

Cheshire and Wirral *NEWS*

The newsletter for BTO members
and volunteers

Winter 2026



Welcome to the winter newsletter for BTO members and volunteers in Cheshire and Wirral.

Thank you very much for all your great sightings, and surveying. As volunteers it's great to have your support and it's really important for the BTO.

In this newsletter, you will find information and updates about a range of BTO surveys, and details about our forthcoming training opportunities.

In addition, [Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society \(CAWOS\)](#) will be undertaking specific species surveys in 2026. Details of these are also given in this newsletter. The BTO also continue to welcome your help with several ongoing surveys of which more details can be found [here](#).

I hope your birding year gets off to a fantastic start and thanks again for your support.



Hen Harrier, Liz Cutting / BTO

Hugh Pulsford

BTO Regional Representative for Cheshire (North & East)

Get ready... the BTO Atlas 2027-31 is coming!

Last most recent BTO Bird Atlas (2007–11) was one of the most ambitious volunteer projects ever undertaken, mapping birds in both winter and the breeding season from every inch of Britain and Ireland.

Following in the footsteps of this project, the BTO have announced that they will be undertaking a **new Atlas running from 2027-31!** This will be hugely important for Cheshire and Wirral as the area will be using the data gathered to prepare a **county-wide Atlas at the same time.**

Over 40,000 volunteers were involved in surveying for the last Atlas and we know that the BTO are looking to increase that figure this time around, making it the most accessible survey they have ever led and will be a brilliant legacy for the organisation.



David Tipling / BTO

It will be assembling the results of both structured timed tetrad visits (TTVs) and casual observations, all appropriately checked and validated, to create a picture of the distributions of our breeding and wintering bird species, plus mapping the hotspots for passage migrants too as in the 2007-11 Atlas. The species maps will be viewable and accessible online and will undoubtedly be used for many years to come in both scientific research and conservation.

Stay tuned for more information to come about this very exciting project in the coming months.

It's the season for a Winter Bird Survey



Brambling, John Harding / BTO

The Winter Bird Survey is a UK-wide repeat of the 2018/19 [English Winter Bird Survey](#). Like its forerunner, the Winter Bird Survey covers a single season, collecting important information on the numbers and distribution of the UK's wintering birds. However, it will cover survey squares across the UK and a wider range of habitats.

Aside from winter bird atlases, we have comparatively little data on the UK's birds outside the breeding season. The Winter Bird Survey will provide important insights into winter bird abundance and distribution, and how these are related to land management practices, especially Agri-Environment Schemes and Agri-Environment and Climate Schemes.

Many of the current volunteers who undertake the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) are currently engaged in recording what birds' winter on their BBS squares. They have already done two survey visits in the last couple of months in 2025 and have another couple to complete January to March. **Many thanks to these volunteers and it will be very interesting to see the overall results.**

BTO Garden BirdWatch

The BTO Garden BirdWatch survey (GBW) has proven to be quite popular across our County, but did you know that **we are currently seeking a volunteer Garden Birdwatch Ambassador** for Cheshire North, East and South!



Greenfinch, Liz Cutting / BTO

This is very enjoyable role, specifically encouraging participation and promoting the survey across the county. It requires an enthusiasm for garden birds and encouraging wildlife into your garden, and a willingness to share that passion with others by representing the BTO and the Garden BirdWatch scheme at local events (where you'd help to run a stand or engagement session) and at nature group meetings (where you could give a talk, hand out leaflets or just generally talk to people about the scheme). You would also be encouraging existing volunteers to keep up their great work with the survey so far and supporting them with any queries.

If you are interested, please contact Hugh Pulsford (ahugh.pulsford@btinternet.com) and the BTO GardenBirdwatch Team (gbw@bto.org) who can provide more details and the application form if you'd wish to apply for the role.

If you don't already participate in this scheme, know that it is **FREE** to take part in GBW and you can do so throughout the year. As well as recording the bird species that you see over the course of the week in your garden, you can also submit records of a variety of other taxa, such as mammals and butterflies. You can sign up for the survey [here](#), and explore GBW data from your local area [here](#).

There is also an option to financially support the Garden BirdWatch scheme (please see the link above for more details). If you opt to do this you will receive the quarterly [Bird Table magazine](#).

Time/ skill needed

- As much time as you like, but a minimum of 20 minutes per week is recommended.
- Can identify common birds by sight.

Find out more about [BTO's Garden BirdWatch scheme](#)



Waxwing, Liz Cutting / BTO

BirdTrack



BirdTrack is a way to make all your birding records count!

There are options to enter data using the website or on the [smartphone app](#). There is also an option to submit details of dead wild birds. You can also report other taxa, such as mammals, butterflies and dragonflies.

More information on the [BirdTrack web pages](#).

Time/ skill needed

- There is no minimum time commitment.
- input record species that you feel confident identifying

Did you know that as many of you submit your sightings into BirdTrack, the County Bird Society – the Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society (CAWOS) - is using BirdTrack as the county database! This means that records entered into BirdTrack assist the volunteers in producing the 2024 County Bird Report. Whilst other sources are also used, data entered into BirdTrack is extremely valuable and we are very grateful to all who use it.



BirdTrack is also pivotal to the County's other outputs, such as the Scarce Migrant Report, the submissions to the Rare Breeding Bird Panel, along with more local environmental impact surveys, planning application support and defence, along with data requests for research or information from a wide range of individuals and organisations.

