



BTO Training Courses 2010 Bird Survey Techniques Information Sheet



Jill Pakenham

Bird Survey Techniques Workshops and Residential Courses

Having a 'focus' is one of the most satisfying aspects of birdwatching and taking part in a BTO survey is an easy and valuable way of gaining such a focus! From the simplicity of providing 'Roving Records' for *BirdAtlas 2007-2011*, to taking on a Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) square you will be having fun - and providing important scientific information at the same time.

These courses are designed to help people learn about, and develop confidence in, the main methods used by the BTO to survey birds in differing habitats and situations. As well as being very informative, our courses are relaxed and, we hope, enjoyable and we encourage questions and discussions at any point.

All the courses, both one-day workshops and the longer residential ones, consist of useful and informative indoor sessions learning about each technique in turn, alternated with outdoor practical sessions where we try the methods out for ourselves.

Course Content

The courses start with an introduction to the whole subject of why we survey birds and how surveying can be used to show population levels and trends, to find out about habitat associations and why habitat recording is so important. We also look at some of the main 'rules' to consider when surveying birds.

Our first method is the increasingly important line transects, and we use the BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey as our basis for this section. We concentrate on how to record the birds, and just as importantly how to record the habitat. Out in the field we practice what we have just learned, and attempt several sections of a transect recording both birds and habitat as we go – this usually creates a lot of discussion!



Luke Delve

Back inside, we look at the new BTO *BirdAtlas 2007-2011* and examine why we need a new atlas, before moving on to how to identify and request tetrads for fieldwork and how to make casual records. This section will also demonstrate how to enter your records both on paper and via the BirdAtlas website. If time allows we will also go out in the field and have a go at a mock atlas visit.

This forms the basis for all our courses, but the residential ones will go into each section in more detail. In addition, our practical sessions are longer to enable everyone to really get to grips with each method and feel confident about it. We will also look in more depth at why we survey birds and, importantly, which type of survey to use in different situations.

Residential courses - a more relaxed way to learn

On residential courses, as well as covering the topics above, we will also investigate some of the other methods used in BTO surveys, such as Point Counts, Single Species Surveys (Skylark, Woodcock and Nightjar are examples of these), Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) and other wetland methods, Colony Counts, Nest Record Scheme and so-called 'hybrid' methods.

Longer courses give more opportunity to relax and enjoy the beautiful surroundings of all the Field Studies Centres we use as venues, and optional pre-breakfast birding allows you to both appreciate the locations, and also, perhaps, to brush up on some of your identification skills! Other additional features include a fun identification quiz, and a sociable evening - possibly in a nearby hostelry!



Su Delve

What's included in the price?

You will be provided with pre-course information including directions on how to find your venue, and at the venue Bird Identification CDs (both lowland and upland habitats) and all course materials, including a course booklet, to take away. For the One-day Workshops tea, coffee and biscuits will also be provided, but you will need to bring your own packed lunch (some venues may offer a café facility, please check availability on booking).

Residential courses offer the above with the addition of full board, from dinner on the first night through to lunch on the final day, although it is also possible to attend these courses as a non-resident, please contact us for prices.

The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) is the UK's leading bird research organisation. Its unique partnership of volunteer birdwatchers and scientific staff bring together information that forms the basis of conservation action in the UK. BTO training courses are designed for BTO members, volunteers and surveyors to help them get the most out of their fieldwork but anyone - amateur or professional - is welcome.

Other information

To get the most from the courses, we would recommend that you have at least a basic knowledge of most of the common bird species by sight and, preferably, by song as well. These courses are not suitable for complete beginners to bird-watching – but see our Bird Identification Courses.



Su Delve

The courses will involve some walking around the venue, but will not be strenuous. However, it will be along footpaths and tracks on occasions. Strong, comfortable walking boots or wellies are therefore important, as is a good selection of warm and weatherproof clothing in natural colours please: no bright reds or yellows! Hats, scarves and gloves may be useful, especially for optional early morning birding.

It is important that you bring your own pair of binoculars and a notebook and pen/pencil is also recommended.

If you would like any more information about any aspects of the courses please contact Su Gough (su.gough@bto.org or 'phone 01842 750 050).

If you would like to book a place on one of our courses, or inquire about costs please contact Robin Anderson at BTO Scotland (robin.anderson@bto.org or 'phone 01786 466 560). Information on the Field Studies Centres used as venues for the residential courses can be found on www.field-studies-council.org

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