



How to take part in BirdTrack

Taking part in BirdTrack is easy and fun. There are a series of simple forms for you to fill in which will give us information about you, the sites where you go birdwatching, the time you go birdwatching and most importantly the birds you see! BirdTrack will use the proportion of the birdwatching lists that include each species to measure the progress of migration and to map the distribution of particular species. All we need is a list of the species that you saw during a birdwatching visit to a particular site (even your garden). Any counts that you would like to contribute will help us to build up a more complete picture of movements, migrations and distributions. You can also use BirdTrack to store all of your birdwatching records in an easily accessible and safe format.

To participate in BirdTrack you need to do the following:

1. Read the instructions on this web site, or download the instructions for printing or reading offline if you prefer.
2. Choose at least one site where you will collect records (more can be added later).
3. Go birdwatching and note all the species that you see.
4. Go to the BirdTrack web site and register as a recorder. If you took part in Migration Watch or any other online survey organised by the BTO then please use your existing username and password.
5. Enter the location of your chosen site(s) or select from the drop-down lists.
6. Enter the date and time of your visit and the site that you visited.
7. Check off the species that you saw on the displayed list.

In addition to species lists based on standard site visits we also welcome casual records. We hope that you will have great fun participating in BirdTrack and that you will return to the website frequently to enter more data and to find out what's happening in your area and around the country. All these results will be updated every night throughout the year. In addition to viewing national and regional summaries you will be able to view all of your own information and to compare it with the regional figures.

We recommend that you read through the instruction pages in order to gain a clear overview of what the project is about. Once you have read each page click the "next - ..." link at the bottom to continue.

How to register

To ensure the integrity of the BirdTrack data it is important that we should know who our observers are and that we should be able to contact them if we have any queries about their records. We will also use email to circulate any important announcements or information about BirdTrack.

To take part in Bird Track you will therefore need to register as a recorder. This involves entering your name, address and e-mail address. When you register, you will need to choose a password. You only need to register ONCE.

If you do not already have a BTO user name and password register for BirdTrack [here](#).

If you have already contributed to Migration Watch or any other online surveys organised by the BTO please use the same username and password for BirdTrack. For a password reminder click [here](#). If





you are already registered with BTO online surveys you will be asked to complete a reduced version of the registration form when you join BirdTrack.

See appendix 1 for advice on how to obtain a free email address

See appendix 2 for advice on choosing a user name and password

You will probably want to select the option that allows you to be identified automatically each time you return to the BirdTrack website. This option places a small file (called a cookie) on your computer that allows the BirdTrack website to identify you automatically if you return to it from the same PC. If you prefer not to use this system then you will need to use your user id and password to login each time you return to the BirdTrack website to enter data or to view your own results. You do not need to login if you just want to view the national or regional results that are updated each day.

Whichever login method you choose we strongly recommend that you keep a written record of your user id and password in a safe place. Please write down your password in a way that is not obvious or accessible. We want to be sure that your records do come from you so please don't share your user id and password with others. There will be a few common sense exceptions to this rule, for example where a family enter their records under a single user id. Your registration and user id will apply to BirdTrack and to other online projects organised by the BTO that you participate in now or choose to join in the future.

During the registration process we ask your permission for us to forward your bird records and personal details to relevant local bird recorders. We hope you will agree to this so that your records can also contribute to ornithology and conservation at a local level. You will also be asked some simple questions about membership of the BirdTrack partner organisations and about receiving communications from them.

In order to register for BirdTrack you will need to agree to the Terms and Conditions for the use of the BTO website and to the BTO's privacy statement that explains how we safeguard your personal data. We also ask you to agree to receive email communications about BTO surveys. Once you have reviewed the relevant statements, and are happy with them, simply check the box at the bottom of the registration form.

Recording sites

For this project, we need to know where you go birdwatching. You can register as many sites as you wish, but records from sites that you visit regularly are the most useful, for example your local park or gravel pits. These sites are assigned to you within the BirdTrack database. If a friend wishes to enter records from the same site then they will need to register it under their own user id.

