Bulletin of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel

No. 37 - November 2024

From Dr Mark Eaton, the Secretary of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel

This bulletin is intended for county and regional bird recorders but is circulated to all data suppliers and those with close links to the RBBP to help keep the bird recording community informed on the work of the Panel. Further information on the RBBP is available on our website at www.rbbp.org.uk.

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Arctic Skua, Ian Francis

Data for 2023: please submit 2023 RBBP data to me, at secretary@rbbp.org.uk, by 30th November 2024.

For county datasets, please use the excel sheet available at **https://rbbp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/rbbp-data-entry-excel-form-for-2023.xlsx.** **Note that this was revised last year.** Please download and use the new version as it has been tweaked to make the form a little easier to use – some of the protections have been removed, meaning that actions like editing data entered already, cutting and pasting and so forth are now possible.

We are very keen wherever possible to receive data for each species on the RBBP list from all sites individually, rather than summed as county totals. This helps with the identification of duplicates received from sources other than county recorders, such as from RSPB reserves, the BTO's Ringing and Nest Recording Schemes and Schedule One licence returns. In addition, it greatly increases the value of our dataset for the conservation and research use of data. The RBBP dataset has been used for a wide range of conservation and research purposes, such as assessing populations of rare breeding birds within the protected area network. Such assessments are only as robust as the data we hold, and so if we don't know which sites held rare breeding birds they will not be included in analyses.


Crested Tit, Richard Tyler

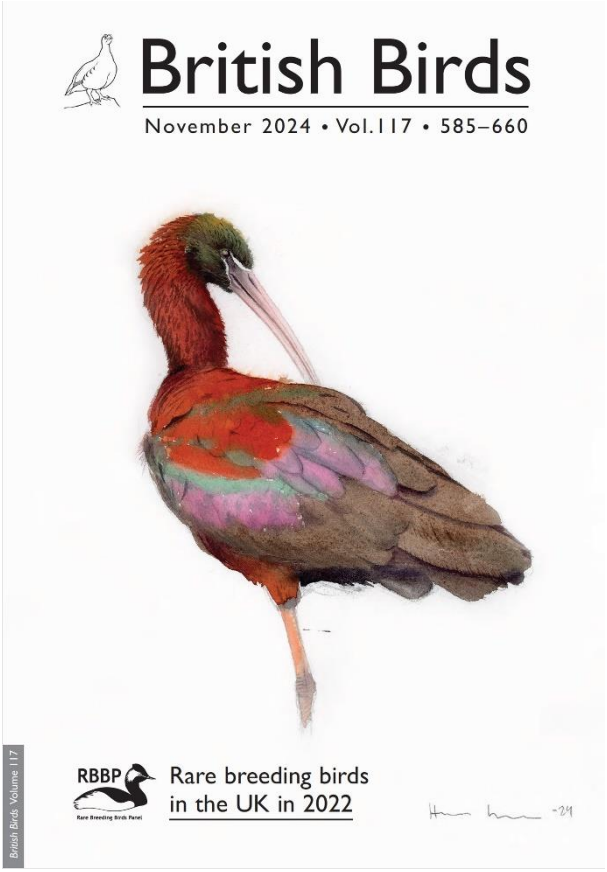
The RBBP list is available at **https://rbbp.org.uk/list-of-species-currently-reported-on-by-rbbp/**; please check to ensure you are not forgetting any species or races – some species such as **Little Egret** and **Quail** tend to get overlooked in submissions. **Crested Tit** was added to the list in 2022, and **Turtle Dove** and **Red-breasted Merganser** are other recent additions. Also, save yourself some work by remembering that **Water Rail, Cetti's Warbler, Firecrest** and **Willow Tit** were removed in recent years, so we no longer require records – there are still some of you sending in records for these species!

And please remember that we also cover rare non-native breeding species. We know that the likes of **Black Swan**, **Muscovy Duck** and **Indian Peafowl** are greatly under-reported.

Guidelines on preparing an annual submission to the RBBP can be found on our website at **https://rbbp.org.uk/guidance-on-submitting-records/**.

