

# LONDON BIRD ATLAS PROJECT 2007-11

Progress Update - September 2009

## Introduction

The London Natural History Society (LNHS) is currently undertaking a bird atlas project which will run from 2007-11 in conjunction with the national atlas being run by the British Trust for Ornithology over the same period (visit [www.birdatlas.net](http://www.birdatlas.net) for details of the national project).

The project aims to map the distribution of birds within the London area during winter (November – February) and the breeding season (April-July). Breeding season distribution will be compared with those mapped during the previous breeding season atlas projects (1968-72 and 1988-94). Winter distribution maps have never been produced before.

The distribution of each species for both seasons will be produced at a tetrad (2km square) level, with the exception of a small number of sensitive species for which maps will be produced at a lower level or not at all. The LNHS area is a circle including all points within 20 miles of St. Paul's Cathedral. There are a total of 856 tetrads in this area so a significant amount of survey effort is required.

The maps will combine data received from timed visits to every tetrad, with records made on additional survey visits to the tetrads (known as 'roving recording') and other records made by birdwatchers and reported to the LNHS recorders. All records will be validated as appropriate by the local and/or national recording panels.

## Current Progress – the Halfway point

We have now reached the midpoint of the project, with two years of fieldwork

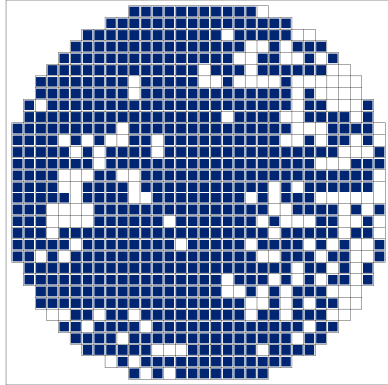
completed in both winter and the breeding season. Progress during the winter has been good, with timed counts completed for 58% of tetrads. Coverage has been lower in the breeding season, however, with only 46% of timed visits complete. The breeding season also requires additional field work to obtain proof of breeding for each species, so this is where the main focus will be during the next two years.

Breeding season results for the halfway point are not yet available as the second year of fieldwork was only completed recently. The remainder of this progress update therefore focuses on winter. Breeding season results will be reported in a later LNHS Newsletter.

A total of 207 species have been reported in the LNHS area during the first two winter survey periods. These include Great northern diver, Iceland gull, Penduline tit, Raven and Snow Bunting, as well as escapes such as Chiloee Wigeon, Cockateil and Peach-faced lovebird. They also include several out-of-season records of summer visitors such as Swallow, Willow warbler and Whitethroat. It should be noted that these records are currently unvalidated, and that some records will need to be checked by the London or national ID panels before being included in the final results.

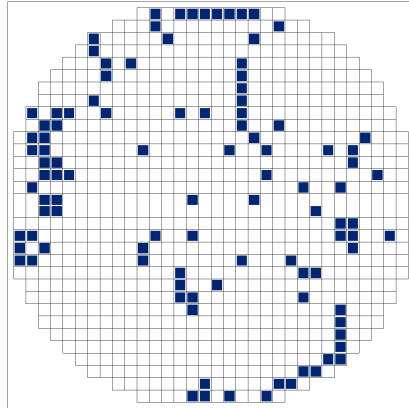
Although good progress has been made so far in winter, it has been patchy, and there are still some parts of the London area where no data has been collected during the first two years. Although we would expect Robin to be present in every tetrad, there are still large gaps in

the provisional distribution map for Robin, especially in Essex and Kent. We need birdwatchers to cover these areas in order to fill in the gaps and to try to find some of the less common species in these areas.



Robin: Winter distribution (2007-8 & 2008-9). Provisional (i.e. unvalidated)

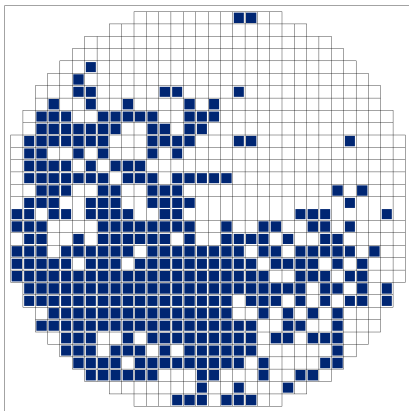
Little egret colonised the UK as recently as the 1990s. In the first two winters, it was reported from over 12% of the tetrads in London – an impressive proportion given that many tetrads will not contain any suitable habitat.