The information that we require is straightforward:

Site name (up to 40 characters long)

Grid Reference OR Postcode OR point to a map to get grid reference

All of the last three location recording methods are used to derive a grid reference that we will use to map your data. We have provided three different methods to make it as easy as possible for a wide range of people to use the system. The new Google mapping system (including satellite images) is





now available for Britain, Ireland and the Channel Isles at present. Postcodes are not used in the Republic of Ireland. When registering a site, we will automatically assign it to a county unless that square covers more than one county. In such cases, the site confirmation page will prompt you to choose the most appropriate county from a list of options.

An alternative method of adding a site to your list is to select it from one of the drop-down lists on the right hand side of the site registration page. These lists now include the main birdwatching sites in Ireland and major RSPB reserves. To add one of these sites to your list just select it from the drop-down menu and click go. You can also select from a list of top county sites by simply selecting the county and then selecting your site from the new drop-down list. For both methods, the name, county and grid reference will be added to your personal sites list automatically.

What is a site?

A site can be almost as big (up to a 10km square) or as small as you like. For most BirdTrack recorders a site is going to be a regular birdwatching area such as your garden, a local park or a nature reserve. For these sites you will be able to provide us with a fairly accurate location, such as postcode for the garden (eg IP24 2PU) or a four-figure grid reference for a nature reserve (eg TL8781). If your site overlaps two or more 1km squares, please give the grid reference for the 1km square in which most of the site lies. If you are birdwatching in an area where it is difficult to provide an accurate location, such as Rannoch Moor or Thetford Forest, then a 10km grid reference will be sufficient (eg TL88). After you have registered a site, the site name will appear on a personalised site list every time you use the data entry system. You can then select the appropriate site. If you discover that you haven't registered the site for which you want to enter data you will be able to register it before you proceed.

You can also now upgrade or downgrade your sites for ease of use, and this is ideal for entering casual records. Downgraded sites won't appear in the drop-down list when you enter a species list, nor will they appear on your main 'View my Sites' page. You can also upgrade these sites at a later date if needed.

Most of the time we will map results by 10 km squares and present other results at a regional level. For such analyses it is not vital to provide a highly accurate location for every site although it will be helpful if you are as precise as possible.

Providing accurate grid references will be really useful because it will allow us to disseminate bird records to County Recorders for use in bird reports (with the observer's permission). It would also help if you use site names that are likely to be understood by your local bird recorder.

Recording visits

For each birdwatching visit we will ask you for some simple information. We will need to know where you went birdwatching, the date and the times of your observations. Recording times are not essential but they do give us a valuable measure of observer effort so we encourage you to record them. You also have the opportunity to enter notes about your visit. These might cover topics such as the weather conditions or which parts of the site were covered.





Recording your sightings

We need your lists!

The success of BirdTrack relies on your birdwatching lists. We need to gather a large number of lists at all times of the year from throughout Britain and Ireland. We prefer complete lists of birds you have seen because the proportion of lists with a given species provides a good measure of frequency of occurrence. Incomplete lists and casual records can also be entered so as to provide a comprehensive record of what you have seen.

It is very important for us to know whether the list that you have recorded is a complete list of everything seen or heard during your visit. If it was please check the box near the top of the species list form. Please note that it doesn't matter if you missed species that were present - we only need to know that you have recorded all the species that you observed.

You can either simply record the presence of a species using a tick box, or give a count. Some birdwatchers will like to be able to provide a count whilst others will be happy just to record presence - the choice is yours!

When you first enter records for a site you will be presented with a list of about 200 species. These are the species we consider you most likely to come across in your day-to-day birdwatching. The remainder of the species on the British and Irish Lists will be accessible from a drop-down menu at the bottom of the page and you can add these onto your list. Simply enter counts or tick the boxes for the species you have seen. Next time you enter records for that site you will just see the list of species that you saw on the first visit. You can add in more species by using the drop-down menu. The idea is to build up a list unique to each site, so you will just see the species that you have recorded at each site over time.

The lists also contain a selection of the most regularly reported escapes such as Black Swan and Bar-headed Goose. We are keen for you to record escaped species on your lists. If you see an escape that is not on the list please let us know by emailing the BirdTrack Organiser (birdtrack@bto.org) and we will add it in.