OUT NOW: Rare breeding birds in the UK in 2022

Our 2022 report was published in *British Birds* this month, so hopefully many of you will have received it on your doormat (or computer/tablet/phone screen) already. As ever, huge thanks to all of you who have compiled and submitted data to enable this reporting – this year's report was derived from more records than ever before.

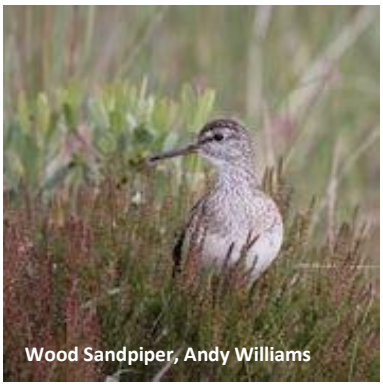


This is our 49th report; we have now reported on 50 breeding seasons (one report covered two years, 2003-04). The report documents the status of the 108 species and subspecies of rare and scarce native birds that were recorded breeding, or showing signs of breeding, in the UK in 2022. As ever, population totals are given for each species in the report, alongside a breakdown in records by country and recording area, and where possible updated trends are given. A table summarising species' totals and trends can be found at https://rbbp.org.uk/2022-report-overview. In addition, records were compiled for 14 rare non-native breeding species.

The 2022 report was enabled by the collation of nearly 11,000 individual records, which, once duplicate records were identified, provided almost 7,600 unique records. The most important sources of data are the detailed submissions compiled by the UK's county and regional bird recorders. These recorders, all of whom are volunteers, are uniquely placed to understand the relevance and context of the records they receive from birders. Of course, county recorders, and in turn RBBP, are highly dependent on observers submitting records in the first place. It is vital that birders across the UK continue to make their sightings available, not least for the value these records have for conservation, as outlined in this report. Other than data submitted by county bird recorders, our important data sources include returns from Schedule 1 licence holders, the BTO/JNCC Nest Record Scheme, raptor study groups, annual species' monitoring, periodic national surveys, and counts from RSPB reserves.

The 108 species and races of rare breeding birds reported breeding, or showing signs of breeding, in the UK in 2022 is three fewer than the record total reported for 2021 but still the second-highest total RBBP has reported on, suggesting a continuation of the increasing trend in rare breeding bird species in the UK, largely driven by the arrival of colonising species. Perhaps the most notable record in this report is the first confirmed breeding of Glossy Ibis, with a pair breeding successfully in Cambridgeshire. Earlier colonists continue to prosper – of the 14 new colonists and reintroduced species to have established populations in the UK since the RBBP began reporting in 1973, five – Mediterranean Gull, Eurasian Spoonbill, Great White Egret, Little Egret and White-tailed Eagle– were reported at record levels in 2022, with another two – Common Crane and Green Sandpiper – just below their previous maxima. Most of these species are expanding their ranges into the UK from the south. More appear to be on the way. Black-winged Stilts bred for the ninth successive year, with eight young fledging, and the two pairs of Bee-eaters that fledged four young in Norfolk made it the

fourth year breeding had been attempted in the UK in the last decade. A male Iberian Chiffchaff raised a brood of hybrid chicks with a female Common Chiffchaff in London and the presence of both sexes of Baillon's Crake at at least one site suggests that breeding might be imminent, if it has not occurred already.


Wood Sandpiper, Andy Williams

As well as new colonists, a number of species continue to recover from historical depletion, with three raptors being reported in record numbers. The number of Eurasian Goshawk pairs reported leapt by 24% since 2021 (which itself was a record year), Marsh Harrier is increasing across much of its range, as is Osprey, which bred in Dorset and Yorkshire for the first time in centuries. The final record-setter is Wood Sandpiper, for which 61 pairs were recorded, continuing the recent increase in numbers in a range of northern waders. The return of Temminck's Stint as a breeding species, following 24 years without breeding, was one of 2021's greatest surprises, and two pairs were present (and very likely attempted to breed) at the same Highland site in 2022. Four successive winters without any lengthy spells of cold temperatures have been good for some resident species, hence Dartford Warbler and Woodlark both reached the highest totals since the last national survey for both species in 2006. Other species which had good years in 2022 included Black-necked Grebe and Black Redstart.

