

Bird Atlas 2007-11

BirdWatch Ireland is mobilising its 14,000 members to undertake a stock-take of Ireland's birds – the first such operation for nearly twenty years. The aim is to understand how recent changes to our climate and habitats are affecting Ireland's birds.

Bird Atlas 2007-11 is a four-year project to check on the numbers and distributions of the birds of Ireland, as well as those of Britain. It is a joint project of BirdWatch Ireland, the British Trust for Ornithology and the Scottish Ornithologists' Club, and the aim is to survey over 250 species of bird. The results will set the agenda for bird conservation over the next two decades, helping to answer questions such as:

- How well are our Robins, Blue Tits and other familiar garden birds faring?
- Is Corncrake conservation working?
- Are birds spreading further north as a result of climate change?
- Have any breeding species become extinct since the last atlas, either regionally or nationally?
- How widespread are Buzzards and Little Egrets now as breeding species?
- How are birds doing at Ireland's internationally important wetlands and seabird colonies?
- Have the serious and worrying declines in populations of traditional and once-familiar farmland species such as Skylark, Yellowhammer and Lapwing continued?

BirdWatch Ireland chairman Kieran Grace said: *“Bird numbers provide a barometer of how the natural world is coping with pressures from climate and habitat changes. Bird Atlas 2007-11 will deliver vital evidence for conservation practitioners.”*

On 1st November, and for the next four years, birdwatchers will be taking to the hills, tramping around fields, strolling through woodland or simply reporting on the birds that visit their gardens. They will record, count and seek out as many species as they can, to see just how much has changed since the last Winter Atlas (1981-84). Next summer they will search out breeding species, comparing their observations to those recorded in the last Breeding Atlas (1988-91). BirdWatch Ireland is keen to involve as many birdwatchers as possible, whatever their levels of knowledge and experience [See note 2].

Brian Caffrey, BirdWatch Ireland's Atlas Coordinator, said:

“The aim is to cover every ten-kilometre square in Ireland, and the BTO and SOC will be organising the same sort of survey in Britain. A project like this relies heavily on records submitted by the general public, and I would urge anyone with even a passing interest in birds and the natural world to send us reports of the birds they see, be they common or rare. There is a real sense of concern about how birds are coping with changes to our climate and their habitats.”

Oran O'Sullivan, CEO of BirdWatch Ireland, said:

“This is the biggest project that Ireland's birdwatchers have ever taken on. BirdWatch Ireland staff have been making preparations for this survey for three years and finally we are now able to fire the starting gun. It's going to be like the start of a marathon, but with binoculars and notebooks instead of trainers and tracksuits – and everyone will be starting off in different places, of course.”

<http://www.bto.org/birdatlas/>

Bird Atlas 2007-11 will cover the whole of Britain and Ireland during the winter and breeding season. BirdWatch Ireland will be working in partnership with the British Trust for Ornithology and the Scottish Ornithologists' Club. Fieldwork will start on 1st November 2007 and will continue through to 2011.

Birdwatchers of all levels of experience and ability can get involved in Bird Atlas 2007-11 in one way or another. There are three levels of participation:

- Are you taking a walk or going birdwatching any time, anywhere? Your records can help to fill in the squares on the Atlas maps. For example, have you seen a hovering Kestrel, the blue flash of a Kingfisher or a Barn Owl flying over the road at dusk? If so, tell us about it.
- Do you know your birds well? We are also looking for keen birdwatchers who will visit 2km by 2km tetrads to identify and count all of the birds they see.
- A huge proportion of Ireland's birds are found in gardens. Simply letting us know what types of bird you see in your own garden will be of enormous help.

For full information on what is involved, please visit
http://www.bto.org/birdatlas/taking_part/index.htm

For more information about Bird Atlas 2007-11, please visit
<http://www.bto.org/birdatlas/about.htm>

BirdWatch Ireland is the largest independent conservation organisation in Ireland and the designated national BirdLife International partner for the Republic of Ireland. Its aim is the conservation of wild birds and their natural habitats. Established in 1968, it currently has over 14,000 members and supporters and a local network of over 20 branches nationwide. It owns or manages an increasing number of reserves which protect threatened habitats and the birds that rely on them, produces several publications dealing with birds and nature conservation in Ireland, and carries out educational and survey work.

Images are freely available for use in association with this press release. Please contact nhatch@birdwatchireland.ie to request digital images.

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The British Trust for Ornithology

<http://www.bto.org/>

The Scottish Ornithologist's Club

<http://www.the-soc.org.uk/>

BirdLife International

<http://www.birdlife.org/>

Clare Birdwatching

<http://www.clarebirdwatching.com/>

Birdwatch Galway

<http://www.birdwatchgalway.org/>

Royal Society For The Protection Of Birds

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/>

Bird Populations Journal

<http://birdpop.org/birdpop.htm>

Birds and the environment

<http://www.jncc.gov.uk/page-2144>