

Rare breeding birds in the UK in 2017

Mark Holling and the Rare Breeding Birds Panel



Alan Harris

Juvenile Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*, Avalon Marshes, Somerset.

Abstract This report documents the status of rare or scarce native birds that were recorded breeding, or showed signs of breeding, in the UK in 2017. The year will be remembered for the first breeding record of Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* in the UK and as a good year for several colonising European species nesting in England, particularly those associated with wetlands, such as Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* and Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*. For the first time ever, data were received directly from all recording areas.

This is the 44th report published by the Rare Breeding Birds Panel (RBBP), and includes details of 97 rare or scarce native taxa that bred, or showed signs of breeding, in the UK in 2017. Three others are likely to have bred in 2017 but no data were received (see Appendix 1), while Appendix 2 summarises the 2017 records of 15 rare non-native breeders.

The area covered by the UK Rare Breeding Birds Panel includes the four countries of the UK (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland), plus the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands. Using 'UK' as a shorthand reference, this is the same unit used by other national monitoring programmes, such as

the BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey (e.g. Harris *et al.* 2019), and by Birds of Conservation Concern (e.g. Eaton *et al.* 2015). The RBBP species list can be downloaded at www.rbbp.org.uk/rbbp-species-list-full.htm. Changes to this list that became effective in 2017 were the addition of Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator* (see p. 717) and the removal of Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti* (see Holling *et al.* 2018).

Review of the year 2017

Overall, 2017 was the fifth-warmest year since 1910, most notably in southeast, eastern and central England in spring and summer. The 2016/17 winter was warmer than average

throughout most of the UK but especially in Scotland. Late winter and spring were generally dry through to mid May. Thereafter, the south and east of the UK was wet while the north and west had below-average rainfall totals. June was hot but also wet – it was the wettest June in Scotland since 1910. July was unsettled with localised heavy rain and flash flooding occurring at times.

It was a particularly memorable year for rare breeding birds. A pair of Night Herons *Nycticorax nycticorax* in Somerset was the first ever confirmed breeding in the UK; Cattle Egrets *Bubulcus ibis* nested at four sites; there were six pairs of Black-winged Stilts *Himantopus himantopus* (a new record total); and the highest-ever totals for Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* (29 pairs), Eurasian Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* (191 booming males and/or nests found) and Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* (1,523 pairs) were reported. Three pairs of European Bee-eaters *Merops apiaster* nested in Nottinghamshire, although poor weather when the young were in the nest eventually led to all the chicks being deserted. The phenomenon of species with a more southerly European distribution colonising the UK is explored further in this

report by Malcolm Ausden (box 1). Other species reaching their highest-ever totals include Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*, White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* and Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*, and there were also high numbers (compared with recent years) of Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra*, Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*, Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris* and Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides*.

Complementing the successes of these expanding species, a diverse range of occasional and potential breeding species was recorded in 2017, including Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps* (paired with a Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*), Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*, Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius*, Little Gull *Hydrocoloeus minutus*, Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis*, Hoopoe *Upupa epops*, Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*, Iberian Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus ibericus*, Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*, Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina* and Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*.

The news for some of our rarest species was less positive, however. Eighteen confirmed breeding pairs of Slavonian Grebe



Andrew Bloomfield

389. Family of Eurasian Spoonbills *Platalea leucorodia*, Holkham, Norfolk, April 2017.

Podiceps auritus was the lowest total since our first report, in 1973, and numbers of both Montagu's Harriers *Circus pygargus* (five pairs) and Spotted Crakes *Porzana porzana* (eight calling males) were the lowest since the 1980s. Numbers of the nominate race of Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa l. limosa* continue to decline, and in 2017 were at their lowest level since 1997. Measured populations of both Corn Crake *Crex crex* and Hobby *Falco subbuteo* have declined in recent years. There were records of two former regular breeders in 2017, Wryneck *Jynx torquilla* and Red-backed Shrike *Lanius colurio*, but little to indicate any change in their status long term. There were again no records of Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus* in breeding habitat.

Annual reports of rare breeding birds are not all about the rarest species. This report provides status updates for more numerous species such as Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*, Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* and Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*. An example of the impact of a local study in furthering our understanding of more widespread species is provided for Long-eared Owl *Asio otus* in Co. Durham.

Analysis of the records of two of the commoner species on our list, Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus* and Firecrest *Regulus ignicapilla*, confirms that their populations are actually well above our threshold for annual reporting and these will be removed from the RBBP list with effect from the 2018 season. Balancing that change, we have added the Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*, the fastest-declining breeding species in the UK. Calculations based on previous estimates and the ongoing rate of decline (Harris *et al.* 2019) suggest that the UK population is now less than 2,000 breeding pairs; see www.rbbp.org.uk/downloads/species_webpages/turtle_dove.PDF.

Data sources and submission

The most important source of information for this report is the detailed submissions compiled by the UK's county and regional bird recorders. As in 2016, this network provided over 70% of all data submissions in 2017. Bird recorders, all of whom are volunteers, are uniquely placed to understand the

relevance and context of the records they receive from birdwatchers. The volume of original data received by recorders has increased substantially in recent years, increasing their workload but underlining the key role that they play. Of course, county recorders, and in turn the RBBP, are highly dependent on observers submitting records in the first place. It is vital that birdwatchers across the UK make their sightings available, not least for the value these records have for conservation, as outlined below.

We are delighted that for 2017 we received data from all recording areas across the UK (although for the Isle of Man the return was incomplete, with data on some species not available) – the best-ever return rate. Moreover, in almost all cases, data from the recorder network was accompanied by at least a four-figure grid reference. A few contributors did not provide data until well after the deadline, causing a delay in preparation of this report. This report includes, for the first time, UK and regional population estimates for 17 species based on county recorder input; see Terminology below for more details.

Other important data sources include returns from Schedule 1 licence holders, the Nest Record Scheme, Raptor Study Groups, national surveys, and counts from RSPB reserves. Best efforts are made to capture all available (verified) information on rare breeding birds from other sources. The volume of data received was slightly higher than in recent years, at over 7,500 unique records. The three species with the highest number of reports were Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*, Little Ringed Plover and Water Rail, together responsible for 20% of all records.

Supplementary data for previous years are still extremely valuable additions to our archive. Birders should consider not only their local records but also ones from holidays elsewhere in the UK, especially to more remote areas such as north and west Scotland. Additions, amendments and corrections to published reports from 2005 onwards are available on the RBBP website (www.rbbp.org.uk). These files are updated regularly and those using the RBBP reports for reference or study should always check

the online amendments.

Accurate grid references are critical, for a number of reasons, but especially to check each location, to improve knowledge of the type of site and habitats used, and to identify duplicate data, thus improving the accuracy of the report. In addition, RBBP data are used to support site and species conservation and the lack of a precise location hinders this work, for example in reviewing the effectiveness of Special Protection Areas and the identification of potential new ones. Site information is not published and these data remain confidential. Yet again, some records (about 300 in 2017) submitted via the Schedule 1 licence return system fail to include an accurate grid reference, despite it being a condition of the licences they were collected under. In most cases, we cannot eliminate the possibility of double-counting, making most of these records effectively worthless. Almost all relate to raptors and as a result our annual totals for species such as Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*, Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis* and Peregrine Falcon are clearly underestimates.

Recommendations and guidelines on data submission are available online, together with our recording standards and species-specific guidelines (www.rbbp.org.uk). Anyone with particular experience in monitoring a rare species is encouraged to share their expertise through the further development of these guidelines.

Conservation and other uses of RBBP data

RBBP policy is to make data available for relevant conservation uses, with appropriate controls over the spatial resolution at which data are provided. Site-specific information is used by JNCC and the national statutory conservation agencies, and national datasets by the RSPB for survey and conservation planning. Over the 14-month period from July 2018 to August 2019 we received 13 specific requests for data or summary information. In addition, population totals published in the *BB* reports are widely used by conservation staff at RSPB, BTO, JNCC and the four national statutory conservation agencies. Projects supported with RBBP data in the last year have included site condition

monitoring in the Humber Estuary SPA and specific enquiries on the status of Mediterranean Gull *Ichthyaetus melanocephalus* in the UK, Hobby in Scotland, Peregrine Falcon in Surrey and Golden Oriole in Avon. We are supporting a project assessing whether Wrynecks are being overlooked in highland Scotland, work on Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers *Dryobates minor* and the new 'Birds in Wales' project. Trends for selected species were also supplied for use in the UK, England and Scotland Wild Bird Indicators.

As an EU Member State, the UK Government is required every six years to produce a report under Article 12 of the Birds Directive (EU Directive on the conservation of wild birds 2009/147/EC). During the last year the JNCC has coordinated the UK's response, a process which required updates to population estimates and trends for all UK breeding species; some of these were derived from RBBP data and so support the conservation of these species.

A regular review, *The State of the UK's Birds*, is published by the RSPB on behalf of a range of conservation organisations. The most recent (Hayhow *et al.* 2017b) included a section on scarce and rare breeding birds, giving population estimates and trends based mainly on data collated by the RBBP.

The Panel

The membership of the Panel is: Mark Eaton (Chairman), Helen Baker, Dawn Balmer, Ian Francis, Andrew King, David Norman, David Stroud and Mark Holling (Secretary). Members serve in a personal capacity, but some also reflect the interests and requirements of the funding partners. The Panel is funded by the JNCC (on behalf of the country conservation agencies) and the RSPB, with additional financial contributions from the BTO. Panel membership aims to achieve broadly representative geographic coverage and to include members who have active involvement in monitoring schemes and specialist research groups, or who participate in various external groups, to facilitate liaison between the Panel and researchers, nest recorders, ringers, surveyors and conservationists. See also Stroud (2019).

2017: a bumper year for colonists*Malcolm Ausden*

It was an amazing year for colonists in 2017. The highest number of breeding Black-winged Stilts (six pairs) fledged a record number of young (13). There were ten pairs of nesting Cattle Egrets at four sites, only the second year of confirmed breeding, although breeding was suspected in two previous years. There were three pairs of European Bee-eaters and, perhaps most surprising of all, the first recorded breeding by Night Herons. These are all species whose main, or entire, breeding population lies to the south of the UK. The year also saw a continued increase in the breeding populations of several other birds that colonised, or recolonised, Britain during the last century, and which have since been extending their range northwards – Avocet, Mediterranean Gull, Cetti's Warbler and Firecrest. Are these northerly range expansions due to climate change?

Climate change is expected to cause NNW to NE shifts in the breeding distributions of birds in Europe and, since the early 1990s, bird populations in Europe as a whole have shown changes consistent with these projections (Green *et al.* 2008; Huntley *et al.* 2008; Gregory *et al.* 2009). The winter distributions of waterbirds, and the geographical distributions of a range of other animal groups, have also shifted, in a N to NE direction, in recent decades (MacLean *et al.* 2008; Lehikoinen *et al.* 2013; Mason *et al.* 2015). Despite the overwhelming evidence of the overall effects of climate change on species' geographical distributions, it is more difficult to link changes in the range of individual species to climate – many other factors could be involved.

Table 1 lists species that, since the early 1990s, have naturally established or re-established regular breeding in Britain, or show signs of doing so. This list reveals some striking patterns. Eleven of the 12 (Red-backed Shrike is the exception) have a breeding distribution lying mainly or entirely to the south of the UK. Nine of the 12 are wetland species and, of these, seven are

Table 1. Birds that since 1990 have naturally colonised, or recolonised Britain, or show signs of doing so.

	Since 1990 recorded breeding (B) or nest-building (N) in Britain for the first time	Since 1990 established (E) or re-established (R) regular breeding ¹ in Britain
Glossy Ibis <i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	N	
Eurasian Spoonbill <i>Platalea leucorodia</i>		R
Little Bittern <i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>		E ²
Night Heron <i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	B	
Cattle Egret <i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	B	
Purple Heron <i>Ardea purpurea</i>	B	
Great White Egret <i>Ardea alba</i>	B	E
Little Egret <i>Egretta garzetta</i>	B	E
Black-winged Stilt <i>Himantopus himantopus</i>		E
Yellow-legged Gull <i>Larus michahellis</i>	B	E
European Bee-eater <i>Merops apiaster</i>		
Red-backed Shrike <i>Lanius collurio</i>		R ³

Notes:

¹ Breeding for five or more consecutive years.

² Has held territory in the UK for five consecutive years or more, but has only rarely been confirmed breeding. NB Breeding by Little Bitterns can be difficult to confirm.

³ This attempted recolonisation (see Davies & Lock 2016) appears to be petering out.

colonially breeding herons and allies. This is extraordinary given that, before the mid 1990s, Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* was the only colonial heron breeding in the UK.

Climate change may well have played a role in the northward range expansion of many species in table 1, but other factors have been important for some. The changes for Glossy Ibis, Spoonbill, Great White Egret and Little Egret have, to a varying extent, involved recolonisation of parts of their former range. Earlier range contractions were undoubtedly caused by human persecution, and perhaps also a reduction in the quality and extent of wetland habitat. Egrets and Spoonbills were widely taken for food in medieval Europe (Bourne 2003; van Eerden *et al.* 2010), while in Victorian times egrets were hunted for their breeding plumes. Expansion and contraction of the breeding range of Glossy Ibis, Great White Egret and Spoonbill in Europe have all been well documented. Cattle Egrets, meanwhile, have been expanding their breeding range since the 1950s, long before the impact of climate change had become apparent (Voisin 1991). It is unclear what has driven their long-term range expansion.

Another factor contributing to the recent population increase of many waterbirds in southwest Europe has been the spread of Red Swamp Crayfish *Procambarus clarkii*. These were introduced to Spain from the USA and Mexico for aquaculture in the early 1970s, and have since spread throughout Spain, much of France and northern Italy (Geiger *et al.* 2005). These crayfish may form a large proportion of the diet of all the colonial herons listed in table 1 (Correia 2001; Montesinos *et al.* 2008; Tablado *et al.* 2010). Periods of drought in southwest Europe have also helped to drive the northward range expansion of several waterbird species. In particular, more Black-winged Stilts arrive in Britain in spring, and breed in the Netherlands, when conditions are dry in southwest Europe (Figuerola 2007; Boele 2012; Ausden *et al.* 2016). Several other waterbirds have extended their range northwards after periods of drought farther south (Ausden *et al.* 2014).

Last but not least, all the wetland birds in table 1 have benefited from conservation measures. In western Europe, a large proportion of the breeding populations of all these species is in protected areas, and in Britain several species mainly use recently restored/created wetland habitats (Ausden *et al.* 2016, 2019). The herons and allies, apart from Cattle Egret, are all Annex I species*, and have undoubtedly benefited from greater habitat protection in Europe, particularly through the EU's 1979 'Birds Directive' (Donald *et al.* 2007).

The lack of colonists associated with farmland and other dry open habitats, woodland and scrub is striking, given the species found in these habitats that breed regularly in the northern half of France, and for which the climate in the UK is probably becoming more suitable (Huntley *et al.* 2007). For some of these, for example Black *Dryocopus martius* and Middle Spotted Woodpeckers *Dendrocoptes medius*, the likelihood of colonising the UK is probably reduced by their reluctance to cross the sea. Yet there is still little sign of other species colonising: Hoopoe, Western Bonelli's *Phylloscopus bonelli* and Melodious Warblers *Hippolais polyglotta* and European Serin *Serinus serinus*. In fact, the number of Serins recorded in the UK has declined (White & Kehoe 2019b); while breeding populations have decreased by 42% across Europe since 1980 (PECBMS 2017), including a sharp decline in the Netherlands (SOVON 2019). For at least some of these species, any improvements in climate at the northern edge of their range appears to be negated by other factors – such as land-use changes in their breeding areas and, for migratory species, conditions in their wintering grounds or on migration.

In summary, while 2017 stands out as a spectacular year for colonists, the events of the year overall continue the recent patterns of change: continued range expansion of a variety of wetland birds, most of which have clearly benefited from conservation measures, contrasting with the struggles of many birds found in other habitats.

* Annex I is a list of species (and some races) for which the EU Birds Directive requires 'special conservation measures concerning their habitat in order to ensure their survival and reproduction...'. Typically, these measures relate to the need to designate Special Protection Areas, but other non-site-based special measures may also be relevant (e.g. targeted agri-environment schemes).

Terminology

Recording areas

The recording areas used in this report are the same as in previous reports (see Holling *et al.* 2007a and www.rbbp.org.uk). We attempt to collate all breeding records by recording area (usually ‘county’) wherever possible and urge contributors to submit records in the same manner, via recorders.

To reduce the possibility of duplication with surrounding areas, records from the Greater London recording area, which covers all areas within a 20-mile radius of St Paul’s Cathedral, are reported as follows. Under the Greater London heading we list records from the Inner London area and the old county of Middlesex only. Records away from this area and within the counties surrounding London – Hertfordshire, Essex, Kent and Surrey – are listed under those county headings.

Species banners

Shown for every species in the report, the species banners present key information on status, numbers and trends. A **regular breeder** is defined as a species that has bred (i.e. confirmed breeding has been recorded) at least once in the UK *and* which has bred (or was strongly suspected to have bred) for any five consecutive years within the last 25 (unless the last breeding was more than ten years ago). This definition is the same as used in the Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC) reviews (Eaton *et al.* 2015). Other species may be classed as an **occasional breeder** (a species which has bred at least once in the UK but is not a regular breeder); a **potential breeder** (one which has not bred previously in the UK but, in some years, shows signs that it may do so, e.g. presence of singing males holding territory or pairs in suitable breeding habitat); a **colonising breeder** (a new colonist which first bred in the UK in the most recent five years (2013–17, or subsequently, if known at the time of writing), or one which may have occasionally bred in the past but for which breeding now appears to be becoming more regular); or a **former breeder** (one which bred regularly in the past but for which there has been no confirmed breeding record in the last ten years).

For all **regular** breeding species, the species banners give additional information, as follows:

1. The population status (Red, Amber or Green) as determined by BoCC4 (Eaton *et al.* 2015); see below.
2. An indication of population status in one of four categories:
 - **Very rare** (mean of <30 breeding pairs (bp) per annum);
 - **Rare** (30–300 bp per annum);
 - **Scarce** (301–1,000 bp per annum);
 - **Less scarce** (>1,000 bp per annum).
3. Published estimate or RBBP 5-year mean. If a recent estimate from a published national survey is available, this is used and referenced. Otherwise the estimate is based on RBBP data, using the mean maximum population size from the last five years (in this report, 2013–17). If annual RBBP coverage is poor, the best available national population estimate is used. The unit varies, but

is most frequently ‘breeding pairs’ (bp). We acknowledge that, for some species, estimates based purely on RBBP data may be contrary to other estimates, especially where RBBP coverage is moderate or low (see below).