Count accuracy

Providing counts of birds are of more value to us and to local bird recorders. It may often be difficult to make an accurate count and in these circumstances it is important to records that the count was approximate. If you have been unable to count the birds accurately then please use an accuracy code of circa (c) or plus (+). Please only use ONE measure of count accuracy.

Within BirdTrack we suggest using circa to mean 'best estimate' eg c300 Golden Plover and plus to mean a minimum estimate eg 250+ Golden Plover. The c and + codes should be entered in the count box alongside the numbers as shown here.

Casual Records

You can record your sightings that you make on a casual basis, such as the first Swallow of the year even if you didn't make a complete list. There is a separate Casual Records Form that you can use. The Casual Records Form allows you to enter up to six records with the standard information such as site, date, species and count.





Notes

The BirdTrack system includes the facility to enter notes against each individual species record. Notes can be used to record numbers of different age and sex categories, information about unusual plumage or moult or anything else that you think is of interest. The notes facility is provided mainly for the use of individual observers but any notes that you do record will also be passed on to local bird recorders (where you have given permission for your records to be forwarded).

If you are lucky enough to see a species that is not included on any of the lists please email details to the BirdTrack Organiser (birdtrack@bto.org).

Download instructions

For those of you who would like to be able to read more about BirdTrack at your leisure, we have provided a copy of the instructions on this page for you to download. These files contain identical information to that found in our drop-down menus and help buttons.

This download is supplied as a .pdf file so you will need Adobe Acrobat Reader installed to read or print it. If you do not already have this software it can be downloaded free from the Adobe web site (<http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep.html>).

Please note that this file may take several minutes to download, depending on the speed of your modem: Download Instructions.

Help for birdwatchers without their own internet access

You may like to offer to enter data for a friend who does not have internet access. In that case please register them as a separate observer and enter their records under their own user id. You will need to give your own e-mail address so that you can pass on any queries about their records.

For those who do not have their own internet facilities, public libraries and a range of other outlets provide free or low cost access to the internet. UK Online Centres provide such facilities together with help and advice for those who do not have previous experience of using the internet. Their website will allow you to find out about your nearest UK Online Centres:

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/ukonlinecentres>

This is the last of the BirdTrack instruction pages. Please use the menus at the top of the page to view other parts of the BirdTrack web site.

Appendix 1 – Help with obtaining an email address and ISPs

E-mail is a useful facility for contacting the BirdTrack organisers or support team with queries or if you encountered problems with the system. It is also important that we should be able to contact you if we have queries about your records. Most users will already have an account with an Internet Service Provider (ISP) which will include email facilities. However, if you do not, then the summary below may provide some help regarding getting your own email and, if you don't already have one, choosing an ISP that best suits your needs.





Already a home user, but need to obtain an email address?

If you are a home user, you will probably already have your email set up. If not, then the section below on ISPs should help in getting you online. However, if you do not own a computer at home, and would still like to contact BirdTrack via email, then we recommend you register with a third-party Webmail service that lets you send and receive e-mail via any internet connected computer at your local library, or even anywhere in the world! Links to a few popular ones are shown below.

Webmail providers

MSN Hotmail	http://lc1.law13.passport.com
Yahoo	http://www.yahoo.com
Lycos	http://www.lycos.co.uk
Netscape	http://my.screename.aol.com/_cqr/login/login.psp?siteId=nscpenusmail&authLev=2&mcState=initialized&triedAimAuth=y
Webmail	http://webmail.mail.com/scripts/common/entrance.main

We cannot recommend any particular supplier; it is up to you to evaluate which service best suits your needs.

Internet service providers

If you are currently accessing BirdTrack away from home (for example, from work or a public library) and you would like to get access from home with your own ISP, then this section describes the different types that are available, and the general issues you should be aware of when choosing an ISP.

Types of ISP

Dial-up ISP: This is where you connect to the internet via your phone line using a modem (typically at 56K bits per second (bps)). With dial-up ISPs, you cannot access the Internet and use the telephone at the same time (unless you have a second phone line installed). There are two distinct types of dial-up ISP:

Pay-as-you-Go ISP: You don't pay any monthly subscription, but you do pay for the phone call while you are connected to the Internet. The cost of the phone call will be dependent on you telephone provider.