The publication since our last report of the results of Britain and Ireland's fourth seabird census, *Seabirds Count* has provided a vital stocktake on our internationally important breeding seabirds, and our report highlights the fortunes of the four rare breeding seabirds. Mediterranean Gulls continue to flourish, and there were 159 pairs of Roseate Terns at the beginning of the 2022 breeding season. Little Terns have, however, declined by 25% since the last census in 1998–2002, although in 2022 they achieved the highest productivity RBBP has reported upon. *Seabirds Count* confirmed fears of a rapid ongoing decline in the Arctic Skua population, with a 66% drop in numbers over 18 years.

Sadly, the impact of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) H5N1 is a concern for all our seabirds – at least 90 adult Roseate Terns died from the disease at the colony on Coquet Island, Northumberland, in 2022, along with an even great number of chicks. There is evidence, reviewed in the report, that the disease also impacted the productivity of raptors such as White-tailed Eagle and Golden Eagle in 2022.


Marsh Warbler, Gary Woodburn

While Arctic Skua may be one of the most rapidly declining rare breeding bird species in the UK, others are also struggling. Slavonian Grebe remained at the lowest level since the start of annual monitoring in 1971 with pairs having extremely poor breeding success in 2022. Numbers of Corn Crakes have declined by 28% in the last ten years, and the population of Black-tailed Godwits in the Cambridgeshire and Norfolk Fens fell owing to several years of poor productivity, despite recent conservation efforts. Marsh Warbler numbers dropped dramatically, with a total of only three pairs, none of which were confirmed to have bred – but, as numbers are influenced heavily by conditions on spring migration, a recovery of sorts is possible in future years.

There are a number of species for which populations have declined to a point at which they are no longer considered regular breeders in the UK, but retain a regular presence in RBBP reports, usually through the occurrence of migrant individuals holding territory. There were single records of Red-backed Shrike, Eurasian Wryneck and European Serin 2022, and two of Golden Orioles. Unfortunately, Montagu's Harrier may be on the way to joining this list, although a displaying male did its best to attract a mate in Wiltshire. One species from this group, Common Rosefinch, did actually breed in 2022, on Fair Isle, for the first time in the UK since 2001.



Yellow-legged Gull, Mark Eaton

Furthermore, there are species that have been regular breeders previously but were not reported showing breeding behaviour at all in 2022. Yellow-legged Gull bred in the UK every year from 2001 to 2019, but the species has now been absent from our reports for three years, and while the Fieldfare has always been a very rare breeding bird, numbers reported by the RBBP have declined in recent years and the blank in 2022 was the fourth such year in the last decade. A review of the history of this species' breeding in the UK is under preparation by Panel members David Norman and Mark Holling. Less meaningful in conservation terms, but always of interest to the birdwatcher, the list of oddities in 2022 included Blue-winged Teal, Broad-billed Sandpiper, Black-browed Albatross, Dusky Warbler and, for the first time in a RBBP report, a pair of Little Buntings.

As always, we wish to thank all those who support the work of the RBBP particularly those such as county bird recorders who collate and submit data to us, and the observers who make the thousands of records of rare breeding birds that contribute to our reports.

Rare Breeding Birds Panel meetings

The RBBP have 'full' meetings twice a year, and short 'interim' meetings in the gaps between these. As is the modern way of things most of this activity is online, but we still meet in person once a year. For the last three autumns these meetings have been held in Northumberland, as this is approximately equidistant for Panel members travelling from Aberdeenshire, Bedfordshire, Cheshire, Dumfries & Galloway, Lothian and Norfolk – and is handy for me as the meeting organiser as it's my home county. This year we spent two days meeting at the visitor centre at Northumberland Wildlife Trust's Hauxley Nature Reserve, as well as fitting a bit of pre- and post-meeting birding in the area.



The RBBP doing a little seawatching at Hauxley, Northumberland. Left to right, Ian Francis, Andy Stanbury, Helen Baker, Mark Holling, Katy Westerberg, Mark Eaton. Dawn Balmer is behind the camera and Paul Castle and David Norman attended the meeting remotely.