4. A population trend, where one can be calculated; this is presented as a 25-year trend where possible. For species that were added to the RBBP list in 1996, a 15-year trend is given. Trends are calculated by comparing the five-year mean in 2017 with that for either 25 or 15 years earlier (1992 or 2002). Trends are categorised into five bands, based on thresholds of rate of change used to classify species trends in the Wild Bird Indicators (e.g. Defra 2019), and shown in the table below. Most trends are derived from RBBP data, although in some cases trends from periodic surveys are used if they are more robust.

	thresholds based on 25 years of data	thresholds based on 15 years of data
strong increase	> +100%	> +52%
weak increase	+33% to +100%	+19% to +52%
stable	-25% to +33%	-16% to +19%
weak decrease	-50% to -25%	-34% to -16%
strong decrease	> -50%	> -34%

5. The degree of coverage (in 2017), defined as follows:
- **Near-complete** (RBBP reports present more or less complete annual totals);
 - **High** (a good estimate of the number of pairs breeding annually, though an unknown (but thought to be small) proportion has not been recorded/reported);
 - **Moderate** (a less accurate estimate of the number of pairs breeding annually, which is nonetheless thought to be a significant proportion of the total population);
 - **Low** (the volume of the data received is such a small proportion of the total population that RBBP totals are of little value for conservation or status reviews; however, maintaining an archive of known sites is useful, and this information can be used in the design of future targeted surveys).

Coverage categories (reassessed in this report) are based on comparisons between the 5-year mean and the most reliable population estimate, where possible, taking into account known factors in the monitoring and detectability of the species.

The BoCC4 status can be Red, Amber or Green. The majority of Red- and Amber-listed species on the RBBP list are categorised as such because of some criteria related to their breeding status, whether it be population size (rarity or recent/historical decline), breeding range (localisation or decline) or international importance of the UK breeding population. Some species, which do not have regular breeding or wintering populations in the UK, are not classified. The only species in this report which is Amber-listed for criteria that are not related to the breeding population is the Eurasian Wigeon *Mareca penelope*, which owes its status to the localised distribution and international importance of its wintering population.

Species accounts

The headline figure for 2017 (number of sites, breeding pairs, singing males, territories, etc.) is indicated in bold for easy reference. Any regular breeding species classed as Very rare (see above), plus occasional, potential, colonising and former breeders, receive more detailed text describing the records by county. For all other species (with only a few exceptions, generally where available data are limited), the data are tabulated, with each line representing a county or RBBP region. Within the tables, note the use of the following abbreviations:

- S = sites
- T = territories
- CP = confirmed breeding pairs
- TP = max. total breeding pairs (typically possible, probable and confirmed breeding)
- SM = singing males
- I = individuals or singles
- YF = min. no. young fledged

In recent years, recorders have been asked to supply their best estimate of the populations (as well as the total of known pairs) for a small number of species (17 in 2017). These are species which occur across large parts of the UK and which we believe are under-recorded. For 2017, two-thirds of recorders provided estimates for these 17 species. Such estimates are presented in the species tables at regional level (number in parentheses after the region name) and at the UK level (in parentheses after the UK total). In a few instances, no breeding records for a given species were submitted for a county where it is known that the species breeds regularly. If an estimate was provided by the recorder, this is shown by an 'e' in the table.

Definitions of breeding evidence

The definitions of 'Confirmed breeding,' 'Probable breeding' and 'Possible breeding' follow those recommended by the European Bird Census Council (EBCC) (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997), but precise definitions are species specific, as defined on www.rbbp.org.uk. Thus, for some species, e.g. Whooper Swan and Eurasian Wigeon, records of summering birds are excluded if we can be sure breeding was not attempted. Where tables show the number of occupied territories, these are the sum of confirmed and probable breeding pairs, as territorial birds are classed as being probably breeding, unless a nest has (at least) progressed to the stage where eggs have been laid, in which case the pair is classified as a confirmed breeding pair. It is important to note that confirmed breeding is *not* the same as successful breeding; nests that fail with eggs or with young still fall into the confirmed category. A successful breeding pair is one that fledges at least one young bird from a nesting attempt. Note that in all cases the identity of the birds has been confirmed; it is only breeding *status* that is possible/probable/confirmed. The report does not routinely include breeding records of hybrid individuals but where young are hatched, they will be noted in an Appendix. Mixed pairs are, however, included where one of the parents is a species or race on the RBBP list.

Definition of numbers used

Within each species account, numbers given in the format '1–4 pairs' indicate (in this case) one confirmed breeding pair and a maximum total of four breeding pairs (thus also including possible and probable breeding pairs). In the tables, 'n/a' indicates that no data were received from that county, but the species normally breeds there.

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*

Very rare 28 bp

25y trend: **strong increase +318%**

Near-complete

27 sites: 24–33 pairs. This is another new peak, fuelled by the continued increase of the main breeding population, in Shetland (fig. 1). Since 2002, Shetland has contributed over 40% of the total every year except 2012. The site in Ayrshire has been occupied annually since 1991 and at least 38 young have fledged over the 27-year period (Shaw 2018). Pairs classed as probably breeding are largely pairs on territory that did not breed in 2017. As well as these birds there seems to be an increase in summering, with at least nine in Argyll (two sites) and 14 in Norfolk (one site), plus single summering birds in several counties (some of which were injured). No apparently naturalised pairs were reported.

England, E

Norfolk One site: two pairs bred; one fledging two young while the other pair failed on eggs.

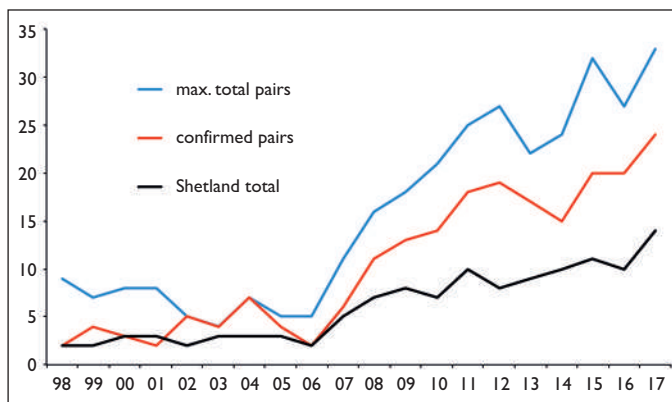


Fig. 1. Breeding Whooper Swans *Cygnus cygnus* in the UK, 1998–2017, showing number of confirmed pairs, maximum total number of pairs and the number of pairs in Shetland.

Scotland, S

Ayrshire One site: one pair was present on a loch close to the traditional site, having abandoned that one owing to forestry work.

Scotland, N & W

Argyll One site: one probable breeding pair. Caithness One site: one pair bred but the clutch was abandoned. Highland Three sites: one pair bred, fledging one young; two probable breeding pairs. Orkney Two sites: one pair bred, but failed early; one probable breeding pair. Outer Hebrides Two sites: two pairs bred, one fledging four young. Shetland 14 sites: 11 pairs bred, at least three successfully, fledging at least five young in total; three probable breeding pairs.

Northern Ireland

Co. Londonderry Two sites: (1) six pairs bred, with between one and six young fledging; (2) one probable breeding pair.

Garganey *Spatula querquedula*

Rare 105 bp

25y trend: **stable +2%**

High

71 sites: 18–104 pairs. Confirmed breeding in Scotland is unusual (Forrester *et al.* 2007), so a successful breeding pair in Orkney is notable, following a similar record (on the same island) in 2015.

Garganey				Norfolk	6	7	9	East Glamorgan	1	0	1
	S	CP	TP	Northamptonshire	2	0	4	Gower	1	0	1
England, SW	4	2	10	Suffolk	2	0	4	Scotland, S	1	0	1
Gloucestershire	1	0	1	England, C	3	0	3	Dumfries & G'way	1	0	1
Somerset	2	2	8	Derbyshire	1	0	1	Scotland, Mid	1	0	1
Wiltshire	1	0	1	Staffordshire	1	0	1	Perth & Kinross	1	0	1
England, SE	12	2	12	Warwickshire	1	0	1	Scotland, N & W	8	1	8
Berkshire	3	0	3	England, N	16	1	18	Argyll	1	0	1
Essex	2	1	2	Cheshire & Wirral	2	0	2	Highland	1	0	1
Hertfordshire	1	0	1	Cleveland	2	0	2	Orkney	2	1	2
Kent	4	1	4	Greater Manchester	2	0	2	Outer Hebrides	4	0	4
Oxfordshire	1	0	1	Lancs & N Mersey	2	0	2	Northern Ireland	1	0	1
Sussex	1	0	1	Northumberland	1	1	1	Co. Londonderry	1	0	1
England, E	22	12	46	Yorkshire	7	0	9	TOTALS	71	18	104
Cambridgeshire	7	5	24	Wales	3	0	4				
Lincolnshire	5	0	5	Anglesey	1	0	2				

Shoveler *Spatula clypeata*

Less scarce 1,098 bp (no trend available)

High

234 sites: 504–1,202 pairs. The total of 1,202 pairs is the highest recorded, which may reflect increased awareness of the need to report all pairs in breeding habitat. The 5-year mean indicates stability and the county estimates suggest that most pairs are being recorded. It is likely that the population is in the order of 1,200–1,300 breeding pairs.

Shoveler				Essex	10	70	82	Northamptonshire	3	0	6
	S	CP	TP	Greater London	1	0	1	Suffolk	10	7	86
England, SW (e 51)	11	11	37	Hertfordshire	6	0	6	England, C (e 30)	20	18	30
Devon	2	2	2	Kent	12	43	51	Derbyshire	4	0	4
Dorset	3	3	10	Oxfordshire	2	0	35	Leics & Rutland	1	1	1
Gloucestershire	1	1	3	Surrey	2	0	4	Nottinghamshire	4	5	8
Hampshire	2	3	3	Sussex	2	1	31	Staffordshire	4	6	9
Somerset	2	2	17	England, E (e 460)	49	169	423	Warwickshire	3	1	3
Wiltshire	1	0	2	Cambridgeshire	12	4	133	West Midlands	1	1	1
England, SE (e 218)	39	114	214	Lincolnshire	7	2	35	Worcestershire	3	4	4
Berkshire	4	0	4	Norfolk	17	156	163				

Rare breeding birds in the UK in 2017

Shoveler <i>cont.</i>				Denbigh & Flint	2	0	5	Highland	4	0	6
				Gwent	1	1	1	Orkney	16	20	51
	S	CP	TP	Pembrokeshire	3	5	6	Outer Hebrides	6	4	19
England, N (e 256)	49	108	255	Scotland, S (e 13)	9	1	13	Northern Ireland	5	3	23
Cheshire & Wirral	6	5	15	Borders	1	0	1	(e 23)			
Cleveland	6	7	23	Clyde	2	0	5	Co. Antrim	2	3	17
Cumbria	1	0	9	Dumfries & G'way	6	1	7	Co. Fermanagh	2	0	2
Co. Durham	2	3	4	Scotland, Mid (e 40)	10	12	40	Co. Londonderry	1	0	4
Greater Manchester	6	0	8	Angus & Dundee	2	0	12	Channel Islands	1	2	2
Lancs & N Mersey	6	41	41	Fife	3	0	4	(e 2)			
Northumberland	2	2	2	North-east Scotland	2	0	4	Jersey	1	2	2
Yorkshire	20	50	153	Perth & Kinross	3	12	20	TOTALS	234	504	1,202
Wales (e 49)	10	9	49	Scotland, N & W	31	57	116	(e 1,279)			
Anglesey	3	3	36	(e 137)							
Caernarfonshire	1	0	1	Argyll	5	33	40				

Eurasian Wigeon *Mareca penelope*

Rare 198 bp

(no trend available)

Moderate

91 sites: 38–209 pairs. The majority of breeding Wigeons occur in northern England and north and west Scotland, and tend to be under-recorded. Confirmed breeding is unusual in the south and there is a possibility that the female seen with four ducklings in Bedfordshire may have bred with a Gadwall *M. strepera*; such mixed pairings have been reported in this county in the past.

Eurasian Wigeon				Nottinghamshire	1	0	1	Angus & Dundee	2	1	2
	S	CP	TP	England, N	10	12	19	Moray & Nairn	2	0	3
England, SW	6	0	9	Cumbria	2	1	2	North-east Scotland	5	2	8
Avon	1	0	1	Co. Durham	3	5	5	Perth & Kinross	2	0	2
Devon	1	0	1	Lancs & N Mersey	1	0	1	Scotland, N & W	48	20	133
Somerset	2	0	5	Northumberland	2	4	4	Argyll	4	0	12
Wiltshire	2	0	2	Yorkshire	2	2	7	Caithness	3	0	3
England, SE	4	1	13	Wales	1	0	1	Highland	23	5	72
Bedfordshire	1	1	1	Anglesey	1	0	1	Orkney	7	4	22
Essex	3	0	12	Scotland, S	5	0	5	Outer Hebrides	9	8	21
England, E	4	2	12	Clyde	1	0	1	Shetland	2	3	3
Cambridgeshire	3	0	10	Dumfries & G'way	3	0	3	Northern Ireland	1	0	1
Norfolk	1	2	2	Lothian	1	0	1	Co. Antrim	1	0	1
England, C	1	0	1	Scotland, Mid	11	3	15	TOTALS	91	38	209

Black Duck *Anas rubripes*

Occasional breeder

In Highland, the long-staying male remained at Strontian throughout 2017 but appeared not to be paired with any of the local Mallards *A. platyrhynchos*.

Pintail *Anas acuta*

Very rare 27 bp

25y trend: **weak decrease -30%**

Near-complete

21 sites: 6–34 pairs. Away from the islands of north and west Scotland, Pintails are only sporadic breeders. In 2017 breeding was confirmed at just three locations, all in Scotland.

England, SE

Kent Five sites: five possible breeding pairs.

England, E

Lincolnshire One site: two possible breeding pairs. Suffolk One site: one probable breeding pair.

England, N

Cumbria One site: one possible breeding pair.

Scotland, S

Dumfries & Galloway Two sites: two possible breeding pairs.

Scotland, Mid

Angus & Dundee One site: one possible breeding pair.

Scotland, N & W

Argyll One extensive site: four pairs bred and six probable breeding pairs. Caithness One site: one pair bred (four young). Orkney Six sites: (1) one pair bred (six young); (2)–(5) eight probable breeding pairs. Outer

Hebrides Two sites: (1) one probable breeding pair; (2) one possible breeding pair.

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*

Scarce 722 bp

25y trend: **weak increase +84%**

High

190 sites: 427–752 pairs. The numbers reported have increased steadily since 1990, and over that period the locus of breeding has shifted south; only four confirmed pairs in 2016 and two in 2017 were found north of a line between Morecambe Bay and the Tees. This increase is in contrast with the decline in wintering numbers (Frost *et al.* 2019). As for Shoveler, regional estimates suggest that most pairs are being reported to the RBBP, and that the UK population is around 800 pairs.

Common Pochard				Sussex	3	7	21	Yorkshire	12	60	73
				England, E (e 218)	45	56	187	Wales (e 44)	7	8	44
	S	CP	TP	Cambridgeshire	17	2	95	Anglesey	4	2	36
England, SW (e 77)	17	58	72	Lincolnshire	5	4	27	Carmarthenshire	1	6	6
Dorset	2	4	7	Norfolk	10	42	45	Denbigh & Flint	1	0	1
Gloucestershire	1	1	1	Northamptonshire	5	0	8	Gwent	1	0	1
Hampshire	7	4	8	Suffolk	8	8	12	Scotland, S (e 1)	1	0	1
Isle of Wight	2	2	3	England, C (e 20)	11	19	20	Clyde	1	0	1
Isles of Scilly	1	2	2	Derbyshire	1	1	1	Scotland, Mid (e 1)	1	0	1
Somerset	2	45	45	Leics & Rutland	1	1	1	Fife	1	0	1
Wiltshire	2	0	6	Nottinghamshire	6	9	10	Scotland, N & W (e 2)	1	0	2
England, SE (e 260)	73	152	257	Staffordshire	2	4	4	Highland	1	0	2
Bedfordshire	1	2	2	Worcestershire	1	4	4	Northern Ireland	12	14	18
Berkshire	5	9	9	England, N (e 150)	22	120	150	(e 18)			
Essex	21	53	89	Cheshire & Wirral	2	19	20	Co. Antrim	5	5	6
Greater London	9	19	21	Cleveland	3	18	31	Co. Armagh	4	8	9
Hertfordshire	8	18	23	Co. Durham	1	0	1	Co. Fermanagh	2	0	2
Kent	20	34	75	Greater Manchester	2	2	4	Co. Londonderry	1	1	1
Oxfordshire	1	0	6	Lancs & N Mersey	1	19	19	TOTALS (e 791)	190	427	752
Surrey	5	10	11	Northumberland	1	2	2				

Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra*

Rare 52 bp*

25y trend: **stable -19%**

Near-complete

14 sites: 10–52 pairs. This is the highest total number of pairs since the national survey of 2007 when 52 pairs were also located. Four broods (ten young in total) were reported from three lochs in Highland and Perth & Kinross. The Flows of Caithness and east Sutherland (Highland) are treated as one extensive site and two broods (seven young) were recorded there.

* Eaton *et al.* 2008.

Common Scoter				Scotland, N & W	11	9	45	Highland	6	3	22
	S	CP	TP	Argyll	1	2	2	TOTALS	14	10	52
Scotland, Mid	3	1	7	Caithness	3	2	3				
Perth & Kinross	3	1	7	Caithness/Highland	1	2	18				

Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*

Rare 200 bp*

25y trend: **stable -21%**

Moderate

62–66 breeding females. Counts from the main breeding area, in the catchment of the Spey and Dee rivers, are samples based largely on nestbox projects; other pairs go unrecorded there, and so reported totals are now far short of the actual population size.

* Musgrove *et al.* (2013).

