

BTO Winter Bird Survey - Turvey 2007/8

As well as a summer breeding bird census there is a winter census taking place over several years with the intention of producing a national atlas. The work involved is more straightforward and less time consuming than the summer census but requires a lot of legwork in a very short period. I volunteered to cover the four tetrads surrounding Turvey - these stretch from Newton Blossomville in the west to Hill Spinney in the east, and from just south of Snelson in the north to Newton Wood and Lodge Farm in the south. Each tetrad covers four square kilometres. The aim is not to cover the entire tetrad but as great a variety of habitat within it as possible within one hour, counting every bird seen or heard. Two counts were made in each tetrad: one in November or December and the second in January or February. The results make interesting reading; here are the top ten birds when all the counts are collated -

1. Wood Pigeon	4690	6. Redwing	113
2. Rook	747	7. Skylark	90
3. Jackdaw	514	8. Blackbird	77
4. Starling	339	9. Crow	56
5. Fieldfare	291	10. Blue Tit	55

As one might expect there is a clear bias towards birds which flock in the open and the clear 'winner' is the Wood Pigeon. If we looked at it in terms of weight, or biomass, the preponderance of Wood Pigeon becomes even more marked. I haven't done the sums for this census but there is a distinct possibility that the biomass of Wood Pigeon is greater than that of all the other birds added together! - with the exception perhaps of the 24 Mute Swans counted. In all some 49 species were located and the top ten were fairly consistent across the squares with the exception of Skylark which represent one flock of some 50 birds faithful to a few fields near Hill Spinney. This flock actually peaked at 160 birds on one occasion outside the counts and attracted a Merlin on at least two occasions. The largest flock of finches located was a mere six Chaffinch! Hopefully, this was simply because the flocks were elsewhere. Of the birds of prey, Buzzard totalled 13, Kestrel 10 and Sparrowhawk 7 (four of these being seen on one day accompanying the large flocks of Wood Pigeon). As might be expected, Pheasants were everywhere before Christmas but markedly scarcer afterwards when no doubt the shooting had taken its toll and the survivors had learnt to keep their heads down. As a cautionary note: Robins leapt from 23rd to 8th in the listings after Christmas

after Christmas simply because they were much easier to locate once they had started singing.

In sum, there are a lot of birds out there but, as any farmer will tell you, the majority are pigeons feeding on oil-seed rape.

Br. John