Panel meetings cover a lot of ground, although you may be disappointed to hear that we spend relatively little time discussing exciting news on rare breeders (although we have recently added an agenda item on this, just to ensure that we do discuss recent occurrences a little, and don't spend all our time discussing processes!). A considerable chunk of time is spent with me, as the professional 'do-er' of much of the Panel's work, reporting on recent progress and seeking the Panel's guidance and approval for my work programme. Obviously, plenty of time is spent discussing our annual reports – the data gathering, analysis, writing and promotion of the final product. Other important topics include how to encourage increased and improved recording of rare breeding birds; how we can improve the flow of such records to ensure they reach us; communicating what the Panel does to important audiences; and ensuring the Panel's data is put to good use by ourselves and others.

In particular, recent meetings have seen a focus on topics including:

- Work improving our database – in recent years we have been successful in securing financial support from the JNCC, Natural England and Natural Resources Wales to refine how the tens of thousands of sites are defined in our Geographical Information System which houses our data – for example, merging duplicate sites, and assigning locations to records that were provided without grid references in the past.

- New outputs, such as the papers published last year reviewing the RBBP's work over the last 50 years, and the series of 'from the archive' papers that Mark Holling has been leading on. Further papers are in the pipeline, and we are considering what we might be able to publish once RBBP trends covering 50 years (1973 – 2023) are available, which will be this time next year.
- Website developments and updates – we have a few of these planned over the next few months.
- Ideas for engagement with both the wider birdwatching community, and those who are involved in collating and submitting data to us, in order to encourage improvements in both the quantity and quality of data submitted. This includes communications through online talks (see below) and social media. At our most recent meeting we decided to start posting on Bluesky, for the time being in addition to X (Twitter) – you can find us at **@ukrbbp.bsky.social.**
- The use of RBBP data – encouraging the use of RBBP data for conservation and research purposes. We are very pleased that a PhD student, Faezeh Fatemizadeh, has just started under the supervision of Prof Steve Willis at Durham University in order to work with RBBP data (with, of course, suitable safeguards). Faezeh's work will develop new statistical modelling approaches to producing trends with RBBP data, as well as looking at drivers of change in rare breeding birds.


St Kilda Wren, Andy Stanbury

Offers and requests

Just briefly, I would like to repeat the requests and offers made in recent bulletins:

Blogs. The RBBP publishes blogs regularly on our website at **https://rbbp.org.uk/blog/**. As well as encouraging you to read these blogs, we would like all in our recording community to consider whether they would like to write one! If you would like to contribute a few hundred words on any aspect of rare breeding birds – about a particular species, or area, documenting a particularly interesting occurrence, giving advice on recording, or having a grumble (within reason!) – please get in touch.

Talks. Since 2020 I have given numerous talks about the work of the RBBP to bird clubs, RSPB groups and wildlife societies across the UK, via zoom. Of course, most of these were during the Covid-19

pandemic when in-person meetings were not possible, and most clubs have now returned to in-person meetings. However, I know that some are continuing with remote meetings held over zoom, or a hybrid model with a mix of in-person and remote events. I'd be happy to talk about the work of the RBBP and rare breeding birds to any interested group, free of charge, so please just email me if this is of interest.

Photos. The RBBP requires photos of rare breeding birds in order to promote our work. However, our photographic library is not as good as we would like and we often struggle to find appropriate pictures, especially when a particular species' photo is required. In particular, we are keen to have photos of 'real' breeding birds – individuals showing breeding evidence (e.g., singing, displaying, carrying food, at the nest, or with young). Of course, we would expect photos to have been taken under a Schedule One disturbance licence when this is required. If you can help by providing suitable photos for the RBBP to use please contact me. Please feel free to share this appeal with your networks to encourage others who may be able to help us out. We thank those photographers who have already provided great images for RBBP use.

To respond to any of the above, email me at **secretary@rbbp.org.uk**

As always, thanks for your efforts on behalf of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel!

Please remember that deadline for submitting 2023 data: **30th November 2024.**

FINALLY… we're interested in knowing how many of the recipients actually read this bulletin – given you've got this far, could you drop me an email simply saying "I read the RBBP bulletin"? Thanks!


Bearded Tit, Ron MacDonald

Mark Eaton, on behalf of the RBBP, November 2024

Dr Mark Eaton, 21 Chapel Lands, Alnwick, Northumberland NE66 1EL