Common Goldeneye			England, N	4	5	Scotland, N & W	55	55
			Northumberland	4	5	Highland	55	55
	CP	TP	Scotland, Mid	2	4	TOTALS	62	66
England, SW	1	2	Moray & Nairn	0	2			
Avon	1	2	North-east Scotland	2	2			

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*

Less scarce 1,565 bp* (no trend available)

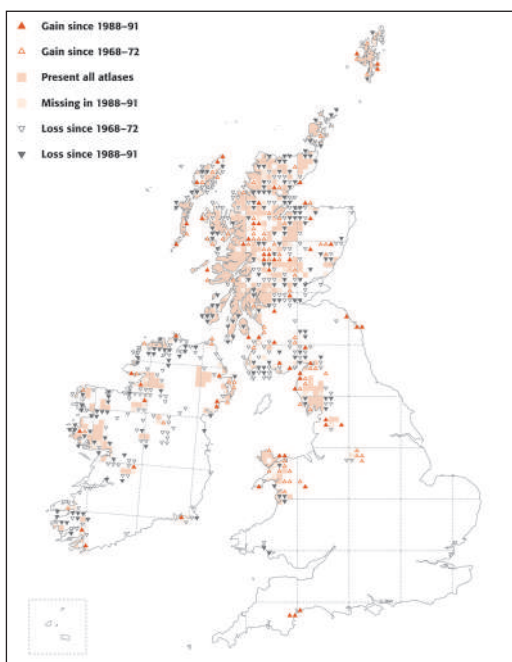
Low

Red-breasted Merganser			Scotland, S (e 31)	3	12	Scotland, N & W (e 228)	45	87
			Clyde	0	8	Argyll	7	9
	CP	TP	Clyde Islands	3	3	Highland	6	10
England, N (e 19)	3	19	Dumfries & Galloway	0	1	Orkney	14	20
Cumbria	3	14	Scotland, Mid (e 42)	2	5	Outer Hebrides	4	31
Lancs & N Mersey	0	5	Angus & Dundee	0	1	Shetland	14	17
Wales (e 24)	4	7	Moray & Nairn	e	e	Northern Ireland (e 37)	1	37
Anglesey	4	5	NE Scotland	e	e	Co. Antrim	1	5
Caernarfonshire	0	1	Perth & Kinross	1	3	Co. Fermanagh	0	32
Meirionnydd	0	1	Upper Forth	1	1	TOTALS (e 381)	58	167

89 sites: 58–167 pairs. Humphreys *et al.* (2016) suggested that the current population lies between 1,373 and 1,754 pairs, and this species was added to the RBBP list for the 2017 season. Over 90% of the UK's Red-breasted Mergansers nest in Scotland, mainly in the north and west, where they occur in sheltered sea lochs, estuaries and some inland waters. Nesting also occurs in northwest England, the south Pennines, Northumberland and in North Wales. *Bird Atlas 2007–11* (Balmer *et al.* 2013) showed that the breeding range has contracted (fig. 2).

Reporting levels were inevitably low during this first season, and estimates by recorders provide little extra information. Red-breasted Merganser is not on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981) and is not the subject of any study group; and since it occurs mainly in remote areas, it is likely to be under-recorded. We encourage all birdwatchers to submit records of Red-breasted Mergansers in breeding habitat.

* Humphreys *et al.* (2016).



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Fig. 2. Breeding distribution change map for Red-breasted Mergansers *Mergus serrator*, from *Bird Atlas 2007–11* (a joint project between BTO, BirdWatch Ireland and the Scottish Ornithologists' Club).

Capercaillie *Tetrao urogallus*

Rare 1,114 individuals* 6y trend: **weak decrease -13%**

Near-complete

211 males at 70 active leks. A total of 107 lek sites was monitored across four recording areas. It is thought that most leks are checked each year, including those now inactive. In 2017 there was a further small decline, mirroring the findings of the last national survey (in winter 2015–16 and summarised in our last report).

* Wilkinson *et al.* (2018).

Capercaillie			Moray & Nairn	8	12	Scotland, N & W	51	183
	leks	males	North-east Scotland	9	14	Highland	51	183
Scotland, Mid	19	28	Perth & Kinross	2	2	TOTALS	70	211

Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix*

Scarce 355 males 25y trend: **weak decrease -37%**

High

1–442 singing males. The last ‘Quail year’ was 2011, when over 2,000 singing males were recorded; since then the total has varied between 237 and 547. In 2011, 60% of records came from northern England or Scotland; the equivalent in 2018 was 51%. In Portugal, spring 2017 was very dry and there were almost no Quails in the Portugal Steppe SPA (Santana 2019). This situation is becoming more common as droughts in southern Europe become more frequent and grazing intensity in agricultural areas increases. Such conditions could potentially lead to more Quails breeding farther north, but currently there is no evidence of this in the UK.

Common Quail			Northamptonshire	3	Scotland, S	31
			Suffolk	6	Ayrshire	2
	SM	England, C	30	Borders	9	
England, SW	66	Derbyshire	11	Clyde	1	
Avon	5	Leics & Rutland	7	Lothian	19	
Dorset	2	Shropshire	11	Scotland, Mid	32	
Gloucestershire	7	Staffordshire	1	Angus & Dundee	3	
Hampshire	10	England, N	112	Fife	2	
Isle of Wight	1	Cheshire & Wirral	5	Moray & Nairn	12	
Somerset	11	Cleveland	6	North-east Scotland	12	
Wiltshire	30	Cumbria	3	Perth & Kinross	2	
England, SE	40	Greater Manchester	5	Upper Forth	1	
Bedfordshire	5	Lancs & N Mersey	13	Scotland, N & W	48	
Berkshire	4	Northumberland	38	Argyll	8	
Buckinghamshire	4	Yorkshire	42	Fair Isle	1	
Essex	4	Wales	19	Highland	7	
Hertfordshire	1	Anglesey	2	Orkney	16	
Kent	1	Caernarfonshire	2	Outer Hebrides	5	
Oxfordshire	13	Ceredigion	1	Shetland	11	
Sussex	8	Denbigh & Flint	2	Northern Ireland	3	
England, E	61	East Glamorgan	2	Co. Antrim	2	
Cambridgeshire	14	Gwent	3	Co. Londonderry	1	
Lincolnshire	9	Meirionnydd	1	TOTAL	442	
Norfolk	29	Radnorshire	6			

Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*

Less scarce 1,255 bp* 12y trend (survey): **weak increase +38%** Low

189–273 pairs. The figures here include results from sample monitoring plots in Shetland (Heubeck *et al.* 2017) although the overall total is still much lower than the last national survey figure of 1,255 pairs in 2006. The trend since then is unclear. Red-throated Divers breed regularly in Argyll (where it is estimated that there are around 100 pairs) but no information on breeding pairs was submitted in 2017.

* Dillon *et al.* (2009).

Red-throated Diver			Scotland, Mid	1	3	Highland	13	18
	CP	TP	Moray & Nairn	1	2	Orkney	67	71
Scotland, S	2	3	North-east Scotland	0	1	Outer Hebrides	12	32
Clyde	0	1	Scotland, N & W	186	267	Shetland	91	140
Clyde Islands	2	2	Caithness	3	6	TOTALS	189	273

Black-throated Diver *Gavia arctica*

Rare 217 bp* 12y trend (survey): **stable +16%** Low

17–31 pairs. Since the addition of Black-throated Diver to the RBBP list in 1996, we have never received so few records. There is no indication that it is really this rare, but it is chronically under-reported. Without a recent national survey, we are dependent on casual records from birders, and we implore people to report sightings of pairs on suitable



Tom Gale

Black-throated Diver *Gavia arctica*

breeding lochs to local recorders. An apparent decline in the south of the range may be real, however. Black-throated Divers are seen at traditional nesting lochs in Ayrshire and Dumfries & Galloway in most years but there were no reports in 2017. Disturbance by Canada Geese *Branta canadensis* may be a factor, as noted in Sweden (Hancock 2000).

* Dillon *et al.* (2009).

Black-throated Diver			Scotland, Mid	1	4	Caithness	1	2
	CP	TP	Moray & Nairn	1	1	Highland	8	10
Scotland, S	0	3	Perth & Kinross	0	3	Outer Hebrides	1	6
Clyde	0	2	Scotland, N & W	16	24	TOTALS	17	31
Dumfries & G'way	0	1	Argyll	6	6			

Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer*

Potential breeder

In **Highland**, one paired with a Black-throated Diver was recorded on an inland loch between 10th May and 11th June; no nesting was observed. In Scotland, Great Northern Divers are unusual inland, yet in addition to this mixed pairing, there was a record on 1st May of a single bird on another inland loch 100 km away.

Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps*

Occasional breeder



Jim Dickson

390. Male Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps*, with hybrid chick, Loch Feorlin, Argyll, July 2017.

One site: one mixed pair. We noted the presence of this North American vagrant from the same site in 2016. The bird, a male, was first reported in 2014. The breeding attempt in 2017 constitutes only the second confirmed breeding by Pied-billed Grebe in the UK (Jardine & Dickson 2017). The first, also a mixed pairing, was in Cornwall in 1994 (Ogilvie *et al.* 1996).

Scotland, N & W

Argyll One site: a male Pied-billed Grebe paired with a Little Grebe. One hybrid young was seen from 14th June but not after 12th July; it was assumed that it did not survive.

Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*

Occasional breeder

In Cambridgeshire, a male was present between 10th April and 17th July at the same site as in 2016.

Slavonian Grebe *Podiceps auritus*

Very rare 28 bp 25y trend: **strong decrease -61%** Near-complete

15 sites: 18–27 pairs. This is the first time since the inception of the Panel that we have reported fewer than 20 confirmed breeding pairs. In addition to the records below, a single bird summered in suitable habitat in Shetland.

Scotland, N & W

Highland 15 sites: 18 pairs bred, fledging seven young; nine probable breeding pairs and five single birds. At the main site, Loch Ruthven, 11 pairs fledged just one young.

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*

Rare 55 bp 25y trend: **stable +21%** Near-complete

16 sites: 34–49 pairs. Northern England, in particular Yorkshire, remains the stronghold with St Aidan’s RSPB reserve in Yorkshire being the most important site: ten pairs fledged 17 young there. A family party seen in late July in Norfolk may have originated from an undetected site elsewhere in eastern England.

Black-necked Grebe					Kent	1	0	1	0
	S	CP	TP	YF	Surrey	1	0	1	0
England, SE	3	7	9	5	England, E	2	0	3	0
Hertfordshire	1	7	7	5	Cambridgeshire	1	0	1	0

Rare breeding birds in the UK in 2017

Black-necked Grebe <i>cont.</i>					England, N	9	20	30	28
	S	CP	TP	YF	Cheshire & Wirral	1	9	9	8
Lincolnshire	1	0	2	0	Greater Manchester	1	0	1	0
England, C					Northumberland	3	0	3	0
Nottinghamshire	1	6	6	14	Yorkshire	4	11	17	20
Staffordshire	1	1	1	3	TOTALS	16	34	49	50

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

Very rare 18 bp

(no trend available but increasing)

Near-complete

Two sites: 29 pairs. Spoonbills are now established as a member of our regular breeding avifauna and as they become more widespread new breeding sites are to be expected. There were two definite breeding sites in 2017, including a new one at Fairburn Ings RSPB in Yorkshire, the first for that county. It is possible that there was another site in Yorkshire, but this was not confirmed. Two recently fledged Spoonbills with four adults appeared at Blacktoft Sands when the young were still in the nest at Fairburn Ings, but they may have flown from Norfolk or indeed the near continent; such movements were documented in 2018 based on marked birds (Malcolm Ausden pers. comm.). Yet there was strong supporting evidence of a third site from observations of Spoonbills making apparent feeding flights to an unknown destination in the Humber area. Elsewhere, at another site in Norfolk, a pair in full breeding plumage was seen to carry sticks into a reedbed but there was no further evidence of breeding.

England, E

Norfolk One site (Holkham): 28 pairs bred, 25 successful pairs fledged 43 young. The first young fledged on 23rd or 24th May.

England, N

Yorkshire One site: one pair bred, fledging three young.

Eurasian Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*

Rare 172 booming males 25y trend: **strong increase +666%**

Near-complete

93 sites: 74–191 pairs. The maximum number of booming Bitterns has increased every year since 2006.

Eurasian Bittern	sites	booming males (min)	booming males (max)	nests (min)	nests (max)	TP
England, SW						
Dorset	2	2	2	0	0	2
Gloucestershire	1	0	1	0	0	1
Somerset	11	49	49	23	23	50
England, SE						
Bedfordshire	3	4	4	0	0	4
Kent	5	5	7	4	5	8
Oxfordshire	1	1	1	2	2	2
Sussex	1	1	1	0	0	1
England, E						
Cambridgeshire	8	18	18	4	4	18
Lincolnshire	5	2	5	1	1	5
Norfolk	25	22	23	9	12	28
Suffolk	10	42	44	15	16	44
England, C						
Derbyshire	1	1	1	0	0	1
Nottinghamshire	1	1	1	0	0	1

Eurasian Bittern <i>cont.</i>	sites	booming males (min)	booming males (max)	nests (min)	nests (max)	TP
England, N	13	15	19	8	8	19
Lancs & N Mersey	3	1	3	0	0	3
Yorkshire	10	14	16	8	8	16
Wales	6	6	6	3	3	7
Anglesey	2	2	2	3	3	3
Ceredigion	1	1	1	0	0	1
East Glamorgan	2	2	2	0	0	2
Gwent	1	1	1	0	0	1
TOTALS	93	169	182	69	74	191

These figures are based on the RSPB monitoring methodology; the minimum figure is the closest to the number of occupied territories. The minimum number of booming males is based on residency at a site for at least a week, while the maximum figure includes males booming for a shorter period only and cases where it was not possible to confirm that different males were involved. The maximum total number of pairs (TP) combines information on both booming males and nests found; sometimes the number of nests at a site exceeds the number of boomers heard.

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*

Very rare 5 males

(no trend available)

Near-complete

Four sites: 1–6 ‘pairs’. Little Bitterns are secretive and easily overlooked so proof of breeding is difficult to establish, even at well-watched sites. Six potential pairs is the highest total yet reported.

England, SW

Gloucestershire One site: a female was heard calling during 2nd–7th June. Isles of Scilly One site: a female was present between 22nd April and 22nd May. Somerset One site: one pair bred (one juvenile seen in July) and two other barking males.

England, N

Yorkshire One site: one male present on one date only (25th June), but at the site which held a long-staying male in June and July 2016.

Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

Colonising breeder

One site: one pair. It is perhaps not surprising that the Somerset marshes were the setting for the first confirmed breeding record of (wild) Night Herons in the UK. There were suggestions that breeding may have occurred there in both 2015 and 2016 (Holling *et al.* 2017, 2018), when there were summer records of one or two individuals; and also in 1997, when a displaying pair was seen in June (Ogilvie *et al.* 1999). In 2017 the pair was first seen together on 16th July, and this was followed by a record of an adult with one juvenile on 22nd. Over the next few days up to two juveniles were seen. There were records of Night Herons elsewhere in Somerset in late June through to mid July and also in early August.

Note that in the 1980s and 1990s there was a sequence of breeding attempts by captive Night Herons at Edinburgh Zoo, some of which were free-flying and bred outside the cages (Murray *et al.* 1998). These birds were of the North American race *N. n. hoactli*. In addition, in Norfolk, between at least 1996 and 2003, there was a free-flying colony of nominate *N. n. nycticorax* at Great Witchingham Wildlife Park, with eight pairs in 2003 (Holling *et al.* 2007b).

England, SW

Somerset One site: one pair bred; up to two recently fledged young were seen in late July.

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

Colonising breeder

Six sites: 10–15 pairs; 14 young fledged. Winter 2016/17 saw an unprecedented influx of Cattle Egrets into southern England (White & Kehoe 2018a). A similar, though smaller influx in 2007/08 led, in 2008, to the first breeding of Cattle Egrets in the UK, so further breeding records in 2017 were not altogether unexpected. In the event, breeding was confirmed at four sites in four widespread counties, with seven pairs at the Somerset site. Cheshire & Wirral, Devon and Dorset all had their first breeding records.

Breeding is not easy to confirm, even if adults are seen with other heron species at colonies; frequently it requires the appearance of fledglings late in the season to clinch the record. Thus, a pair with a juvenile, away from a heronry, in Sussex, may have bred elsewhere in southeast England, or may have arrived from continental Europe. The locations of other juveniles in Somerset, away from the known colony, suggests there may also have been another breeding site in that county.

England, SW

Devon One site: one pair bred; three young probably fledged. Dorset One site: two pairs bred; two young fledged. Somerset One site: six pairs bred and one possible breeding pair. Four successful pairs fledged eight young.

England, N

Cheshire & Wirral One site: one pair bred; two young hatched but only one fledged. Two other pairs also in the heronry may also have nested but it was not possible to confirm breeding.

Wales

Gwent One site: one possible breeding pair close to a Little Egret colony in March and April and one other bird in full breeding plumage elsewhere in July.

Meirionnydd One site: one possible breeding pair and one other bird at a Little Egret colony in May.

Great White Egret *Ardea alba*

Very rare 6 bp

(no trend available but increasing)

Near-complete

Five sites: 8–12 pairs. Breeding at the two colonies occupied in 2016 was repeated, but there were also suggestions of potential breeding elsewhere. In this report, the presence of two or more birds lingering in the vicinity of heronries or other suitable nesting sites, but where there are no further signs of nesting, is taken to indicate possible breeding.

England, SW

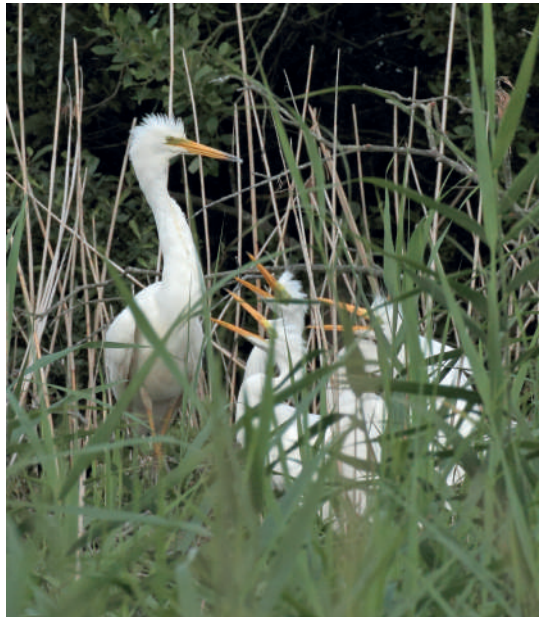
Somerset One site: seven pairs bred; 16 young fledged.

England, E

Cambridgeshire One site: one possible breeding pair. Norfolk One site: one pair bred, fledging three young. Also one other pair and a single bird at the same location. Northamptonshire One site: one possible breeding pair.

England, N

Cheshire & Wirral One site: at least one probable breeding pair, with up to six birds in a reedbed, though some of these were immatures. Display noted but activity ceased after a period of gales in early June, although after that up to three birds were still showing signs of nest-building.