So, we want to encourage everyone to please use BirdTrack to record your local patch sightings and share what you see on your days out around the County. It's also great if you can remember to enter breeding codes against birds recorded during the breeding season; they add a significant value and understanding of what our bird populations are doing.

BTO/JNCC Bird Ringing Scheme

To find out how to get involved in bird ringing take a look at the [ringing scheme website](#).

If you would like to explore ringing data from your local area, take a look at the online ringing report, which can be accessed [here](#).

Many thanks to all the ringers, from both the South Manchester and Merseyside Ringing Groups, as well as several independent ringers, across the County who actively taking part submitting their data, including nest records via the Demon BTO system.



David Tipling / BTO

Time/ skill needed

- It usually takes a year or more, ringing regularly with qualified Trainer ringers, to obtain a ringing permit.
- This is a level of commitment that is required. Basic bird identification skills and reasonable dexterity are required.

CAWOS Species surveys 2026

The County Society is looking to undertake a survey of Little Owls across Cheshire and Wirral in February/March 2026.



Little Owl, Liz Cutting / BTO

Our Little Owls have declined over the last 10 years, despite suitable habitat still being present and remaining in historic sites. The Atlas database will be used to identify historic sites for the initiation of this survey along with knowledge from the County's Little Owl experts. The survey techniques of using species playback. Full guidance on the use of this technique including downloadable recordings will be provided.

All volunteers are welcome to join, whether CAWOS members or not. For full details please contact Roy Leigh direct. roy@leighecology.co.uk

In addition, following a pilot survey in 2025, CAWOS will be liaising with members, BTO volunteers and local RSPB and other groups to undertake a more comprehensive survey on Swifts across Cheshire and Wirral.

What could be more relaxing than going outside on a warm evening in early June and counting the screaming Swifts above you. It really is that easy!

Other things to do...

BTO Online Training Courses

The BTO online training courses are a great way of gaining confidence with your bird identification skills. They are also a great way of preparing you for taking part in BTO surveys in the future.

The BTO is currently focus on Raptor ID training through the winter season, and there are still places available!

To find out which courses are happening in the near future and to book on sessions, including Raptor ID, please visit [BTO's training web pages](#).



Goshawk, Moss Taylor / BTO

Contact details:

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GBW Ambassador Cheshire Mid: George Pilkington
nurturing-nature@virginmedia.com

Twitter: @_BTO

Instagram: @btobirds

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/The.BTO>

Full web page links

1. Sign up for GBW: <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/gbw/join-gbw>
2. Explore GBW data: <https://www.bto.org/gbw/data>
3. Bird Table magazine: <https://www.bto.org/our-science/publications/bird-table>
4. GBW homepage: <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/gbw>
5. Usutu Virus factsheet: https://www.gardenwildlifehealth.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2018/02/Avian-Usutu-virus_disease-factsheet_GWH.pdf
6. Blackbirds in Gardens how to take part: <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/blackbirds-gardens/taking-part>
7. BirdTrack website: <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/birdtrack>
8. BirdTrack smartphone app: <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/birdtrack/about-birdtrack-app>

9. Heronries vacant sites map: <https://app.bto.org/colonies/public/vacant-sites.jsp>
10. WeBS vacant sectors map: <https://app.bto.org/websonline/sites/vacant/vacant-sites.jsp#lon=-4.5263672&lat=54.8006849&zoom=5>
11. Wetland Bird Survey homepage: <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/wetland-bird-survey>
12. Icelandic-Breeding Goose Census fact sheet: https://www.bto.org/sites/default/files/igc_form.pdf
13. Goose and Swan Monitoring Programme homepage: <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/goose-and-swan-monitoring-programme>
14. Winter Gull Survey homepage: <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/winter-gull-survey>
15. WinGS survey website: <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/winter-gull-survey>
16. Seabird Monitoring Programme vacant sites: <https://app.bto.org/seabirds/public/index.jsp>
17. Seabird Monitoring Programme website: <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/seabird-monitoring-programme>
18. BBS vacant squares map: <https://app.bto.org/bbs/public/request-square.jsp>
19. WBBS vacant stretches map: <https://app.bto.org/bbs/public/request-square.jsp?s=WBBS>
20. Breeding Bird Survey homepage: <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/breeding-bird-survey>
21. Waterways Breeding Bird Survey homepage: <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/waterways-breeding-bird-survey>
22. Woodcock survey: <https://www.bto.org/woodcock>
23. Demography Online (DemOn): <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/bird-ringing-scheme/taking-part/submitting-records/demon>
24. Online Ringing Report: <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/bird-ringing-scheme/ringing-publications/online-ringing-and-nest-recording>
25. Bird Ringing Scheme homepage: <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/bird-ringing-scheme>
26. Putting up nest boxes for birds: <https://www.bto.org/how-you-can-help/provide-birds/putting-nest-boxes-birds>
27. Nest Recording Code of Conduct: <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/nest-record-scheme/taking-part/coc>
28. Nesting Neighbours homepage: <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/nesting-neighbours>
29. NRS lookup tool: <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/nest-record-scheme/publications/online-nesting-reports>
30. Nest Record Scheme web pages: <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/nest-record-scheme>