breed only occasionally or which have, to date, only shown signs of attempting to breed. A list of species considered by the RBBP can be viewed here: <http://www.rbbp.org.uk/rbbp-species-list-full.htm>.

The hints here of course apply to any breeding bird recorded in BirdTrack. Records of breeding can also be enhanced by follow-up visits, thus pairs of ducks or other waterfowl at a site may produce young later in the year, and singing passerines in April or May could be seen carrying food for young in the nest if the site is re-visited later in May or June.

Let's use two examples to illustrate the use of BirdTrack in this way. Shoveler is a duck where breeding evidence is usually based on pairs lingering in breeding habitat, and records of females with broods of young later in the season. Other solitary breeding birds might be recorded in this way. Little Egret is a good example of a colonial breeder where nest contents are not usually visible but where birdwatchers looking at a colony from a safe distance can contribute nest counts.

Counts of **Shoveler** at a potential breeding site can be recorded in the usual way but it is especially useful to provide a breakdown of adults by sex. Several visits to the site can compile a useful history of the breeding attempt, and at some locations there may be a series of records from multiple observers. In this way, the number of females may be seen to decline at a site over the season as they move onto nests, whereas the numbers of males typically stays stable as the males remain in the breeding area "guarding" females. Once the eggs hatch, females may be seen with ducklings in tow and these chicks can be counted as well. For a record of two female ducks each with a brood (one of 6 and one of 4) use BirdTrack in the following way:

Count = 12

Overall breeding status = FL (fledged young – the standard atlas code for nidifugous young which have left the nest).

Age/Sex: adult female, count =2
 chick, count =10

Breeding: brood, count = 4
brood, count = 6

Pinpoint: add a 6-figure grid reference (with count of 12 and any relevant comment) – this is especially important for rare breeding birds. Accurate locations of breeding pairs greatly help the calculation of the number of breeding pairs in a county and prevent duplications.

Sensitive: depending on local circumstances and the rarity of the species you may wish to use the Sensitive tag to alert the recorder that you consider this record (or site) to be sensitive.

Comments: free-format, any other relevant facts can be included here to help the recorder process the details.

If you wish to record a **Little Egret** colony, or a colony of some other species, you may only be able to count occupied nests, although later in the season some young in nests may be visible. Let's say there are 9 nests visible and in 3 of these young can be seen, although it is not possible to get an accurate count of the young (you could include them in the totals if you are able to get a good count). There are 14 adults at the colony, but the most important figure for RBBP will be the number of nests (i.e. confirmed breeding pairs).

Count = 14

Overall breeding status = NY (nest with young).

Age/Sex: adult, count =14

Breeding: NY – Nest with young, count = 3
ON – Occupied nest, count = 6

Pinpoint: add a 6-figure grid reference (with count of 14 and any relevant comment) – this is especially important for rare breeding birds. Accurate locations of breeding pairs greatly help the calculation of the number of breeding pairs in a county and prevent duplications.

Sensitive: unless the colony is well known you may wish to flag the record as sensitive; a number of counties keep the locations of colonies secret.

Comments: free-format, any other relevant facts can be included here to help the recorder process the details.

All of these data can easily be entered online using the BirdTrack website, but many of you now are recording birds in the field using the BirdTrack apps. These are excellent for recording details at the time, but are slightly more limited as you do not have the opportunity to record optional details. We would recommend that app users record the best breeding evidence on the app, and additional details in the comments. If possible, once home, ideally you would use the field comments to populate the other fields as described above.