Andrew Bloomfield

391. Adult and three juvenile Great White Egrets *Ardea alba*, Holkham, Norfolk, July 2017; the first successful breeding at this site.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Less scarce 1,148 bp 15y trend: **strong increase +1,321%** High

160 sites: 1,443–1,523 pairs. Little Egrets continue to increase; there was a slowdown after the colder winters of 2009/10 and 2010/11 (fig. 4 in Holling *et al.* 2016), but since then there has been no apparent let-up in the rise in numbers. Worcestershire saw its first breeding record in 2017, though the nest was abandoned before the eggs hatched. The large increase in the numbers reported, in Lincolnshire (74 in 2016, 218 in 2017) is attributed to more accurate counting; and more widely it is possible that access difficulties at some sites may lead to underestimates. There is still no Scottish breeding record, but in 2017 there was a colony on the English side of the Solway, so that landmark is surely not far off being achieved.

Little Egret			Kent	8	145	Lancs & N Mersey	2	19
			Oxfordshire	2	6	Northumberland	2	2
	S	TP	Surrey	2	7	Yorkshire	7	26
England, SW	35	276	Sussex	9	62	Wales	16	147
Avon	1	2	England, E	28	412	Anglesey	3	23
Cornwall	6	34	Cambridgeshire	4	37	Caernarfonshire	3	60
Devon	7	58	Lincolnshire	7	218	Carmarthenshire	1	10
Dorset	5	44	Norfolk	7	98	Denbigh & Flint	2	15
Gloucestershire	3	4	Northamptonshire	2	3	Gower	1	19
Hampshire	5	68	Suffolk	8	56	Gwent	3	12
Isle of Wight	1	6	England, C	7	39	Meirionnydd	2	7
Somerset	4	38	Leics & Rutland	2	2	Radnorshire	1	1
Wiltshire	3	22	Nottinghamshire	2	29	Northern Ireland	2	27
England, SE	50	419	Warwickshire	2	7	Co. Down	2	27
Bedfordshire	2	8	Worcestershire	1	1	Channel Islands	4	44
Berkshire	4	9	England, N	18	159	Guernsey	1	20
Buckinghamshire	5	20	Cheshire & Wirral	1	83	Jersey	3	24
Essex	12	136	Cleveland	1	9	TOTALS	160	1,523
Hertfordshire	6	26	Cumbria	5	20			

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

Rare 240 bp 25y trend: **strong increase +272%** High

216–258 pairs. This is another record total, although still likely to be an underestimate of the Scottish population (see Holling *et al.* 2018 and comments in the introduction).

Osprey				Denbigh & Flint	0	1	0	Fife	1	1	0
	CP	TP	YF	Meirionnydd	3	3	9	Moray & Nairn	9	9	14
England, E	2	2	2	Montgomeryshire	2	2	4	North-east Scotland	15	19	17
Northamptonshire	2	2	2	Scotland, S	26	30	38	Perth & Kinross	24	37	43
England, C	6	7	13	Ayrshire	1	1	0	Upper Forth	21	26	33
Derbyshire	0	1	0	Borders	9	11	14	Scotland, N & W	86	97	141
Leics & Rutland	6	6	13	Clyde	5	5	8	Argyll	8	14	17
England, N	11	12	20	Clyde Islands	1	1	3	Caithness	5	5	3
Cumbria	7	8	11	Dumfries & G'way	9	11	12	Highland	73	78	121
Northumberland	4	4	9	Lothian	1	1	1	TOTALS	216	258	351
Wales	6	7	13	Scotland, Mid	79	103	124				
Caernarfonshire	1	1	0	Angus & Dundee	9	11	17				



Allan Drewitt

392. Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* carrying nest material, Loch Insh, Highland, May 2011. Osprey Green DY, a female, was ringed as a pullus at Loch Insh in 2005, and has subsequently returned to breed there (including in 2019).

Honey-buzzard *Pernis apivorus*

Rare 39 bp

25y trend: **strong increase +101%**

Moderate

27–47 pairs. As others have suggested (e.g. Roberts & Law 2014), the UK Honey-buzzard population may be double the number of records submitted annually to the Panel. Consequently, raptor workers are planning a national survey in 2020, with the support of the RBBP, and this will include searching potential new sites. Much of what we know is based on nests found, yet survey work in central Scotland focused simply on identifying territories demonstrates the potential of this technique in establishing local population statistics. The counts from Perth & Kinross and Upper Forth contributed to the 2017 total of 47 pairs being the highest reported since the previous survey in 2000–01. Derbyshire also recorded its first confirmed breeding in 2017.

Honey-buzzard									
	I	CP	TP	YF					
England, SW	0	9	12	14	England, N	1	0	4	0
Dorset	0	2	2	2	Cumbria	0	0	1	0
Hampshire	0	6	9	10	Yorkshire	1	0	3	0
Wiltshire	0	1	1	2	Wales	0	0	2	0
England, SE	1	7	12	9	Gower	0	0	2	0
Berkshire	0	0	2	0	Scotland, S	0	1	1	2
Kent	1	1	4	1	Dumfries & G'way	0	1	1	2
Surrey	0	1	1	2	Scotland, Mid	7	9	14	8
Sussex	0	5	5	6	Moray & Nairn	0	0	1	0
England, E	1	0	0	0	Perth & Kinross	5	8	10	7
Cambridgeshire	1	0	0	0	Upper Forth	2	1	3	1
England, C	0	1	1	1	Scotland, N & W	1	0	1	0
Derbyshire	0	1	1	1	Highland	1	0	1	0
					TOTALS	11	27	47	34

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*

Scarce 508 bp*

33y trend (survey): **stable +16%**

High

178–310 pairs. In Scotland, members of the Scottish Raptor Study Groups typically monitor 60–70% of the total population each year and the results are summarised here. Golden Eagles reintroduced in the Republic of Ireland over recent years had a successful year in 2017, with three pairs fledging three chicks in Co. Donegal (<http://bit.ly/2o4XqP0>); so far no breeding has occurred in Northern Ireland.

* Hayhow et al. (2017a).

Golden Eagle									
	I ¹	CP	TP	YF					
					Scotland, N & W	15	140	251	119
Scotland, S	0	9	9	6	Argyll	5	29	46	24
Scotland, Mid	4	29	49	33	Caithness	1	1	1	n/a
Angus & Dundee	2	4	7	3	Highland	8	79	152	66
Moray & Nairn	0	0	2	0	Outer Hebrides	1	31	52	29
North-east Scotland	1	8	15	12	Northern Ireland	0	0	1	0
Perth & Kinross	1	12	19	15	Co. Tyrone	0	0	1	0
Upper Forth	0	5	6	3	TOTALS	19	178	310	158

¹ Total includes home ranges occupied by single birds or showing signs of occupation but no pair seen.

Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*

Scarce 619 bp

25y trend: **strong increase +214%**

Moderate

460–684 pairs. The numbers tabulated below are similar to those in 2016, and thought to represent an underestimate of the actual population size: county estimates suggest a UK population of nearer 1,000 pairs. Some licensed fieldworkers persist in not providing accurate nest locations, so these data cannot be included. In 2017, there were over 60 such records, particularly in southwest England and the English Midlands. All Goshawk records should be accompanied by at least a 4-figure grid reference.

Northern Goshawk									
				Shropshire	14	18	Montgomeryshire	1	3
				Staffordshire	4	5	Pembrokeshire	2	3
				Worcestershire	1	7	Radnorshire	4	16
England, SW (e 220)	137	174	England, N (e 85)	57	84	Scotland, S (e 131)	52	65	
Cornwall	5	7	Cheshire & Wirral	1	4	Ayrshire	5	6	
Devon	25	25	Cleveland	0	1	Borders	21	30	
Dorset	5	5	Cumbria	1	2	Clyde	2	2	
Gloucestershire	41	43	Co. Durham	0	3	Dumfries & G'way	23	26	
Hampshire	41	60	Lancs & N Mersey	0	3	Lothian	1	1	
Somerset	2	6	Northumberland	29	37	Scotland, Mid (e 123)	68	92	
Wiltshire	18	28	Yorkshire	26	34	Angus & Dundee	1	3	
England, SE (e 25)	5	22	Wales (e 223)	44	123	Fife	0	9	
Surrey	0	3	Anglesey	0	2	Moray & Nairn	e	e	
Sussex	5	19	Breconshire	11	29	North-east Scotland	51	60	
England, E (e 37)	27	32	Caernarfonshire	0	3	Perth & Kinross	12	14	
Norfolk	16	20	Carmarthenshire	2	6	Upper Forth	4	6	
Northamptonshire	0	1	Ceredigion	0	2	Scotland, N & W (e 13)	7	8	
Suffolk	11	11	Denbigh & Flint	1	6	Argyll	e	e	
England, C (e 108)	62	83	East Glamorgan	0	1	Highland	7	8	
Derbyshire	20	27	Gower	5	8	Northern Ireland (e 1)	1	1	
Herefordshire	12	15	Gwent	17	38	Co. Londonderry	1	1	
Nottinghamshire	11	11	Meirionnydd	1	6	TOTALS (e 966)	460	684	

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

Scarce 371 bp

25y trend: **strong increase +322%**

High

350–392 breeding females/pairs. Some ‘pairs’ refer to two or more females paired with a single polygynous male. Most Marsh Harriers nest in eastern and southeastern England. A decline in the Lincolnshire Fens was identified, possibly due to a reduction in hunting habitat related to an increase in the amount of rye grass grown for bio-ethanol (Lincolnshire Bird Club 2019). In 2017 there was a small range extension with the first breeding in Cumbria for 150 years, and further consolidation in southwest England. Even though not all nests were monitored through the whole season in Kent and Cambridgeshire, the minimum number of young fledged (550) is the highest yet reported by the Panel.

Marsh Harrier	CP	TP	YF	England, E (e 221)	208	221	352	Wales (e 4)	4	4	6
				Cambridgeshire	26	31	27	Anglesey	3	3	5
England, SW (e 26)	19	25	40	Lincolnshire	39	39	73	Gwent	1	1	1
Cornwall	0	1	0	Norfolk	85	91	161	Scotland, Mid	8	9	18
Dorset	4	5	10	Suffolk	58	60	91	(e 11)			
Hampshire	1	4	2	England, C (e 2)	2	2	3	Angus & Dundee	2	3	5
Isle of Wight	2	3	6	Nottinghamshire	2	2	3	NE Scotland	1	1	1
Somerset	12	12	22	England, N (e 44)	38	44	65	Perth & Kinross	4	4	11
England, SE (e 94)	48	61	49	Cheshire & Wirral	2	3	2	Upper Forth	1	1	1
Bedfordshire	0	2	0	Cumbria	1	1	2	Channel Islands	23	26	17
Essex	13	16	19	Greater Manchester	0	1	0	(e 26)			
Kent	33	37	24	Lancs & N Mersey	3	3	7	Guernsey	2	5	2
Oxfordshire	1	1	4	Northumberland	1	1	0	Jersey	21	21	15
Sussex	1	5	2	Yorkshire	31	35	54	TOTALS	350	392	550
								(e 428)			

Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*

Scarce 575 bp*

12y trend (survey): **weak decrease -29%** High

228–364 pairs. The totals for 2017 are very similar to those in other non-survey years, since not all pairs are monitored annually. No data from the Isle of Man were available; 30 pairs were counted in the 2016 survey. Northumberland is now the main county for Hen Harriers in England; five pairs nested and fledged ten young. No pairs nested in the former stronghold of the Forest of Bowland, Lancashire & North Merseyside. Unpaired birds were reported from suitable habitat in Derbyshire, Greater Manchester and Lancashire & North Merseyside.

* Wotton *et al.* (2018).

Hen Harrier	CP	TP	YF	Scotland, S	48	66	132	Caithness	4	12	3
				Ayrshire	1	3	0	Highland	21	27	55
				Borders	6	7	10	Orkney	40	72	67
England, N	6	7	10	Clyde	10	18	35	Outer Hebrides	12	17	34
Cumbria	1	2	0	Clyde Islands	18	21	39	Northern Ireland	12	32	n/a
Northumberland	5	5	10	Dumfries & G’way	13	17	48	Co. Antrim	3	9	n/a
Wales	29	51	32	Scotland, Mid	25	36	52	Co. Fermanagh	3	12	n/a
Breconshire	1	3	0	Angus & Dundee	1	2	0	Co. Londonderry	1	4	n/a
Caernarfonshire	2	7	3	Moray & Nairn	8	9	21	Co. Tyrone	5	7	n/a
Denbigh & Flint	3	10	5	North-east Scotland	1	1	2	Isle of Man	n/a	n/a	n/a
Meirionnydd	17	18	20	Perth & Kinross	15	24	29	TOTALS	228	364	445
Montgomeryshire	2	4	4	Scotland, N & W	108	172	219				
Radnorshire	4	9	n/a	Argyll	31	44	60				



Paul Ellis

393. Male Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*, Whitendale, Lancashire & N Merseyside, May 2017.

Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*

Potential breeder

Two single males. Most of the world's Pallid Harriers breed in the steppe grasslands in Russia, Kazakhstan and northwest China (*HBW*) with occasional and sporadic breeding farther west, including Finland. The first known breeding in western Europe occurred in the Netherlands in 2017, when a pair fledged four young from an agricultural field (Henry 2018; SOVON 2018). The female from that pair was discovered breeding in Spain in 2019 (<http://bit.ly/2nmWVzjt>).

It was therefore remarkable that two male Pallid Harriers established territories in England in 2017. Historically in the UK, there have been just two previous breeding records. In 1993, a male was recorded displaying to a female Hen Harrier in Perth & Kinross (Ogilvie *et al.* 1996). In 1995, a female Hen Harrier paired with a male Pallid Harrier in Orkney; a clutch of eggs was laid but these were taken, probably by a predator (Ogilvie *et al.* 1998).

England, N

Cumbria One site: a single male displaying in an area where Hen Harriers were breeding; first recorded on 27th April, it remained on site until at least 27th May. **Lancashire & N Merseyside** One site: a single male displaying and holding territory in an area where an immature male Hen Harrier was also attempting to breed; first recorded on 26th April and remaining until 14th May it was seen to build at least two nests and cache food.

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*

Very rare 8 bp

25y trend: **weak decrease -34%**

Near-complete

Six sites: five pairs and a single female. Fortunes for the Montagu's Harrier, now one of our rarest breeding birds, dipped further in 2017; breeding occurred in just two areas of England, and hopes of a regular site in Yorkshire came to nothing. Thanks largely to nest-fencing to deter mammalian predators, nest predation was reduced and 12 young were fledged, the highest total since 2014 (fig. 3); such intervention has helped to maintain productivity in recent years despite the lower numbers of nesting pairs.

England, S

Four sites: four pairs bred, fledging a total of nine young.

England, E

Norfolk One site: one pair bred, fledging three young.

England, N

Yorkshire One site: one single female summered but no male was seen.

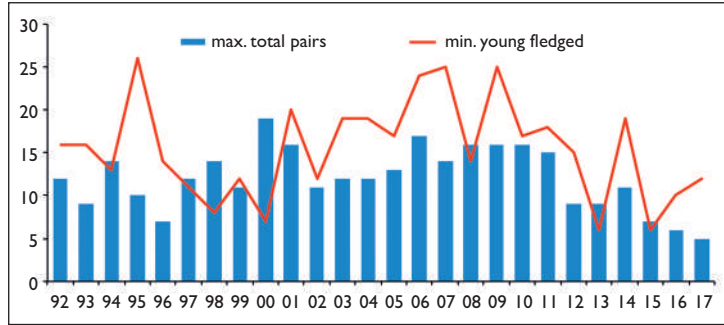


Fig. 3. Maximum total number of pairs and the minimum number of young fledged by Montagu's Harriers *Circus pygargus* in the UK, 1992–2017.

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*

Rare 103 bp

25y trend: **strong increase +1,258%**

Near-complete

87–123 pairs. The total number of pairs of White-tailed Eagles has increased annually for over 20 years as the reintroduced population has consolidated in, and expanded from, the original release sites in western Scotland. The total of 86 young fledged is also a new record high. The breeding pair in North-east Scotland was the first in that recording area.

White-tailed Eagle			NE Scotland			Orkney					
CP	TP	YF	Perth & Kinross			Outer Hebrides					
Scotland, Mid	3	4	4	Scotland, N & W	84	118	82	Northern Ireland	0	1	0
Angus & Dundee	1	1	2	Argyll	22	33	22	Co. Fermanagh	0	1	0
Fife	0	1	0	Highland	38	51	37	TOTALS	87	123	86

Great Bustard *Otis tarda*

Very rare 4 bp

(no trend available)

Near-complete

One extensive site: three nesting females. Only one nest was found, but three chicks were seen in three separate areas indicating that at least three females hatched young. There were an additional five females of breeding age in the area. Despite these numbers, there is no indication that this population is self-sustaining. The source of birds for the releases changed in 2014 from Russia to Spain (<http://greatbustard.org/the-project/sourcing-the-birds>). First-winter survival of the Spanish birds has been over 50%, higher than it was for the Russian birds and higher than the 22% which may be expected in a natural wild population. As the Spanish birds reach maturity and start to breed, it will be interesting to see if there is an upturn in the fortunes of this project.

England, SW

Wiltshire One extensive site: at least three females laid eggs; a minimum of three young hatched.

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*

Less scarce 1,387 bp (no trend available)

Moderate

451 sites: 204–1,397 territories. This is the second-highest number of territories reported to the RBBP but the numbers estimated in each county reveal that there are probably more than twice as many breeding Water Rails than we report annually. Francis *et al.* (in press) used RBBP data and estimates to conclude that the UK population is in the order of 3,900 territories; consequently, this is the last time the species will appear in this report.

