



Cetti's warbler

Cettia cetti

Status

Amber listed: BR
Non-SPEC
Schedule 1 of WCA 1981

National monitoring

Rare Breeding Birds Panel.
National survey in 1996 (RSPB/EN).

Population and distribution

Cetti's warbler is a recent colonist of the UK. It was first recorded in Hampshire in 1961, although breeding was not confirmed until 1973 in the Stour valley, Kent (Wotton et al 1998). By 1984, the UK population had risen to 316 singing males, of which 114 were in Kent. Two cold winters in the mid-1980s reversed the species' fortunes, particularly in Kent, and by 1986 the UK population had declined to 211 singing males. By the late 1980s, the species had disappeared from Kent, and the centre of its population had shifted further towards south and south-west England. By the mid-1990s, the population had recovered and a national survey in 1996 located a total of 535–593 singing males at 168 sites in 26 counties across southern Britain (plus Jersey). Two-thirds of the population was recorded in only four counties: Hampshire, Dorset, Devon and Somerset (Wotton et al 1998).

Ecology

During the breeding season, Cetti's warblers are typically found around wet, swampy areas near the water's edge where there is low and fragmented scrubby cover. They prefer areas of scattered scrub in reedbed, in reed swamp and by open water. During the winter months, Cetti's warblers may move into reedbeds and open marshland (Bibby and Thomas 1984). Males patrol large territories, sometimes up to 450 m long, in which one or more females may breed (Bibby 1982). The breeding season lasts from late April to mid-July. The young fledge by mid- to late August. Clutches of 3–5 eggs are laid in well-concealed nests in dense vegetation.

Breeding season survey – population

Information required

- number of territories.

Number and timing of visits

Three visits: the first between the end of March and mid-April, the second between mid-April and mid-May, and the third between mid-May and early June.

Time of day

Dawn to 1100 BST.

Weather constraints

Fine, calm, sunny mornings are best.

Sites/areas to visit

Areas of scattered scrub in reedbeds, in reed swamp, in fen/marsh, by open water and along river systems.

Equipment

- 1:10,000 or 1:25,000 OS map of the area to be visited
- Schedule 1 licence.

Safety reminders

No specific advice. See the *Introduction* for general guidelines.

Disturbance

No disturbance to the birds is necessary.

Methods

Mark the boundary of the survey area on a large-scale field map.

Before starting each visit, listen for any calling or singing males. The male's explosive song is very distinctive, allowing it to be located readily in the field. In addition, males sing for prolonged periods which helps greatly to establish the number of territories present.

Walk around the site at a steady pace, using existing access routes or suitable vantage points from which to conduct the survey. Mark all records of Cetti's warblers on the field map using standard BTO (CBC) codes (Appendix 1). Males patrol their territory boundaries at about half-hourly intervals, and can move quite long distances, so beware of double-counting the same male. Linear territories (eg along river banks) can be up to 450 m long (Bibby 1982). Record birds moving from one location to another on the map using the standard codes. Try to obtain as many records of countersinging or simultaneously singing males as possible, as this will help when interpreting the maps later.

Following the third visit, estimate the number of territories on the site. To do this, count each separate singing male as a territory. Differentiating two neighbouring males from a single male that has moved can be difficult. If the two males were heard singing simultaneously, or if you were able to detect subtle differences in their songs (which is possible with practice), then they can be considered to be two separate males/territories. Note that some male territories may overlap, particularly in areas with a high density of Cetti's warblers. More than one female may nest within a single male's territory, therefore the total number of territories estimated cannot be considered to be the same as the number of pairs on the site.

Report the estimated number of territories on the site.

References

- Bibby, C J (1982) Polygyny and the breeding ecology of the Cetti's warbler *Cettia cetti*. *Ibis* 124: 288–301.
- Bibby, C J and Thomas, D K (1984) Sexual dimorphism in size, moult and movement of Cetti's warbler *Cettia cetti*. *Bird Study* 31: 28–34.
- Wotton, S, Gibbons, D W, Dilger, M and Grice, P V (1998) *British Birds* 91: 77–88.