

BTO Woodcock Survey 2013

Information for volunteers in Sussex



Introduction The breeding distribution of woodcock covers much of Britain and Ireland, but a considerable reduction in range has been indicated by the results of Bird Atlas 2007-2011 compared with results from the 1968-1972 Breeding Atlas. The nocturnal habits and cryptic nature of this species make it difficult to monitor the breeding population using traditional survey methods such as the BTO Breeding Bird Survey (BBS). However, a special survey method was devised for a national breeding woodcock survey in 2003, using counts of the territorial roding flights undertaken by males at dusk and dawn to estimate the number of individual males present. The 2003 survey estimated a breeding population of 78,000 males in Britain. This new survey in 2013, funded by and designed jointly with the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, will use the same method of counting territorial roding flights, and the results will be crucial in determining the extent of changes to the breeding population size and distribution and how these changes are related to woodland habitat characteristics and land use in habitats adjoining the woodland.

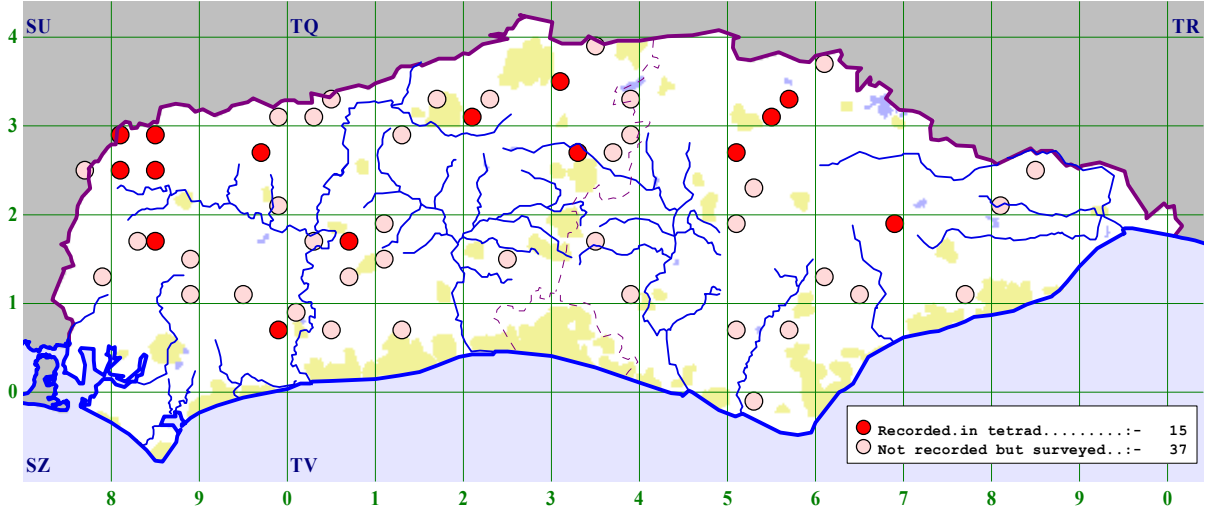
How will the survey be organised? Survey sites (1-km squares) will be randomly selected from within the known breeding range, and these will be checked where possible to ensure that they contain suitable habitat. There will be some priority sites, which will be those that were surveyed in 2003, and some new sites. Within each site a single fixed count point will be selected, from which all observations are conducted. For each priority site, the six-figure grid reference of the survey point used in 2003 will be provided (to permit direct comparison with previous results), but surveyors of new sites will need to select their own count points. Priority sites will be allocated to volunteers by BTO Regional Representatives, and volunteers will be able to select other survey sites online.

What will be the survey method? The field methods will be the same as those used in 2003. A total of four visits to each site will be required. One daytime visit will be required in April to establish the best place to locate the count point. Three visits should then be made at dusk to the count point between 1st May and 30th June, with at least one week between visits. If no woodcock are recorded on both of the first two dusk visits, there is no need to make the third visit.

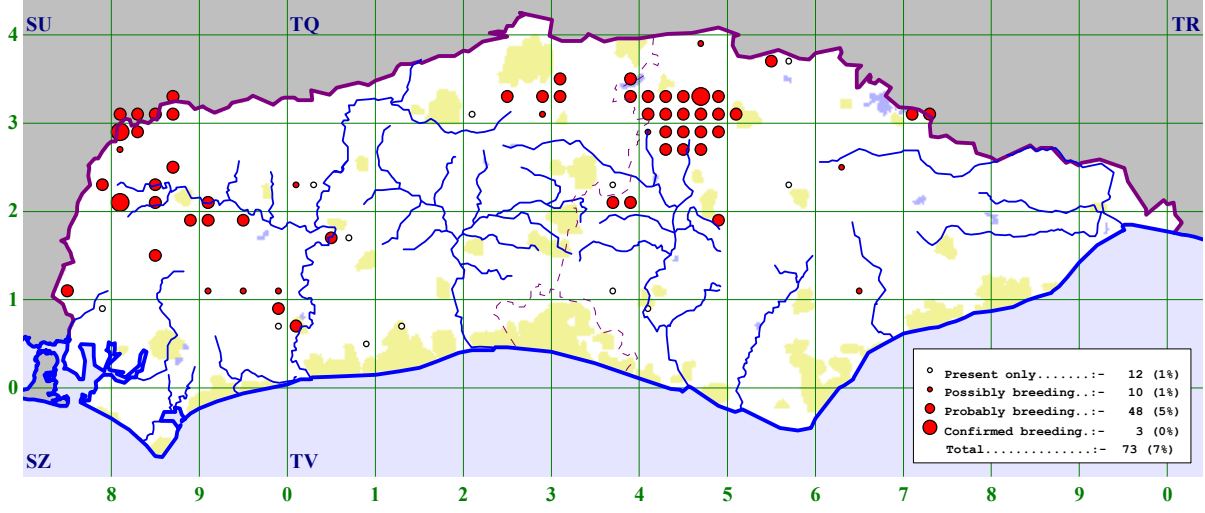
The count period has been extended to 75 minutes from the 60-minute period used in the 2003 survey. Counts should commence 15 minutes before sunset and finish 60 minutes after sunset, giving a total survey duration of 75 minutes. Times of individual woodcock passes (whether detected by sight or sound) will be recorded so that data for 60-minute and 75-minute counts can be compared at the analysis stage. Some basic information on habitat and deer presence will also be collected between mid-May and mid-June.

What will be happening in Sussex? The first map below shows the sites visited in Sussex for the 2003 survey; clearly the results of that survey do not give an accurate indication of the breeding woodcock population in Sussex, because coverage was sparse and some important breeding areas were not surveyed at all. The second map below shows the current woodcock breeding distribution as revealed by fieldwork for the Bird Atlas 2007-2011 project. This fieldwork during the 2008-2011 breeding seasons did not include any

requirement for dusk visits, so the distribution map is likely to be incomplete. The aim in Sussex during 2013 will be to survey as many potential woodcock breeding sites as possible, and the Sussex Ornithological Society plans to use all of the data collected through this survey to obtain a population estimate for breeding woodcock within Sussex, as well as to inform conservation measures for this species within the county.



Sites surveyed for breeding woodcock in Sussex in 2003.



Woodcock breeding distribution in Sussex during 2008-11.

Interested? Please contact Helen Crabtree (hcrabtree@gmail.com or 01444 441687) for further information or to be allocated a site in Sussex to survey for woodcock in 2013. Further information can also be obtained through the BTO website at <http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/woodcock-survey>.