Little egret: Winter 2007-8 & 2008-9. Provisional.

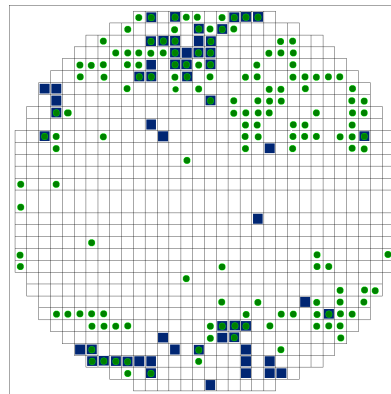
### Winter Season Results – Contrasting fortunes

The provisional (i.e. unvalidated) winter season distribution maps demonstrate some of the well known success stories from recent years. The Ring-necked parakeet population is thought to date from the early 1970s, but this introduced species is now widespread in south and west London, with birdwatchers divided over whether this is a good or a bad thing!



Ring-necked parakeet: Winter 2007-8 & 2008-9. Provisional.

For some species, the picture is less promising. Marsh tit has been reported from just 7% of tetrads in winter so far, lesser-spotted woodpecker from just 6%, and hawfinch and grey partridge less than 1%. For all four species, this is a significant decrease from the 1988-94 breeding atlas. In the case of Marsh tit, many of the gaps are in Essex and Kent, where survey effort has been lowest, so they may be filled during the last two years of the current survey.



Marsh tit: Winter 2007-8 & 2008-9 (squares), breeding season 1988-94 (circles). Provisional.

The winter season survey work also allows us to make some early comparisons between winter visitors which have not previously been mapped at a tetrad level in the London area. One interesting example is in the maps of the to winter thrushes. A visual inspection of the distribution maps for the first two years suggests that Redwing is more widespread, with less visible gaps, particularly in the central and southern parts of the LNHS area. As stated for Marsh tit, there is still plenty of time for the picture to change, although some of the gaps for Fieldfare are in areas where coverage has been good, meaning that they are more likely to represent a genuine absence rather than lack of survey effort.

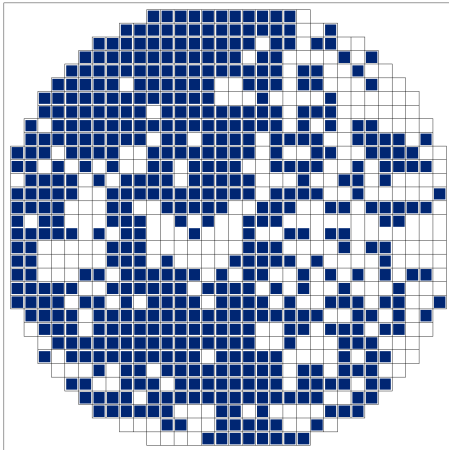
### How can I help?

We need birdwatchers to undertake timed visits in tetrads that still require them (view the maps at [www.birdatlas.net](http://www.birdatlas.net)), or to submit 'roving records'. We are especially keen to hear from birders who regularly watch those areas where there are gaps in coverage, or who are willing to travel to these areas 3-4 times in the winter and 3-4 times in the breeding season to see what you can find.

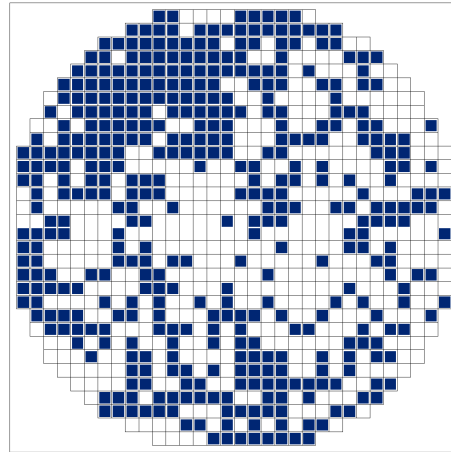
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Redwing: Winter 2007-8 & 2008-9. Provisional.



Fieldfare: Winter 2007-8 & 2008-9. Provisional.