Water Rail			Herefordshire	2	2	Ayrshire	10	17
	S	T	Leics & Rutland	1	2	Borders	3	3
England, SW (e 1,126)	41	141	Nottinghamshire	2	23	Clyde	7	13
Avon	2	3	Staffordshire	8	57	Clyde Islands	1	3
Devon	5	5	Warwickshire	5	26	Dumfries & G'way	10	18
Dorset	10	21	West Midlands	2	2	Lothian	7	7
Gloucestershire	3	3	Worcestershire	4	8	Scotland, Mid (e 446)	28	71
Hampshire	8	29	England, N (e 431)	82	269	Angus & Dundee	2	4
Isle of Wight	9	9	Cheshire & Wirral	2	48	Fife	8	8
Somerset	3	70	Cleveland	2	18	Moray & Nairn	1	1
Wiltshire	1	1	Cumbria	8	9	North-east Scotland	12	15
England, SE (e 359)	72	107	Co. Durham	7	27	Perth & Kinross	4	39
Bedfordshire	8	8	Greater Manchester	13	23	Upper Forth	1	4
Berkshire	11	22	Lancs & N Mersey	5	5	Scotland, N & W (e 322)	30	63
Buckinghamshire	2	2	Northumberland	13	23	Argyll	6	9
Essex	6	9	Yorkshire	32	116	Caithness	1	1
Greater London	1	1	Wales (e 79)	26	49	Highland	14	42
Hertfordshire	4	5	Anglesey	2	15	Orkney	8	10
Kent	16	27	Breconshire	3	3	Outer Hebrides	e	e
Oxfordshire	3	10	Caernarfonshire	1	2	Shetland	1	1
Surrey	6	8	Carmarthenshire	2	5	Northern Ireland (e 8)	5	8
Sussex	15	15	Ceredigion	2	3	Co. Antrim	3	5
England, E (e 598)	99	501	Denbigh & Flint	1	1	Co. Armagh	1	1
Cambridgeshire	12	23	East Glamorgan	2	3	Co. Down	1	2
Lincolnshire	15	88	Gower	3	3	Channel Islands (e 3)	3	3
Norfolk	41	64	Gwent	2	4	Jersey	3	3
Northamptonshire	7	12	Meirionnydd	e	e	TOTALS	451	1,397
Suffolk	24	314	Pembrokeshire	3	3	(e 3,836)		
England, C (e 124)	27	124	Radnorshire	5	7			
Derbyshire	3	4	Scotland, S (e 340)	38	61			

Corn Crake *Crex crex*

Less scarce 1,087 bp 23y trend (survey*): **strong increase +146%** Near-complete

923 singing males. After a period of sustained growth from the early 2000s, the number of Corn Crakes has begun to decline (fig. 4). The trend from national survey data shows a strong increase but annual RBBP data now show the trend to be a weak increase only (+77%). The decline in 2017 is apparent in the reduced totals throughout north and west Scotland, where only three of the listed areas showed an increase: Barra and Vatersay (+27 males), Caithness (+1) and Harris (+1).

Reintroduction programmes in England have so far had limited success, and the count of singing males at the Nene Washes release site (where the last releases were in 2016) remained the same as in 2016. A new release site in the Wensum Valley in Norfolk was established by the Pensthorpe Conservation Trust in 2016 (69 birds released), presumably resulting in the five calling birds there in 2017; a further 154 birds were released in 2017. A singing male in Warwickshire was repeatedly flushed by birders, seemingly unaware that they may have been jeopardising a breeding attempt, which is of course illegal.

* Wotton *et al.* (2015).

England, E

Cambridgeshire Total 17: Nene Washes 15, Ouse Washes 2. Lincolnshire One. Norfolk Five, at three widely separated sites.

England, C

Warwickshire One.

England, N

Yorkshire Eight, all within one extensive site. At least two juveniles were seen.

Scotland, Mid

North-east Scotland One.

Scotland, N & W

Argyll Total 499: Coll 49, Colonsay & Oronsay 36, Gigha 0, Iona 15, Islay 75, Mull 3, Staffa 1, Tiree 315, Treshnish Isles 3, mainland 2. Caithness 2. Highland Total 28: Canna 2, mainland 11, Muck 1, Skye 14. Orkney Total 9. Outer Hebrides Total 351: Barra & Vatersay 84, Benbecula 5, Berneray 0, Harris 7, Lewis 75, Mingulay and other islands south of Vatersay 4, North Uist 108, South Uist 68.

Northern Ireland

Co. Antrim One.

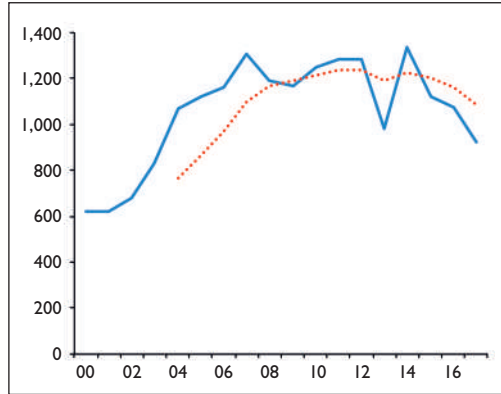


Fig. 4. Number of singing male Corn Crakes *Crex crex* in the UK, 2000–17: maximum total in blue and rolling 5-year mean in red.

Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana*

Very rare 27 bp

25y trend: **stable -4%**

High

Six sites: 0–8 pairs/singing males. The last year that fewer than ten males were recorded was 1982 (six). White & Kehoe (2019a) noted that 2017 was a poor year for passage Spotted Crakes, especially in the spring. Stroud *et al.* (2012) showed that years with poor breeding numbers led to low numbers in the autumn. All records refer to singing males and all records are included here, regardless of how long the birds were present.

England, SW

Dorset One site: one, 12th–14th May. Somerset One site: two.

England, E

Cambridgeshire One site: one, 10th–23rd May. Norfolk One site: two, 22nd–29th May.

England, N

Yorkshire One site: one, 28th May to 6th June.

Scotland, Mid

North-east Scotland One site: one, 23rd–28th June.

Common Crane *Grus grus*

Rare 31 bp

25y trend: **strong increase +1,460%**

Near-complete

19 sites: 29–37 pairs. There has been a strong increase in the Crane population in recent years, partly fuelled by reintroductions in southwest England, although in the last three years the population has stabilised at 32–38 pairs. The number of fledged young has also increased, and 22 in 2017 was a new record total. For the headline total, we count only paired birds associated with a specific potential/actual breeding site; other apparent pairs are classed as non-breeding and excluded from the totals since this species has a tendency to roam widely.

England, SW

Gloucestershire One extensive site: two pairs bred, no young fledged. One possible breeding pair and two non-breeding pairs in the county. Somerset Three sites: six pairs bred, fledging a total of four young; two possible breeding pairs. Two non-breeding pairs in the county.

England, SE

Oxfordshire One site: one pair bred, one chick hatched from a clutch of two but did not fledge.

England, E

Cambridgeshire Three sites: (1) three pairs bred, all successfully, with a total of four young fledging; also a non-breeding pair; (2) one pair bred, young hatched but lost to predators when about five weeks old; (3) one possible breeding pair – exact site not located so may have made a breeding attempt. Also, one non-breeding

pair elsewhere in the county. **Norfolk** Seven sites: ten pairs bred; three successful pairs fledged a minimum of ten young. Also, two possible and three non-breeding pairs. **Suffolk** One site: one pair bred, fledging one young.

England, N

Yorkshire One extensive site: three pairs bred, fledging one young.

Wales

East Glamorgan One non-breeding pair. **Gwent** One site: one pair bred, two young hatched but none fledged.

Scotland, Mid

North-east Scotland One extensive site: one pair bred, fledging two young, one probable and one possible breeding pair.

Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*

Scarce 363 bp

25y trend: **strong increase +147%**

Moderate

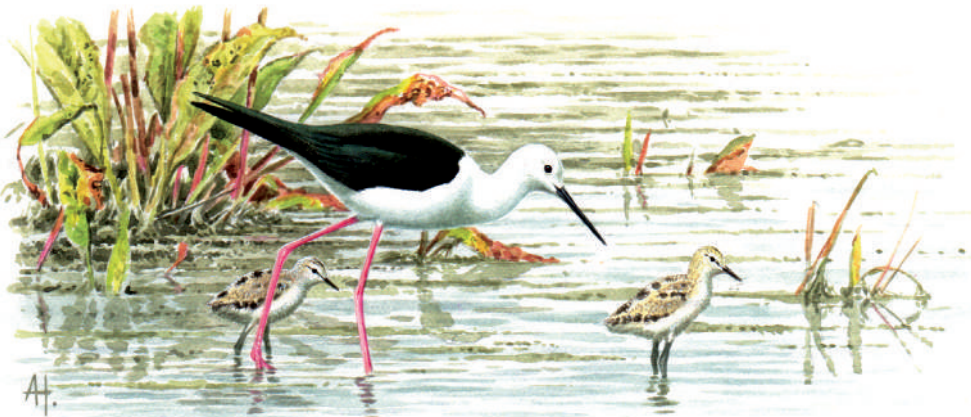
293–323 pairs. After totals in excess of 400 pairs in 2011–12 and 2014–15 (in 2013 a late, cold spring affected numbers settling to breed), the last two years have seen a decline in the total number of Stone-curlews breeding. RSPB-led monitoring shows that some areas were not surveyed in 2017; previous results suggest that these areas in eastern England contained another 49 pairs.

Stone-curlew			Wiltshire	88	100	England, E	174	184
			England, SE	8	11	Cambridgeshire	1	1
	CP	TP	Berkshire	4	6	Norfolk	89	93
England, SW	111	128	Oxfordshire	2	3	Suffolk	84	90
Hampshire	23	28	Sussex	2	2	TOTALS	293	323

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

Colonising breeder

Five sites: six pairs. An early spring influx of Black-winged Stilts into southern Britain is now a familiar event and it is anticipated that some of these birds will settle to breed. This year proved to be the best yet for stilts in the UK: six breeding pairs surpassed the previous best of four in 2015. White & Kehoe (2019a) showed that more Black-winged Stilts were reported in Britain in 2017 than in any previous year. Favourable weather conditions, leading to stable water levels at the chosen sites, may have contributed to high productivity: four successful pairs fledged a total of 13 young. As well as those listed below, at least six other pairs were reported from potential breeding habitat in Cambridgeshire, Essex, Gloucestershire, Isles of Scilly, Lincolnshire and Suffolk.



Alan Harris

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* with chicks

Although display and even mating were witnessed at some of these sites, the birds did not settle and some of them may have been the pairs subsequently seen at the eventual breeding sites.

England, SE

Kent One site: two pairs bred, seven young fledged. One of these pairs had earlier laid eggs in Essex but relocated after losing the clutch to a predator.

England, E

Cambridgeshire One site: one pair bred, two young fledged. **Norfolk** Three sites: (1) one pair bred, eggs predated; (2) one pair bred, four young fledged; (3) one pair bred, clutch of four laid, two hatched but chicks predated on the day of hatching.

Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

Less scarce 1,949 bp 25y trend: **strong increase +334%** Near-complete

139 sites: 2,256 pairs. In our first report, covering 1973, the Avocet was restricted to coastal East Anglia with 145 of the 149 pairs that year breeding at the RSPB reserves of Minsmere and Havergate Island. In 2017, the number of sites and pairs both reached a new peak and include the first breeding records for both Cumbria and Denbigh & Flint and only the second for Dorset. In the table, we include all pairs where there is a high level of confidence that breeding occurred; note, however, that some breeding pairs that lay at one site and fail early may move to nearby sites for a second breeding attempt, potentially leading to a small amount of double-counting.

Avocet			England, E	53	960	Cheshire & Wirral	7	156
	S	CP	Cambridgeshire	6	35	Cleveland	7	44
England, SW	8	64	Lincolnshire	12	237	Cumbria	1	2
Dorset	1	1	Norfolk	19	432	Co. Durham	1	15
Gloucestershire	1	19	Suffolk	16	256	Lancs & N Mersey	6	104
Hampshire	5	37	England, C	6	39	Northumberland	4	10
Somerset	1	7	Leics & Rutland	1	2	Yorkshire	11	118
England, SE	33	704	Nottinghamshire	3	11	Wales	2	40
Essex	16	245	Staffordshire	1	4	Denbigh & Flint	1	5
Kent	14	337	Worcestershire	1	22	Gwent	1	35
Sussex	3	122	England, N	37	449	TOTALS	139	2,256

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

Scarce 577 bp 15y trend: **stable +3%** Moderate

362–615 pairs. To maintain comparability with the last national survey (Conway *et al.* 2008), the table below shows only confirmed and probable breeding pairs. Information on a further 53 possible breeding pairs was also submitted but these may have been passage birds or those using sites only temporarily. Collation of county estimates suggest that around 100 pairs are being overlooked but the national population in 2007 was estimated at 1,115 pairs (Conway *et al.* 2008), and some counties with large riverine populations did not provide estimates for 2017.

Little Ringed Plover		England, SE (e 121)	93	Sussex		10
	TP	Bedfordshire	5	England, E (e 98)		92
England, SW (e 69)	54	Berkshire	22	Cambridgeshire		10
Avon	3	Buckinghamshire	6	Lincolnshire		33
Devon	3	Essex	17	Norfolk		29
Dorset	1	Greater London	e	Northamptonshire		8
Gloucestershire	9	Hertfordshire	6	Suffolk		12
Hampshire	25	Kent	15	England, C (e 113)		108
Somerset	6	Oxfordshire	5	Derbyshire		21
Wiltshire	7	Surrey	7	Herefordshire		12

Little Ringed Plover cont.		Greater Manchester	27	Scotland, S (e 26)	23
	TP	Lancs & N Mersey	39	Borders	1
Leics & Rutland	12	Northumberland	16	Clyde	17
Nottinghamshire	4	Yorkshire	67	Dumfries & G'way	3
Shropshire	10	Wales (e 47)	35	Lothian	2
Staffordshire	25	Breconshire	5	Scotland, Mid (e 20)	14
Warwickshire	9	Carmarthenshire	5	Angus & Dundee	5
West Midlands	3	Denbigh & Flint	4	Fife	1
Worcestershire	12	East Glamorgan	5	Moray & Nairn	1
England, N (e 222)	196	Gower	1	North-east Scotland	5
Cheshire & Wirral	20	Gwent	5	Perth & Kinross	1
Cleveland	11	Meirionnydd	3	Upper Forth	1
Cumbria	6	Montgomeryshire	4	TOTAL (e 716)	615
Co. Durham	10	Radnorshire	3		

Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus*

Scarce 423 males* 24y trend (survey): **strong decrease -57%** Low

15–45 'pairs'. Few records of breeding Dotterels are received in years without a full survey. In 2017, little more than 10% of the population was sampled. The main range lies north of the Highland boundary fault, where records of a total of 43 breeding pairs or single birds in suitable habitat were received from three recording areas: **Highland** (23), **Moray & Nairn** (10) and **North-east Scotland** (10). South of the main range there were two records suggestive of breeding. In **Cumbria**, an individual seen in mid June was well after the normal passage period (see Callion & Strowger 2018), while in **Dumfries & Galloway**, a pair was recorded in late May at a site where breeding has been confirmed in the past.

* Hayhow *et al.* (2015).

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

Rare 290+ bp* (no trend available) Low

1–41 pairs. It was encouraging to receive data from sample surveys of parts of Shetland conducted since 2010, which have been incorporated into the RBBP archive; 2017 data are summarised below. *Bird Atlas 2007–11* (Balmer *et al.* 2013) confirms that the majority of our breeding Whimbrels occur in Shetland with only sporadic records from Orkney and Outer Hebrides.

* Jackson (2009).

Scotland, N & W

Outer Hebrides One site: one bird seen in a known breeding area. **Shetland** Ten areas were surveyed and 40 territories identified across Fetlar, Mainland, Unst and Yell. Breeding was confirmed on Fetlar, where chicks were seen.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

Rare 53 bp 25y trend: **stable -2%** Near-complete

Eight sites: 44–47 pairs. This is the lowest reported total since 1997 and the population has now fallen back to the numbers last seen in the early 2000s. Black-tailed Godwits in north and west Scotland are of the race *L. l. islandica* and here the total number of pairs has fluctuated around a mean of 7.5 pairs since 2005, with 1–4 young fledged each year over that period. The small but regular breeding population in Shetland was reduced to one pair in 2017 although single birds were present at two former traditional sites.

Numbers of the nominate race have declined over the last decade (fig. 5), mirroring declines in the Dutch breeding population since 1980 (Boele *et al.* 2019). This decline is thought to be

Black-tailed Godwit				
	S	CP	TP	YF
<i>L. l. limosa</i>	5	40	41	10
England, SW	1	1	1	0
England, E	2	38	38	7
Cambridgeshire	1	35	35	5
Norfolk	1	3	3	2
England, N	2	1	2	3
Lancs & N Mersey	1	1	1	3
Yorkshire	1	0	1	0
<i>L. l. islandica</i>	3	4	6	3
Scotland, N & W	3	4	6	3
Orkney	2	4	5	3
Shetland	1	0	1	0
TOTALS	8	44	47	13

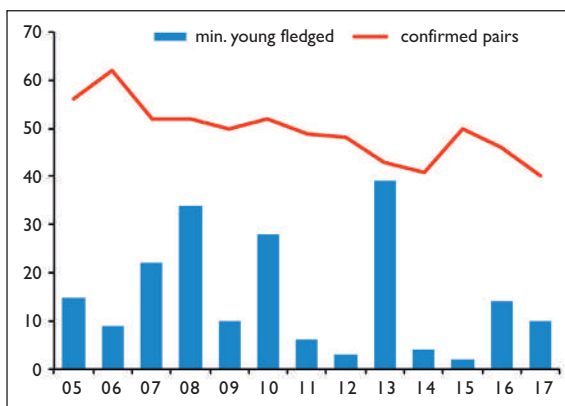


Fig. 5. Number of confirmed breeding pairs of Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa l. limosa*, and the minimum number of young fledged in the UK, 2005–17.

driven by low productivity in some years, and since 2010 there has been only one ‘good’ year. Problems include flooding and losses due to predation. As a result, WWT and RSPB began a ‘headstarting’ project in 2017, artificially incubating eggs and feeding small chicks in captivity prior to releasing them in the wild (<https://projectgodwit.org.uk/category/headstarting>).

Ruff *Calidris pugnax*

Very rare 13 females 25y trend: **stable -6%**

Near-complete

Seven sites: 0–8 breeding females. After a bumper year in 2016, when there were up to 33 breeding females in ten counties, records were back to normal in 2017. There were no records of confirmed breeding, although the June records perhaps suggest that breeding was attempted at these sites.

England, E

Lincolnshire One site: a maximum of two females with seven males at a lek during 1st–21st June.

England, N

Cheshire & Wirral One site: one female and four males lekking in early May only, but a lone female was still present in late May.

Scotland, N & W

Argyll One site: one female with up to five males during 10th–25th May. Orkney One site: one female at a lek with seven males on 8th June. Outer Hebrides Three sites: (1) one female and at least three males, 1st May to 21st June; (2) one female and up to four males from 8th May with the female still present on 11th July; (3) one female and up to four males during 12th–29th May.

Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima*

Very rare 1 bp

25y trend: **strong decrease -54%**

Near-complete

One site: 0–1 pairs. After a blank year in 2016, one pair was present at a traditional site in Northern Scotland from 24th May to 8th July, with one adult alarming on one occasion suggesting that there may have been young in the area.