Subscription ISP: You pay a monthly subscription charge, but then do not pay for the phone call while you are connected to the Internet. The cost of the subscription charge varies depending on when you want to access the Internet (i.e. peak, off-peak or both)

Broadband ISP: Broadband ISPs offer a much faster connection than dial-up ISPs (typically between 150K and 1024K bps). You pay a subscription charge, which is dependent on the speed you want to connect to Internet, but then pay no additional charges. Broadband also has the advantage of not tying up your phone line, so you can use your telephone and the internet at the same time.

'Non-Computer' ISP: These are ISPs which provide Internet access for devices other than personal computers. These can include mobile phones, WebTV, personal organisers etc. These ISPs typically offer very limited Internet access and are not supported by the BTO.

Support

A lot of Internet Service Providers offer technical support to their customers, either via email or over the phone. Note however, that a lot of providers use a premium rate (perhaps £1 per minute) phone





number for their help-desk. It is therefore advisable to check this out beforehand, and preferably choose an ISP with low-cost support.

E-mail

Most ISPs provide an e-mail service, although this requires a specific connection to your home computer, which should meet your needs in most circumstances. However, if your ISP offers a Webmail service, then it is possible to access your e-mail from anywhere in the world through a web browser. Once registered with an ISP, you needn't be bound to a specific, supplied e-mail account or their own Webmail. You can still choose to use one of the global e-mail accounts, described above, that will work everywhere. In general web-based e-mail is likely to be less secure than e-mail supplied to a specific computer.

Additional Software

For accessing the BTO website, we recommend using either Internet Explorer (version 6 for PC or version 5 for Apple Mac) or Netscape (version 6 or later). Both of these are freely available, and Internet Explorer even comes supplied with most distributions of Microsoft Windows.

Some ISPs may provide their own software, but we recommend against using this for accessing BTO Online, as they have been known to sometimes cause problems.

For information on Internet Explorer, please visit: <http://www.microsoft.com/ie>

For information on Netscape, please visit <http://www.netscape.com>

In addition, it is also advisable to invest in an up-to-date virus checker and possibly a personal firewall, to protect your computer from malicious damage from outside. Such software can be purchased from all good computer retailers or over the internet.

Naturally, the BTO cannot recommend any particular supplier, it is up to you to evaluate which service best suits your needs. It is sometimes possible to get a good deal if you subscribe for Internet access as part of a package deal, for example with phone-line rental or cable TV.

To help you make the right choice, you can find further, more detailed information of UK Internet service providers at ISP review (<http://www.ispreview.co.uk/>).

Note: It is important that you keep us informed of any changes of email address, so we are able to contact you if there is a query about your records.

Appendix 2 - Advice on choosing a user name and password

You need to have a unique user name (sometimes called a user id) to participate in BirdTrack. The BirdTrack computer will suggest a user name to you, made up of your first two initials and your surname sometimes followed by a number. We recommend that you accept this. However, you can replace this default name with a name of your own choice provided that it is not already in use. We recommend that user names be made up of letters and numbers only and that they should start with a letter. The absolute maximum length is 32 characters but user names will normally be much shorter than this.





Passwords should be a minimum of 6 characters long and should normally contain a mixture of letters and numbers. Passwords are case sensitive so unusual capitalisation will help to make them secure. You can also include characters other than letters and numbers. A good password should be meaningful to you alone. Care should be taken to avoid obvious passwords that could easily be guessed such as your name, bird names (English or Latin) or your car registration number. A good way to make up an easily memorable password is to use the first letters of a phrase that is known to you alone. BirdTrack does not use encrypted Internet connections (https). We recommend that your BirdTrack password should be different from any passwords that you use in situations requiring a very high level of security such as Internet banking or your computer account at work.

You will be able to obtain an automatic password reminder by email (sent to your registered email address only) if you forget your password. If you forget your user name please e-mail web.support@bto.org for advice. Please do not register a second time just because you have forgotten your user name.