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*

Rare 64 bp

25y trend: **strong increase +222%**

Near-complete

29 sites: 22–82 breeding pairs/males. In 2015–17 the total number of breeding ‘pairs’ has been 86, 70 and 82, compared with a mean of 33 during 2005–2014. The pair on Fair Isle fledged three young; this was the first breeding record for the island.

Red-necked Phalarope							
	S	CP	TP				
Scotland, N & W	29	22	82	Orkney	2	2	2
Argyll	4	10	10	Outer Hebrides	3	5	13
Fair Isle	1	1	1	Shetland	19	4	56
				TOTALS	29	22	82

The reasons for this increase are not clear but Iain Malzer, Reserves Ecologist with RSPB Scotland, commented: ‘The phalaropes in Scotland are at the southern edge of this species’ global breeding range, and therefore slight changes in breeding success can lead to fluctuations in local breeding numbers. Across the key breeding sites, especially Shetland, numbers have steadily increased over the last half decade. A couple of productive seasons could have facilitated increased numbers and consequent range expansions. However, the number of phalaropes that return will be very dependent on success during their long annual migration to the Pacific. During migration, Red-necked Phalaropes are largely oceanic and therefore large-scale climatic factors or changes in oceanic currents or temperatures could have a significant bearing on food availability and the success of migrations.’

Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius*

Occasional breeder

In Cumbria, a bird present at a Cumbrian lake from 13th May to 21st June was seen displaying to and attempting to mate with a Common Sandpiper *A. hypoleucos*, and was also seen behaving aggressively towards the male of a pair of Common Sandpipers on 31st May. Spotted Sandpipers have bred once in the UK, on Skye (Highland) in 1975 (Wilson 1976; Ferguson-Lees 1977), though the clutch was deserted. There was also a series of mixed pairings of a Spotted Sandpiper with a Common Sandpiper at a site in Yorkshire in 1990–92; hybrid young fledged in 1991 (Ogilvie 1994).

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

Very rare 2 bp

15y trend: **weak decrease -25%**

Near-complete

Three sites: 0–3 pairs. Confirmed breeding, which occurred in 11 of 13 years from 1999, has not been reported since 2011 despite the efforts of observers in trying to establish further breeding evidence at one of these sites. Nevertheless, three is the highest return since 2012.

Scotland, N & W

Highland Three sites: three possible breeding pairs.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

Very rare 30 bp

25y trend: **strong increase +640%**

Near-complete

14 sites: 5–27 pairs. The fall in numbers since 2016 (31 pairs) was largely due to a reduction in the number of reported pairs in Caithness, which may be the result of fewer sites being checked.

Wood Sandpiper							
	S	CP	TP		S	CP	TP
Scotland, N & W	14	5	27	Highland	12	5	25
Caithness	2	0	2	TOTALS	14	5	27

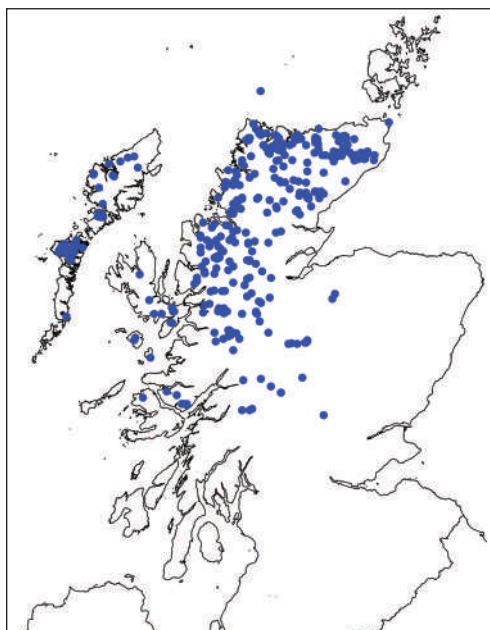
Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Less scarce 1,080 bp* (no trend available)

Low

24–119 pairs. The number of reported pairs remains low compared with the 20-year-old estimate of 1,080 pairs (Hancock *et al.* 1997). However, mapping all grid-referenced records received

Greenshank			
	TP	Caithness	28
Scotland, Mid	1	Highland	61
Perth & Kinross	1	Outer Hebrides	13
Scotland, N & W	118	Shetland	1
Argyll	15	TOTALS	119



in the six years since the publication of *Bird Atlas 2007–11* (Balmer *et al.* 2013) reveals the wide distribution, concentrated mainly north and west of the Great Glen in Scotland and in parts of the Outer Hebrides (fig. 6).

* Hancock *et al.* (1997).

Fig. 6. Distribution of all records of breeding Greenshanks *Tringa nebularia* in the UK, 2012–17. One record from Shetland (in 2017) and all records supplied without at least a tetrad grid reference are omitted.

Little Gull *Hydrocoloeus minutus*

Occasional breeder

In North-east Scotland, a pair returned to the 2016 breeding site and was present until 8th May; copulation was observed but no nesting occurred.

Mediterranean Gull *Ichthyaetus melanocephalus*

Less scarce 1,186 bp 25y trend: **strong increase +6,211%** Near-complete

54 sites: 1,399–1,429 pairs. After a bumper year in 2016, there was a reduction in the number of counted nests, largely due to a decline in Kent. There were fewer nesting pairs at the main colonies in the Medway and Swale estuaries and no young fledged from these two sites. High tides and onshore winds in May flooded many nests but the rest also failed, apparently following disturbance by human visitors to the nesting islands.

Away from the main range, three counties noted their first records of confirmed breeding: Derbyshire, Northamptonshire and Surrey. There was just one record of mixed breeding: one again bred with a Common Gull *Larus canus* in Co. Fermanagh. By far the largest inland colony, and the only substantial colony away from the south and southeast coasts of England, is at Belmont Reservoir in Lancashire & North Merseyside. Here, at an altitude of 260 m asl, Mediterranean Gulls nest alongside over 10,000 pairs of Black-headed Gulls *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* (Martin 2017). This colony is counted both from the land and using drone footage; the 49 nests in 2017 comprised 3.5% of the UK population.

Mediterranean Gull				Surrey	1	1	1	Derbyshire	1	2	2
	S	CP	TP	Sussex	3	5	5	Staffordshire	1	0	2
England, SW	6	877	877	England, E	11	135	138	West Midlands	1	0	1
Dorset	1	33	33	Cambridgeshire	1	1	1	Worcestershire	2	2	2
Hampshire	5	844	844	Lincolnshire	2	1	3	England, N	11	56	65
England, SE	16	318	328	Norfolk	6	97	98	Cheshire & Wirral	4	2	7
Berkshire	1	0	1	Northamptonshire	1	1	1	Cumbria	1	1	1
Essex	8	32	41	Suffolk	1	35	35	Lancs & N Mersey	2	52	52
Kent	3	280	280	England, C	5	4	7	Northumberland	1	1	1

Mediterranean Gull cont.				Anglesey	1	0	5	Co. Fermanagh	1	1*	1*
	S	CP	TP	Northern Ireland	4	9	9	TOTALS	54	1,399	1,429
Yorkshire	3	0	4	Co. Antrim	2	3	3	(* mixed pairs)			
Wales	1	0	5	Co. Down	1	5	5				

Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis*

Occasional breeder

In Perth & Kinross, an adult at a Common Gull colony was possibly associated with an incubating Common Gull. Though not reported every year, it is likely that this individual has attended the same colony since 2009. Breeding probably occurred again in 2017, but it is not known whether young were produced.

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*

Very rare 2 bp

15y trend: **weak decrease -21%**

Near-complete

Two sites: One pair and one mixed pair. Nesting in Hampshire involved mixed pairs with Herring Gulls *L. argentatus* until 2013. Although the adults involved since 2014 appear to be pure *michahellis*, there are now some doubts: photographs of the young in 2017 suggest some signs of hybridisation. In Breconshire, an adult that was paired with a Lesser Black-backed Gull *L. fuscus* arrived with two juveniles on 20th July, suggesting that a mixed pairing may have occurred elsewhere in Wales.

England, SW

Hampshire One site: one pair bred, three young fledged.

England, E

Lincolnshire One site: one adult paired with a Herring Gull showed signs of nesting but no eggs were laid.

Little Tern *Sternula albifrons*

Less scarce 1,453 bp

15y trend: **stable -10%**

Near-complete

63 sites: 1,485 pairs. Higher numbers in Hampshire, Norfolk, Northumberland and Yorkshire contributed to an overall increase compared with 2016 (1,290 pairs). In Scotland, Little Terns returned to former colonies in Fife (three pairs) and Lothian (two) but breeding was not confirmed.

Little Tern	S	CP	YF	Norfolk	6	542	263	North-east Scotland	1	4	0
England, SW	4	98	102	Suffolk	4	75	21	Scotland, N & W	24	169	28
Dorset	1	38	73	England, N	7	283	86	Argyll	4	74	13
Hampshire	3	60	29	Cleveland	2	81	8	Highland	3	9	2
England, SE	10	95	30	Cumbria	2	56	44	Orkney	2	8	13
Essex	3	34	7	Northumberland	2	97	20	Outer Hebrides	15	78	n/a
Kent	3	19	0	Yorkshire	1	49	14	Isle of Man	1	31	0
Sussex	4	42	23	Wales	2	162	203	TOTALS	63	1,485	740
England, E	14	643	291	Denbigh & Flint	2	162	203				
Lincolnshire	4	26	7	Scotland, Mid	1	4	0				

Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii*

Rare 101 bp

25y trend: **stable -19%**

Near-complete

Two sites: 112 pairs. The only colony where young fledged was again the main UK colony of Coquet Island, in Northumberland. Two young hatched in Co. Antrim but there was no evidence of fledging. A mixed pair (with Common Tern *S. hirundo*) occurred on Anglesey but breeding

Roseate Tern											
	S	CP	YF	Northumberland	1	111	166	Co. Antrim	1	1	0
England, N	1	111	166	Northern Ireland	1	1	0	TOTALS	2	112	166

was not confirmed. In Lothian, a single adult returned to a Common Tern colony but did not breed.

Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*

Scarce 2,136 bp* 15y trend (survey): **strong decrease -37%** Low

180 AOTs. When Arctic Skua was added to the RBBP list in 2010, we reported 557 apparently occupied territories (AOTs) but in subsequent years the mean number of AOTs has been only 185. The JNCC-led national survey, Seabirds Count, carried out during 2015–19, will give a revised total against which to compare the sample counts submitted to the RBBP. The number of young fledged is low partly because of widespread breeding failures (for example, on Foula, Shetland, only 23 pairs bred, the lowest ever, and no young fledged) but also because several counted sites do not monitor productivity.

* Mitchell *et al.* (2004).

Arctic Skua											
	S	AOT	YF	Highland	2	4	n/a	Shetland	9	72	3
Scotland N & W	26	180	13	Orkney	9	63	6	TOTALS	26	180	13
Fair Isle	1	30	1	Outer Hebrides	5	11	3				



Brydon Thomason

394. Newly fledged juvenile Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*, Shetland, July 2017.

Long-eared Owl *Asio otus*

Less scarce 1,800+ bp* (no trend available) Low

270–338 pairs. County estimates suggest that the national total is over 900 pairs, which supports the view that the Long-eared Owl is probably the most under-recorded species in this report. Dedicated fieldwork can greatly increase the number of pairs found, as demonstrated in Co. Durham where a survey identified 80 breeding pairs (see box 2). Long-eared Owls are difficult to

census and surveys such as this largely measure successful pairs, which can fluctuate between years depending on food supply and weather conditions.

* Musgrove *et al.* (2013).

Long-eared Owl			England, N (e 231)	146	160	Moray & Nairn	e	e
			Cleveland	0	1	North-east Scotland	3	5
	CP	TP	Cumbria	4	4	Perth & Kinross	3	3
England, SW (e 39)	2	3	Co. Durham	80	80	Upper Forth	10	10
Devon	e	e	Greater Manchester	14	17	Scotland, N & W	15	27
Hampshire	e	e	Lancs & N Mersey	3	5	(e 121)		
Isle of Wight	1	1	Northumberland	11	14	Argyll	3	6
Somerset	1	1	Yorkshire	34	39	Caithness	0	3
Wiltshire	0	1	Wales (e 21)	4	15	Highland	11	12
England, SE (e 114)	8	17	Breconshire	e	e	Outer Hebrides	1	6
Berkshire	1	1	Ceredigion	0	2	Northern Ireland	16	17
Essex	2	5	Denbigh & Flint	0	1	(e 17)		
Kent	4	8	Gwent	1	4	Co. Antrim	1	1
Sussex	1	3	Meirionnydd	0	1	Co. Armagh	5	5
England, E (e 21)	11	16	Radnorshire	3	7	Co. Down	8	9
Cambridgeshire	4	6	Scotland, S (e 117)	17	24	Co. Fermanagh	2	2
Norfolk	4	5	Borders	3	7	Channel Islands	18	19
Suffolk	3	5	Clyde	4	4	(e 19)		
England, C (e 12)	10	15	Clyde Islands	0	2	Guernsey	1	2
Derbyshire	4	5	Lothian	10	11	Jersey	17	17
Leics & Rutland	1	1	Scotland, Mid	23	25	TOTALS (e 932)	270	338
Nottinghamshire	2	3	(e 220)					
Staffordshire	3	6	Angus & Dundee	7	7			

A survey of Co. Durham's breeding Long-eared Owls in 2017. BOX 2

Andrew Kinghorn (Co. Durham recorder)

During the spring and early summer of 2017 there was a concerted effort to discover how many breeding pairs of Long-eared Owls there were in Co. Durham. This started when Long-eared Owl enthusiast Steve Evans decided to collate all his sightings, add in records from other workers, and source Long-eared Owl reports on various social media platforms. This initiative clearly captivated birdwatchers and enthusiasm for it was infectious; by the end of the survey, Co. Durham could quite comfortably claim to have the largest-known breeding population of Long-eared Owls of any UK county.

Long-eared Owls are secretive and unobtrusive but successful breeders normally have 'branched' young (i.e. out of the nest) by the first week of June, and these chicks have a distinctive begging call, audible at some distance in calm conditions. This is a high-pitched, 'squeaky gate' call, sounding to some ears like a child screeching 'MEEEE!'. The fact that these begging calls make the chicks so conspicuous results in easy confirmation of breeding success. However, adults will call to the chicks for them to be silent if they perceive a threat.

Methodology for the Durham survey was simple, with individuals visiting suitable habitat and attempting to locate begging juveniles in late May and June. Many observers were looking for breeding pairs before then, and if an occupied site was found follow-up visits were made to try to establish success or failure. Potential surveyors were made aware that Long-eared Owls are very susceptible to desertion during the laying stage, and that keeping disturbance to a minimum was critical. In some cases, adult pairs were not observed but follow-up visits produced young out of the nest. The power of social media could not be understated in the success of this survey, with much of the data coming from Facebook, Twitter and other platforms.

Analysis of the habitat used by breeding pairs shows that there were clearly two preferred tree species: Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and spruce *Picea*. All confirmed nests in Hawthorn were from lowland areas, whereas the majority of birds nesting in spruce were in the uplands. But this was not a hard-and-fast rule, with some birds in lowland Durham choosing spruce where Hawthorn was readily available. Other trees used included Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris*, larch *Larix*, birch *Betula*, and Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*. Nest types varied from old corvid nests through to an old squirrel drey and some used nest baskets erected to encourage breeding.

During the survey a minimum of 80 pairs was identified and these fledged at least 176 young. This does not include records of single birds that were probably paired up but could not be confirmed as breeders; indeed, many failed pairs on territory (those which do not fledge young) will never be detected.

Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*

Scarce 620+ bp*

(no trend available)

Moderate

139–278 pairs. Short-eared Owls are well known for their nomadic behaviour and highly fluctuating breeding numbers. Since 2010, when we first included the species in our reports, there have been between 181 (2016) and 465 (2012) pairs reported to the Panel. In 2017, one notable submission from the RSPB reserve of Geltsdale in Cumbria described ‘an incredible year, with 26 pairs identified by territory mapping’; this result is not reflected in other submissions in the region, perhaps due to a lack of detailed monitoring.

* Musgrove *et al.* (2013).

Short-eared Owl			Northumberland	4	6	Scotland, Mid (e 50)	20	20
			Yorkshire	8	14	Angus & Dundee	5	5
	CP	TP	Wales (e 23)	12	21	Moray & Nairn	e	e
England, SE (e 7)	3	7	Breconshire	e	e	North-east Scotland	e	e
Essex	0	2	Caernarfonshire	1	3	Perth & Kinross	9	9
Kent	3	5	Meirionnydd	0	3	Upper Forth	6	6
England, C (e 7)	2	7	Pembrokeshire	7	7	Scotland, N & W (e 86)	15	81
Derbyshire	2	5	Radnorshire	4	8	Argyll	3	6
Staffordshire	0	2	Scotland, S (e 64)	31	60	Caithness	4	4
England, N (e 85)	56	82	Borders	9	16	Highland	4	5
Cumbria	21	30	Clyde	8	16	Orkney	2	52
Co. Durham	7	13	Clyde Islands	0	4	Outer Hebrides	2	14
Greater Manchester	0	2	Dumfries & G’way	13	22	TOTALS (e 322)	139	278
Lancs & N Mersey	16	17	Lothian	1	2			

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*

Occasional breeder

One site: three pairs. During the decade 2001–10, single pairs were reported breeding in three years: 2002 (Co. Durham, confirmed, successful), 2005 (Herefordshire, confirmed, failed) and 2006 (Dorset, probable). Then, after an eight-year gap, breeding has been confirmed in three of the last four years: 2014 (Isle of Wight, two pairs, confirmed, successful), 2015 (Cumbria, two pairs, confirmed, successful) and now 2017. The Nottinghamshire attempt, comprising seven adults, was the largest yet and the subject of 24-hour wardening with viewing arrangements by the RSPB. Young were being fed in three nests until early August when cooler and wet weather seems to have caused the nests to be abandoned.

England, C

Nottinghamshire One site: three pairs bred at East Leake GP but all nests were abandoned after the young hatched.

Rosemary Watts



European Bee-eaters *Merops apiaster*

Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

Occasional breeder

In Gloucestershire, a singing male was present from 31st May to 7th June. Although Hoopoes are regular passage migrants, with 48 reported in spring 2017 (White & Kehoe 2019a), few linger and even fewer are recorded singing, with records in the RBBP archive for only six years out of the last 25.

Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*

Former breeder

In Perth & Kinross, one singing male was present from 26th May to 3rd June. The last confirmed breeding in the UK was in 2002.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dryobates minor*

Less scarce 1,000+ bp* (no trend available)

Moderate

27–309 territories. The table below lists all records of Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers thought to be in breeding territories, based on presence in suitable habitat between February and July. County estimates suggest that the reported sites represent less than half of those actually occupied. To improve monitoring of this species, all sightings between February and July should be submitted to recorders. In 2017, there were again no records from Cumbria, Lancashire & N Merseyside or Co. Durham (*contra Bird Atlas 2007–11*). The most northerly record came from near York (Yorkshire).

* Musgrove *et al.* (2013).

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker		Devon	8	Somerset	17
		Dorset	6	Wiltshire	3
England, SW (e 320)	TP	Gloucestershire	7	England, SE (e 245)	97
	97	Hampshire	56	Bedfordshire	8

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker		Lincolnshire	2	Cheshire & Wirral	7
<i>cont.</i>		Norfolk	3	Greater Manchester	2
	TP	Northamptonshire	2	Yorkshire	10
Berkshire	2	Suffolk	3	Wales (e 35)	28
Buckinghamshire	5	England, C (e 106)	56	Breconshire	3
Essex	8	Derbyshire	4	Carmarthenshire	2
Greater London	7	Herefordshire	2	Ceredigion	3
Hertfordshire	9	Leics & Rutland	3	East Glamorgan	4
Kent	24	Nottinghamshire	6	Gwent	5
Oxfordshire	3	Shropshire	9	Meirionnydd	3
Surrey	15	Staffordshire	9	Montgomeryshire	1
Sussex	16	Warwickshire	13	Radnorshire	7
England, E (e 14)	12	Worcestershire	10	TOTALS (739)	309
Cambridgeshire	2	England, N (e 19)	19		

Merlin *Falco columbarius*

Less scarce 1,160 bp* 25y trend (survey): **weak increase +94%** Moderate

283–363 pairs. Merlin was readmitted to the Red list (Eaton *et al.* 2015) owing to its faltering population recovery. An investigation is under way to establish which are the most important drivers of population change (Challis *et al.* 2018) and these may include: a change in the intensity of management of heather moors; changes in upland land cover (such as the increased area of improved grassland and forestry); a reduction in avian prey abundance at critical times, especially early in the season; predation of nests or adults; and climate change.

* Ewing *et al.* (2011).

Merlin		Staffordshire	1	1	Greater Manchester	1	4
	CP	England, N	109	125	Lancs & N Mersey	21	21
England, C	9	Cheshire & Wirral	1	1	Northumberland	15	18
Derbyshire	7	Cumbria	6	7	Yorkshire	30	34
Shropshire	1	Co. Durham	35	40			



Brydon Thomason

395. Merlin *Falco columbarius* bringing in a Skylark *Alauda arvensis* to two well-grown chicks near the nest, Shetland, August 2017.

Merlin cont.			Ayrshire	1	1	Argyll	1	2
	CP	TP	Borders	8	11	Caithness	1	1
Wales	14	28	Clyde	5	5	Highland	26	36
Breconshire	1	8	Dumfries & G'way	8	10	Orkney	9	9
Caernarfonshire	1	1	Lothian	1	3	Outer Hebrides	4	13
Carmarthenshire	0	2	Scotland, Mid	52	68	Shetland	25	25
Denbigh & Flint	1	1	Angus & Dundee	9	9	Northern Ireland	10	11
Gwent	0	2	Moray & Nairn	6	9	Co. Antrim	3	4
Meirionnydd	5	5	North-east Scotland	22	28	Co. Londonderry	2	2
Montgomeryshire	1	1	Perth & Kinross	14	20	Co. Tyrone	5	5
Radnorshire	5	8	Upper Forth	1	2	TOTALS	283	363
Scotland, S	23	30	Scotland, N & W	66	86			

Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

Less scarce 795 bp 25y trend: **weak increase +80%** Moderate

282–632 pairs. Numbers reported to the RBBP increased for many years, but after reaching a peak in 2009, the trend has been generally downward for the past decade (fig. 7). Since the Hobby is one of those species which is under-recorded in many of its core areas in southern and central England, there is a degree of uncertainty about any trend based on RBBP data, but this pattern reflects the subjective comments from some observers that there are now fewer Hobbies in parts of the main range.

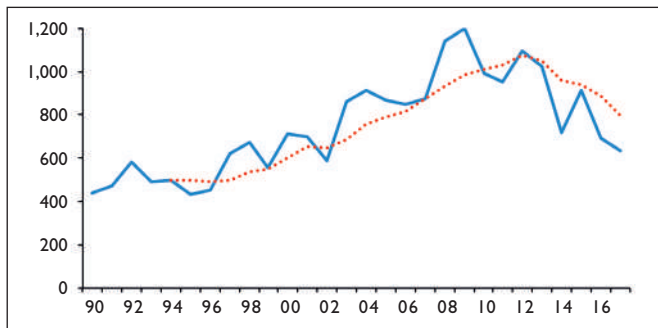


Fig. 7. Number of pairs of breeding Hobbies *Falco subbuteo* in the UK, 1990–2017: maximum total with rolling 5-year mean in red.

In areas of northern England monitored by the Northern England Raptor Forum (Smith *et al.* 2018), mean productivity per laying pair was close to 2.0 young during 2009–14 and 2017 but 1.6 in 2015–16.

Hobby			Oxfordshire	e	e	Co. Durham	0	1
	CP	TP	Surrey	6	15	Greater Manchester	1	5
England, SW (e 530)	50	125	Sussex	5	26	Lancs & N Mersey	0	1
Avon	2	7	England, E (e 250)	85	150	Yorkshire	29	44
Cornwall	6	7	Cambridgeshire	11	13	Wales (e 66)	19	52
Devon	3	9	Lincolnshire	8	62	Breconshire	6	12
Dorset	6	9	Norfolk	19	22	Carmarthenshire	e	e
Gloucestershire	7	13	Northamptonshire	26	26	Denbigh & Flint	1	2
Hampshire	15	15	Suffolk	21	27	East Glamorgan	1	3
Isle of Wight	0	1	England, C (e 150)	59	108	Gower	0	2
Somerset	5	28	Derbyshire	35	42	Gwent	5	19
Wiltshire	6	36	Herefordshire	6	12	Meirionnydd	0	1
England, SE (e 466)	23	116	Leics & Rutland	1	12	Montgomeryshire	e	e
Bedfordshire	1	1	Nottinghamshire	1	1	Radnorshire	6	13
Berkshire	3	12	Shropshire	8	8	Scotland, Mid (e 5)	3	5
Buckinghamshire	1	15	Staffordshire	0	12	Angus & Dundee	2	2
Essex	4	9	Warwickshire	5	9	North-east Scotland	0	1
Greater London	2	6	Worcestershire	3	12	Perth & Kinross	1	2
Hertfordshire	1	8	England, N (e 90)	43	76	TOTALS (e 1,557)	282	632
Kent	0	24	Cheshire & Wirral	13	25			

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

Less scarce 1,701 bp* 22y trend (survey): **stable +5%**

High

834–1,088 pairs. The number of Peregrine Falcon territories reported in 2017 was almost identical to that in 2016, even when compared at the regional level. The estimates supplied by recorders seem to be on the low side as the total is less than the calculated population in the 2014 survey and there is no indication of a population decline through much of the range.

* Wilson *et al.* (2018).

Peregrine Falcon		CP	TP						
				Leics & Rutland	5	10	Borders	25	36
England, SW (e 266)	132	163		Nottinghamshire	4	4	Clyde	18	22
Avon	9	14		Shropshire	16	19	Clyde Islands	3	7
Cornwall	49	56		Staffordshire	9	9	Dumfries & G'way	50	63
Devon	25	32		Warwickshire	3	6	Lothian	12	15
Dorset	4	4		West Midlands	6	7	Scotland, Mid (e 107)	57	85
Gloucestershire	13	14		Worcestershire	5	6	Angus & Dundee	13	18
Hampshire	18	21		England, N (e 171)	118	147	Fife	9	11
Isle of Wight	2	2		Cheshire & Wirral	13	14	Isle of May	0	1
Isles of Scilly	1	3		Cleveland	4	4	Moray & Nairn	5	5
Somerset	7	11		Cumbria	7	12	North-east Scotland	5	9
Wiltshire	4	6		Co. Durham	8	12	Perth & Kinross	13	23
England, SE (e 130)	75	89		Greater Manchester	10	11	Upper Forth	12	18
Bedfordshire	1	3		Lancs & N Mersey	26	30	Scotland, N & W (e 60)	43	61
Berkshire	1	1		Northumberland	15	21	Argyll	8	12
Buckinghamshire	2	2		Yorkshire	35	43	Caithness	2	2
Essex	6	7		Wales (e 234)	104	157	Highland	17	23
Greater London	14	18		Anglesey	2	5	Orkney	12	13
Hertfordshire	2	4		Breconshire	7	12	Outer Hebrides	4	10
Kent	9	12		Caernarfonshire	4	12	Shetland	0	1
Oxfordshire	3	3		Carmarthenshire	2	9	Northern Ireland (e 78)	68	78
Surrey	7	9		Ceredigion	2	2	Co. Antrim	19	25
Sussex	30	30		Denbigh & Flint	10	14	Co. Armagh	6	6
England, E (e 43)	36	38		East Glamorgan	22	28	Co. Down	10	10
Cambridgeshire	3	4		Gower	4	8	Co. Fermanagh	13	14
Lincolnshire	19	19		Gwent	9	10	Co. Londonderry	9	10
Norfolk	6	6		Meirionnydd	2	5	Co. Tyrone	11	13
Northamptonshire	2	2		Montgomeryshire	2	2	Isle of Man (e 2)	2	2
Suffolk	6	7		Pembrokeshire	25	34	Channel Islands (e 7)	7	7
England, C (e 100)	62	92		Radnorshire	13	16	Guernsey	3	3
Derbyshire	13	27		Scotland, S (e 169)	130	169	Jersey	4	4
Herefordshire	1	4		Ayrshire	22	26	TOTALS (e 1,367)	834	1,088

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*

Very rare 3 bp

25y trend: **strong decrease -55%**

High

Four sites: 0–4 pairs. After a blank year in 2016, there was more to report in 2017, but the scattered single birds were mostly males.

England, SW

Devon One extensive site: three records of males on three different dates between 12th and 22nd June may relate to the same or up to three individuals. The male on 12th June was singing. Two of the records were close to a previous breeding area. Wiltshire One site: one singing male on 16th–17th June.

England, E

Norfolk One site: one singing male between 25th May and 26th June.

Scotland, Mid

North-east Scotland One site: a male was reported on 20th June and a female less than 2 km away on 11th July.

Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*

Potential breeder

In Devon, a wintering male lingered until 28th May and was observed singing towards the end of its stay. There have been only two previous records of summering Great Grey Shrikes in these reports, relating to single birds in 1975 (Lincolnshire) and 1991 (Suffolk).

Red-billed Chough *Pyrhacorax pyrrhacorax*

Scarce 381 bp*

32y trend (survey): **stable -1%**

Near-complete

303–362 pairs. Since the 2014 survey (Hayhow *et al.* 2018b), Chough numbers have increased in Cornwall while they have remained stable in Wales. Choughs have nested in Co. Antrim every year since at least 2002 but were absent in 2017. Counts in the Isle of Man in 2017 were incomplete. Jardine *et al.* (2019) described how the small population on Colonsay and Oronsay (Argyll) has declined due to poor survival of first-year birds.

* Hayhow *et al.* (2018b).

Red-billed Chough			Ceredigion	19	21	Argyll:		
	T	TP	Denbigh & Flint	2	2	Colonsay & Oronsay	7	9
England, SW	7	12	East Glamorgan	0	2	Argyll: Islay	48	48
Cornwall	7	12	Gower	0	2	Isle of Man	23	32
Wales	214	257	Meirionnydd	10	16	Channel Islands	4	4
Anglesey	35	42	Pembrokeshire	62	79	Jersey	4	4
Caernarfonshire	86	93	Scotland, N & W	55	57	TOTALS	303	362

Willow Tit *Poecile montanus*

Less scarce 3,400+ bp* (no trend available)

Moderate

255–728 pairs. These pairs were reported from over 230 sites across 26 counties in England, 11 in Wales and two in Scotland. This is the first time we have received information on over 700 pairs but county estimates put the total at over 1,000 pairs. To establish a better population estimate, a national Willow Tit survey is taking place in 2019 and 2020, organised by the RBBP, RSPB, BTO and Welsh Ornithological Society with support from Natural England and Natural Resources Wales. Simon Wotton, the survey coordinator, said: ‘The survey has gone well in 2019, with many observers taking part. We anticipate that over 700 tetrads have been covered in 2019 with the main aim for 2020 being to fill in any gaps in coverage across the range.’

* Musgrove *et al.* (2013).

Willow Tit							
	TP	Leics & Rutland	6	Wales (e 125)	72		
England, SW (e 227)	64	Nottinghamshire	14	Breconshire	8		
Cornwall	34	Shropshire	21	Caernarfonshire	e		
Devon	11	Staffordshire	48	Cardiganshire	7		
Gloucestershire	2	Warwickshire	7	Ceredigion	6		
Hampshire	15	West Midlands	4	Denbigh & Flint	3		
Wiltshire	2	Worcestershire	1	East Glamorgan	4		
England, SE (e 1)	1	England, N (e 493)	408	Gwent	2		
Oxfordshire	1	Cheshire & Wirral	38	Meirionnydd	1		
England, E (e 22)	22	Cleveland	8	Montgomeryshire	16		
Lincolnshire	6	Cumbria	3	Pembrokeshire	7		
Norfolk	10	Co. Durham	153	Radnorshire	18		
Northamptonshire	6	Greater Manchester	75	Scotland, S (e 51)	18		
England, C (e 162)	143	Lancs & N Mersey	10	Ayrshire	1		
Derbyshire	41	Northumberland	17	Dumfries & G’way	17		
Herefordshire	1	Yorkshire	104	TOTALS (e 1,081)	728		

Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus*

Scarce 694 bp

15y trend: **strong increase +55%**

Near-complete

Bearded Tit

	S	TP
England, SW	13	30
Dorset	6	18
Hampshire	3	8
Somerset	4	4
England, SE	24	112
Bedfordshire	3	3
Essex	5	17
Kent	13	73
Sussex	3	19
England, E	42	312
Cambridgeshire	9	26
Lincolnshire	4	60
Norfolk	13	107
Suffolk	16	119
England, C	1	2
Nottinghamshire	1	2
England, N	10	161
Lancs & N Mersey	1	26
Yorkshire	9	135
Wales	1	7
Gwent	1	7
Scotland, Mid	4	130
North-east Scotland	2	3
Perth & Kinross	1	125
Upper Forth	1	2
TOTALS	95	754



Dan Powell

Juvenile Bearded Tits *Panurus biarmicus*

95 sites: 754 pairs. This is the second-highest total ever reported by the Panel, following the 772 pairs in 2014. They occurred in the same counties in 2017 with two exceptions: Nottinghamshire gained breeding Bearded Tits only in 2015, while they were absent in the Channel Islands in 2017 for the first time in over 20 years. However, the regional totals in 2017 are quite different from those in 2014 – notably lower in southwest England, for example – suggesting that the overall UK population may be higher still.

Woodlark *Lullula arborea*

Less scarce 3,064 bp* (no trend available)

Moderate

974 singing males. After only two years back on the RBBP list, it is too early to establish any recent trends in numbers of breeding Woodlarks. Counts from Hampshire are unrepresentative, being based largely on casual records only. The county estimate of 400 territories there is thought to be more realistic but a comprehensive survey of Hampshire’s Woodlarks in 2019 will provide more information.

* Conway *et al.* (2009).

Woodlark		England, SE (e 297)	295	Suffolk	223
	SM/T	Berkshire	53	England, C (e 66)	66
England, SW (e 492)	218	Buckinghamshire	2	Derbyshire	2
Devon	6	Surrey	152	Nottinghamshire	30
Dorset	60	Sussex	88	Staffordshire	34
Gloucestershire	2	England, E (e 401)	380	England, N (e 15)	15
Hampshire	144	Lincolnshire	19	Yorkshire	15
Wiltshire	6	Norfolk	138	TOTALS (e 1,271)	974

Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus*

Potential breeder

In Devon, a singing male remained from 28th February until 14th April. The number of migrants was exceptionally high in autumn 2016 (White & Kehoe 2018b). Small numbers now remain in south and southwest England in winter, and some linger into the spring.

Iberian Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus ibericus*

Colonising breeder

Four sites: four singing males. These four birds held territory for at least five days in suitable breeding habitat. The one in Shropshire may have been a returning bird from 2016.

England, SE

Kent One site: one singing male, 30th March to 17th April.

England, E

Norfolk One site: one singing male, 16th–21st May.

England, C

Shropshire One site: one singing male, 3rd–7th April.

England, N

Cheshire & Wirral One site: one singing male, 31st May to 28th June.

Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*

Potential breeder

In Highland, a singing male from 28th June to 3rd July was a typical record, of an apparently unpaired male. Records of this species in the UK are increasing and earlier in the spring a singing male in Cumbria was present in suitable habitat on 14th–15th June.

Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*

Very rare 8 bp

25y trend: **strong decrease -70%**

Near-complete

12 sites: 2–13 pairs. This is the highest total since 2009, when there were 16 potential pairs. Only longer-staying birds are listed here, thus one-day birds on the coast in Norfolk and a three-day bird in Cambridgeshire in mid June are excluded. Marsh Warblers tend to appear on the east coast in late May/early June and in the last 15 years or so some have remained to breed in areas of rank vegetation. These patches can be quite small and observers should be aware that singing birds during this period, or silent birds found later, could be making a breeding attempt.

England, SE

Essex One site: one singing male, held territory from 25th May and breeding was suspected; last recorded 1st July. Kent Three sites: (1) one pair bred and a further singing male; (2) one singing male 4th–10th June; (3) one singing male.

England, E

Suffolk Two sites: (1) one singing male, 21st–31st May; (2) one singing on 17th June and it or another trapped on 20th July.



Mark Rayment

396. Singing Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*, Lakenheath, Suffolk, May 2017.

England, N

Cleveland Two sites: (1) one singing male, 2nd May to 7th June; (2) one singing male, 4th–21st June. Northumberland One site: one pair bred. First heard singing on 29th May, two young fledged; last recorded on 19th July.

Scotland, N & W

Shetland Three sites: (1) one probable breeding pair. One bird on 12th June, then a second bird on 17th June carrying nest material. There was no further evidence of breeding, but the birds remained on site until at least 16th July; (2) one singing male, 11th–19th June; (3) one singing male, 12th June to 2nd July.

Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina*

Occasional breeder

Two sites: two singing males. This is the fifth consecutive year that territorial Icterine Warblers have been recorded in the UK. Of the nine birds, seven have been in Highland and two in neighbouring North-east Scotland.

Scotland, N & W

Highland Two sites: (1) one singing male, 2nd–30th June; (2) one singing male, 5th–14th June.

Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides*

Very rare 5 bp

25y trend: **strong decrease -67%**

Near-complete

Seven sites: 0–8 pairs. There has been a long-term decrease in the numbers of singing Savi's Warblers reported, with ten or fewer every year since 1993; the total of eight is therefore one of the highest over that period. Details of all of these records were published by BBRC (Holt *et al.* 2018). Records of birds heard on one or two days only, and those not yet submitted to BBRC, are excluded.

England, SW

Somerset Two sites: (1) one singing male, presumed returning from 2016, 15th April to 27th May; (2) one singing male, 16th–30th April.

England, SE

Kent One site: one singing male, 28th May to 2nd June.

England, E

Cambridgeshire One site: one singing male, 31st May to 4th June. Norfolk One site: one singing male, 19th April to 5th July. Suffolk Two sites: (1) two singing males, one from 18th April to 17th July, another from 14th June to 11th July; (2) one singing male, 11th–29th May.

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*

Potential breeder

In the Channel Islands, a pair held territory on Alderney in July. Although this species breeds in Brittany and Normandy, in France, it is exceptionally rare in Britain. There are more regular reports from the Channel Islands, including a singing male on Alderney in 2008 and a breeding pair on Guernsey in 2009 (Balmer *et al.* 2013).

Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*

Less scarce 3,214 bp* 25y trend: **weak increase +74%** Moderate

1,639 territories. Not all pairs are reported each year and county totals vary according to reporting effort. However, the totals were consistent at between 1,639 and 1,691 in 2015–17, compared with a mean of 685 during 2010–14 when the population was hit by the cold winters 2009/10 and 2010/11. Recorders' estimates put the current UK total at almost 2,200 territories. In Hampshire, 600–800 territories are estimated, mostly in the New Forest, based on densities measured in three study areas (per Hampshire recorder).

* Wotton *et al.* (2009).

Dartford Warbler					
	TP	England, SE (e 557)	554	Wales (e 31)	29
England, SW (e 1,422)	873	Bedfordshire	1	Caernarfonshire	1
Cornwall	24	Berkshire	37	Gower	5
Devon	24	Surrey	477	Pembrokeshire	23
Dorset	466	Sussex	39	Channel Islands (e 51)	51
Hampshire	287	England, E (e 135)	132	Jersey	50
Isle of Wight	2	Norfolk	3	Guernsey	1
Somerset	70	Suffolk	129	TOTAL (e 2,196)	1,639

Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans*

Potential breeder

In Dorset, a singing male 'Eastern Subalpine Warbler' *S. c. cantillans/albistriata* was present from 28th April to 2nd May (Holt *et al.* 2018).

Firecrest *Regulus ignicapilla*

Less scarce 1,210 bp 25y trend: **strong increase +1,618%** Low

1,108 singing males. The total number of Firecrests recorded in 2017 was lower than in 2016, but this species is widely under-recorded in counties where it is now numerous; comments from county recorders support the view that Firecrests continue to increase in numbers and range in the south (in 2017, the most northerly birds were in Derbyshire). In Sussex, Mallalieu (2019) located 287 singing Firecrests in 2018, twice as many as reported in 2017, and the county population was estimated at 700 territories. Of those, 72% were found in conifer plantations, with the majority in Norway Spruce *Picea abies* or Western Hemlock *Tsuga heterophylla*. Territory density varied but reached 18 in a single 1-km square in West Sussex. In Surrey, a raptor worker reported finding Firecrests in almost every wood visited, while in Devon, where breeding was first recorded in 2014, 19 territories were reported in 2017. Firecrests are thought to be particularly overlooked in Wales, where there is much suitable habitat rarely visited by birders. Two Welsh county recorders received no Firecrest records in 2017 but provided estimates based on past experience and the availability of habitat.

Clements *et al.* (2017) suggested that the UK population exceeded 4,000 pairs/singing males. Firecrests do not yet occur in a sufficient number of BBS squares to produce an annual index, largely because of the clustered nature of their distribution and the relatively limited national



Tom Gale

Firecrest *Regulus ignicapilla*

range. However, county estimates suggest that the total population is now likely to exceed 6,000 pairs, well above the threshold for a rare breeding bird; consequently, this is the last report in which the species will appear.

Over the last decade, Rob Clements and Marcus Ward have studied this species in the New Forest (Hampshire), assessing populations and densities, and provide the following status summary.

Since Firecrests were first recorded breeding in Britain, in 1962, their expansion in range and numbers can be characterised in two phases. Up to 2000, total numbers reported to the RBBP rarely exceeded 100, with only 19 singing males/territories in 1992. After 2000, a phase of rapid expansion in numbers ensued, with over 600 reported in 2007 and more than 1,000 by 2014. Surveys in the New Forest saw an increase in the core 46-km² study area from 104 territories in 2009 to 498 in 2016. A similar increase outside the New Forest led to an estimated population of 3,000 pairs for Hampshire as a whole.

The evidence suggests that range expansion is slow, with only low numbers reported from counties such as Hertfordshire, Essex, Oxfordshire and Bedfordshire, to the north and east of the core range. However, within Hampshire and Sussex infilling continues apace, with Firecrests now common in village and town gardens, hedgerows and pure deciduous woodland, well away from the conifer woods where the species first appeared. Mild winters and the increasing numbers overwintering in coastal and urban habitats appear to have fuelled this growth. A continued expansion of the species' range seems likely.

Firecrest		Buckinghamshire	48	Derbyshire	1
	SM	Essex	2	Herefordshire	1
England, SW (e 4,783)	609	Greater London	2	Staffordshire	1
Avon	3	Hertfordshire	3	Worcestershire	2
Devon	19	Kent	31	Wales (e 54)	13
Dorset	18	Oxfordshire	12	Denbigh & Flint	1
Gloucestershire	21	Surrey	59	Gwent	11
Hampshire	478	Sussex	145	Radnorshire	1
Somerset	3	England, E (e 211)	97	Channel Islands (e 16)	21
Wiltshire	67	Cambridgeshire	1	Guernsey	14
England, SE (e 1,130)	363	Norfolk	54	Jersey	7
Bedfordshire	4	Suffolk	42	England, C (e 12)	5
Berkshire	57			TOTAL (e 6,206)	1,108

‘Fair Isle Wren’ *Troglodytes troglodytes fridariensis*

Rare 39 bp (no trend available) Near-complete

45 territories. In 2017, there was an increase of 11 territories (from 34 in 2016) to 45, the highest we have reported since 2010. Fledged young were recorded in a minimum of 12 territories. The first young were seen on 1st June, the joint-earliest date on record.

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*

Occasional breeder

In Northumberland, a single bird remained in suitable breeding habitat from early May until 16th June; there have been other summer records in this general area in recent years and the last confirmed breeding, in 2012, when two pairs bred, was also in Northumberland.

Redwing *Turdus iliacus*

Very rare 24 bp 25y trend: **stable -24%** High

24 sites: 4–25 pairs. The number of reports of breeding Redwings fluctuate widely, between six and 40 in the last 20 years. Much of this variation is related to observer effort and we urge residents and visitors to Highland in particular to be on the lookout for singing birds and potential breeding attempts.

Scotland, N & W

Highland 15 sites: one pair bred, two probable breeding pairs and 12 singing males. Outer Hebrides Three sites: two possible breeding pairs and one singing male. Shetland Six sites: three pairs bred, three probable breeding pairs and one singing male.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*

Rare 58 bp 25y trend: **weak decrease -30%** High

47 sites: 18–60 pairs. The overall totals are broadly consistent with recent years but in 2017 no breeding Black Redstarts were reported from either Wales or Scotland.

Black Redstart											
	S	CP	TP	Kent	4	6	8	Derbyshire	1	0	1
England, SW	3	1	4	Surrey	1	0	1	Staffordshire	1	0	1
Devon	1	0	1	Sussex	2	1	3	England, N	4	1	4
Hampshire	1	0	2	England, E	12	9	19	Cheshire & Wirral	1	0	1
Somerset	1	1	1	Cambridgeshire	3	2	4	Cleveland	1	1	1
England, SE	26	7	31	Norfolk	2	2	5	Greater Manchester	1	0	1
Essex	3	0	3	Suffolk	7	5	10	Yorkshire	1	0	1
Greater London	16	0	16	England, C	2	0	2	TOTALS	47	18	60

‘Blue-headed Wagtail’ *Motacilla f. flava*

Very rare 1 bp (no trend available) High

Two sites: two mixed pairs. Since 2008 we have received records in all years apart from 2012, and from 12 counties, mostly in England: three in the southwest, one in the southeast (Oxfordshire in 2017), two in eastern, three in central and two in northern England; and one in Scotland. This covers much of the range of Yellow Wagtail *M. f. flavissima* (Balmer *et al.* 2013).

England, SE

Oxfordshire One site: a male paired with a female of undetermined race fledged young.

England, E

Norfolk One site: a male bred with a female *flavissima*, seen feeding young.

‘White Wagtail’ *Motacilla a. alba*

Very rare 3 bp (no trend available) High

Four sites: 1–22 pairs. In the Channel Islands, White Wagtail is a rare but annual breeder, with an estimate of ten pairs on both Guernsey and Jersey. Elsewhere, White Wagtail is a regular breeder only at the far extremities of Britain, as exemplified in 2017.

England, SW

Isles of Scilly One site: one pair bred, seen collecting food for young.

Scotland, N & W

Shetland One site: one singing male.

‘Scandinavian Rock Pipit’ *Anthus petrosus littoralis*

Occasional breeder

In Lothian, a bird resembling *A. p. littoralis* was found paired with a nominate *petrosus*, at a different site from that in 2016. The nominate bird was carrying food for young; the *littoralis* was seen in the same territory but was not observed carrying food.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

Less scarce 500+ bp* (no trend available) Moderate

17–121 pairs. Hawfinches are notoriously difficult to locate in the breeding season and what we are able to report each year is largely dependent on the efforts of a few individuals. After a bumper total of 509 pairs in 2016, only 121 pairs were reported in 2017. Three areas dominate the figures: the Forest of Dean (Gloucestershire/Gwent, where an independent estimate of up to 650 pairs was made by Lewis 2018), the New Forest (Hampshire) and Kent. County estimates are a better guide to the true national figure yet even they reach only around 750 pairs, with the bulk in those same three areas, plus Meirionnydd and Sussex.

* Clements (2013).

Hawfinch					
	TP	Suffolk	1	East Glamorgan	e
England, SW (e 595)	53	England, N (e 6)	4	Gower	3
Gloucestershire	28	Cumbria	3	Gwent	24
Hampshire	21	Lancs & N Mersey	e	Meirionnydd	5
Wiltshire	4	Yorkshire	1	Montgomeryshire	2
England, SE (e 40)	12	Wales (e 82)	46	Radnorshire	5
Kent	11	Breconshire	4	Scotland, Mid (e 14)	3
Sussex	1	Caernarfonshire	1	North-east Scotland	e
England, E (e 16)	3	Carmarthenshire	1	Perth & Kinross	3
Norfolk	2	Denbigh & Flint	1	TOTALS (e 753)	121

Common Redpoll *Acanthis flammea*

Very rare 12 bp (no trend available) High

Eight sites: 5–9 pairs. No records were received from Argyll, Orkney or the Outer Hebrides, though it is likely that some Common Redpolls were present among breeding Lesser Redpolls *A. cabaret* there. In Orkney at least, this is because records of breeding redpolls are often not identified to species. Both species breed in Shetland and at least nine pairs were tentatively identified there.

Scotland, N & W

Shetland Eight sites: (1) two pairs displaying in May and at least one pair bred; (2)–(5) one pair bred; (6)–(8) one possible breeding pair.

Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis*

Rare 79 bp*

(no trend available)

Moderate

6–28 pairs. These records represent only a small sample of the Scottish population, estimated at 79 pairs in 2011.

* Hayhow *et al.* (2018a).

Scotland, Mid

Moray & Nairn Cairngorms: one possible breeding pair, seven singing males. North-east Scotland Cairngorms: three pairs bred, one probable breeding pair.

Scotland, N & W

Highland Cairngorms: three pairs bred, one probable and three possible breeding pairs plus four singing males. Ben Nevis range: two possible breeding pairs, one singing male. Northern Highland: one probable breeding pair, one singing male.

Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus*

Less scarce 1,079 bp* 27y trend (survey): strong increase +814%

Low

116 territories. Following the full survey in 2016, only limited information was received for 2017, including 12 pairs at three sites in Cornwall, and 101 territories in two extensive coastal areas of south Devon. Three pairs fledged ten young at one site on Jersey, Channel Islands.

* Jeffs *et al.* (2018).

Appendix 1. RBBP taxa for which no data were received in 2017.

The following rare taxa are regular breeders in the UK, but in 2017 no breeding records were submitted: ‘St Kilda Wren’ *Troglodytes troglodytes hirtensis* (St Kilda, Outer Hebrides, only); Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla* (Channel Islands only); Parrot Crossbill *Loxia pytyopsittacus* (Highland only).

Appendix 2. Rare non-native species considered by RBBP recorded in 2017

Data on the following rare non-native breeding species have been received for 2017.

Cackling Goose *Branta hutchinsii* One of unknown origin bred with a Barnacle Goose *B. leucopsis* and the pair was seen with three hybrid young in Sussex on 5th June.

Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus* One was seen paired with a Canada Goose *Branta canadensis* in Berkshire on 28th March, but no further breeding evidence was recorded.

Snow Goose *Anser caerulescens* No information was received on the resident and possibly breeding birds in Oxfordshire or Yorkshire. The breeding flock resident on Coll, Argyll, was reduced to 12 birds and again no young were reported. Breeding there was last confirmed in 2014.

White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons* A pair of unknown origin and unspecified race appeared with two young at a site in Essex on 27th August; they had not bred there but are likely to have bred in Essex or Greater London.

Black Swan *Cygnus atratus* A total of ten pairs was reported. Four pairs bred: in Cheshire & Wirral (one pair fledged one young), Hampshire (two pairs hatched a total of eight young, of which at least five fledged) and Sussex (one pair fledged six young; also a single female laid a clutch of infertile eggs). All other records related to long-staying pairs in five other counties (Cleveland, Denbigh & Flint, Derbyshire, Dorset and Wiltshire). In Wiltshire, there were two pairs and a single paired with a Mute Swan *C. olor*.

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* One pair was present at the regular site in Wiltshire, and probably bred there in 2017.

Muscovy Duck *Cairina moschata* A total of 16 pairs was reported with breeding confirmed in four counties: Cambridgeshire (ten pairs, a minimum of 65 young of which at least 14 fledged), Derbyshire (three pairs bred successfully), West Midlands (one pair bred) and Yorkshire (one pair fledged at least four young). A pair at the regular site in Breconshire did not breed.

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina* Sixty-seven pairs reported is another new record total, and come from a total of 39 sites in 13 counties. The Cotswold Water Park in Gloucestershire (one pair bred, 11 other pairs) and Wiltshire (two pairs bred, 12 other pairs) remains the stronghold and these numbers are thought to be underestimates. Breeding was also confirmed in Berkshire (one pair bred, four other pairs), Derbyshire (two pairs bred), Essex (16 pairs bred), Greater London (four pairs bred), Hertfordshire (one pair bred, one other pair), Norfolk (one pair bred), Northamptonshire (one pair bred) and Yorkshire (one pair bred). Elsewhere, pairs were reported from Cambridgeshire (5), Lincolnshire (3), Leicestershire & Rutland (1).

Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis* One pair again bred in Surrey. Otherwise the only birds reported in the breeding season were a female in Cambridgeshire and two males in Clyde.

Reeves's Pheasant *Syrnaticus reevesii* At one site in Wiltshire, two males and a female were seen; elsewhere in the county there was a single bird. There were reports of single birds at two sites in Moray & Nairn.

Golden Pheasant *Chrysolophus pictus* Golden Pheasants were reported from Dorset (birds at three sites), Highland (single birds at two sites), Isles of Scilly (one site) and Suffolk. Breeding may have been attempted in Suffolk, as up to eight adults including three males and a female were reported, but no immatures have been seen at this site since 2007.

Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus* Breeding in the wild was recorded in Cornwall (three broods reported and an estimated population of 30 birds) and Lincolnshire (at least one brood but five males and four females present at a site where Peafowl have been present for about 30 years). There were also at least 15 birds at one site in Dorset. Cheke (2019) showed that this species is grossly under-recorded in the UK and suggested that some populations are self-sustaining.

Harris's Hawk *Parabuteo unicinctus* A pair bred in Yorkshire, fledging two young. In Cambridgeshire, a male attempted to pair with a Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* early in the season, but it was displaced by a male Buzzard.

Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo* The regular pair nested in the Forest of Bowland, Lancashire & N Merseyside, fledging two young.

Monk Parakeet *Myiopsitta monachus* There were up to 16 birds in Greater London during January to March, but none was reported thereafter. In Hertfordshire, there were three in March and two in November. No breeding was recorded.

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This report is the 13th that Mark Holling has produced in his role as Secretary of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel, and the last, since Mark is retiring in March 2020. He has served as Secretary for just short of 14 years, making him the longest-standing Secretary since the Panel's establishment, in 1972. Over this period, Mark has driven forward many improvements with customary enthusiasm, working tirelessly to improve data submission from the wide range of sources of information on rare breeding birds. He has established and strengthened collaborations with multiple recording networks in both Britain and Ireland, and it is a testament to his efforts that his final report is the first in the Panel's history to receive direct data submissions from every recording area in the UK. In addition, he has overseen the move to a new GIS database, establishing innovations in communications and networking, continually improved the RBBP's annual report and promoted the use of rare breeding bird data for a wide range of conservation uses.

The Panel is delighted that Mark will continue to help its work in a voluntary capacity following his retirement, but hopes that he enjoys a well-earned rest with more time to birdwatch, cycle and travel. A new Secretary will be recruited in early 2020.

Mark Eaton, Chairman RBBP

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Find out more about the Panel at www.rbbp.org.uk



Records of rare breeding birds in 2018 are now being analysed. County recorders are reminded that any outstanding data should be submitted on the spreadsheet downloadable from www.rbbp.org.uk as soon as possible.