

BTO HERONRIES CENSUS 2021 SUMMARY



GARY HAIGH / BTO

INTRODUCTION

Following the drop in coverage due to the first COVID-19 lock-down in 2020, we would like to thank all Heronries Census volunteers and Regional Organisers for their efforts in 2021. By the end of 2021 we had received records from 796 sites. This is similar to the levels of coverage achieved prior to 2020, excluding 2018 when a 'full survey' was carried out which included visits to historical sites (Fig. 1). This level of coverage is all the more impressive as it has been achieved whilst there have been ongoing difficulties caused by the pandemic, and despite a new lock-down being in place early in 2021, which meant that some surveyors were unable to carry out their Census visits. We expect the 2021 total to increase further as we usually receive additional late counts via local bird clubs although, not surprisingly, it is unlikely that the final total will exceed the 897 sites visited in 2019.

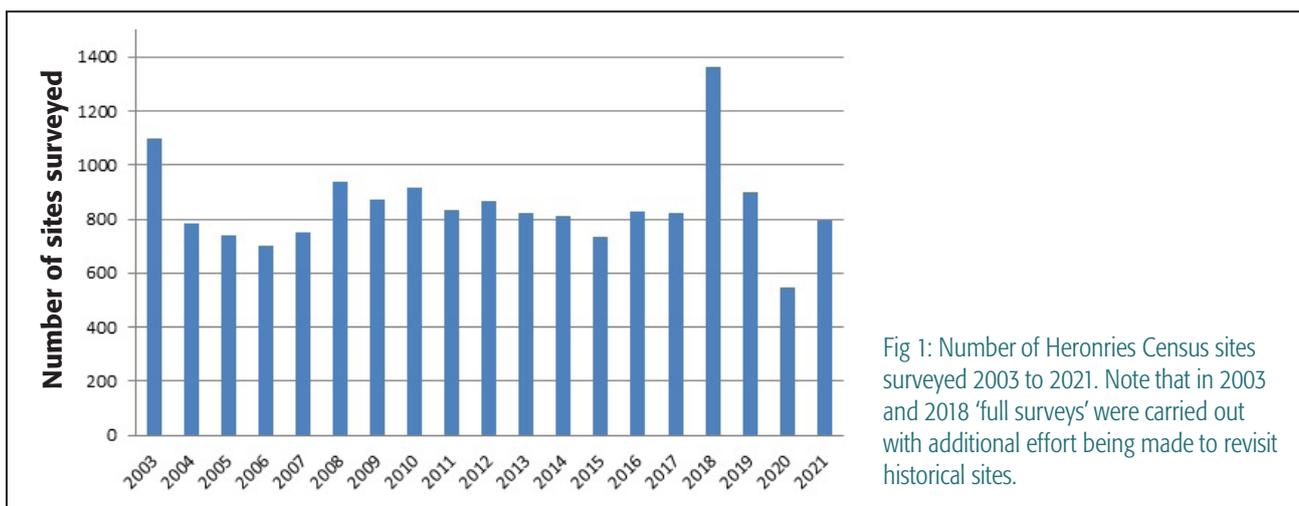


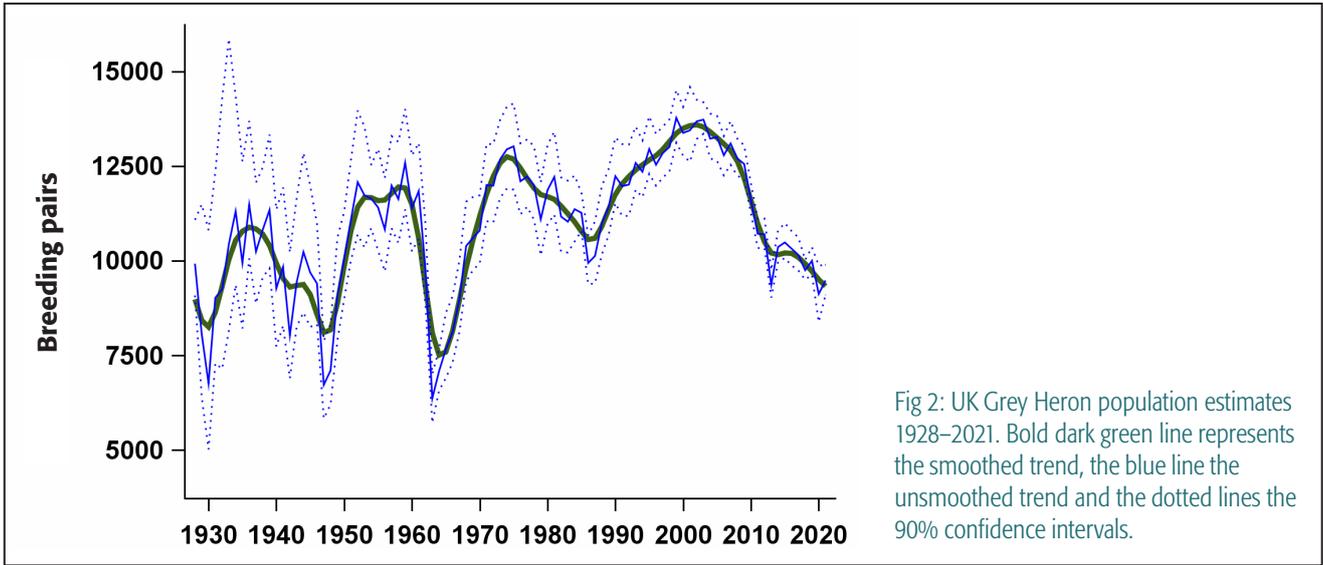
Fig 1: Number of Heronries Census sites surveyed 2003 to 2021. Note that in 2003 and 2018 'full surveys' were carried out with additional effort being made to revisit historical sites.

GREY HERON RESULTS

The largest total in 2021 was at a site in Hampshire where 110 nests were counted. The latest UK population estimate is 9,479 apparently occupied nests in 2021, up from 9,121 in 2020. It should be noted that the 2020 estimate may be unreliable due to the poor Census coverage that year, but the 2021 estimate confirms a decrease has occurred from 9,998 in 2019. It is unclear why this decrease may have occurred: the winters of 2019/20 and 2020/21 were both relatively warm compared to average, although 2019/20 was unusually wet and stormy, particularly in February (UK Met Office) when many herons would have been beginning nesting activity. The population has yet to recover from the sharp declines that occurred between 2007 and 2013 when there were several severe winters, which contrasts with the strong recoveries and continued increases that have occurred after previous declines caused by severe weather (Fig 2).



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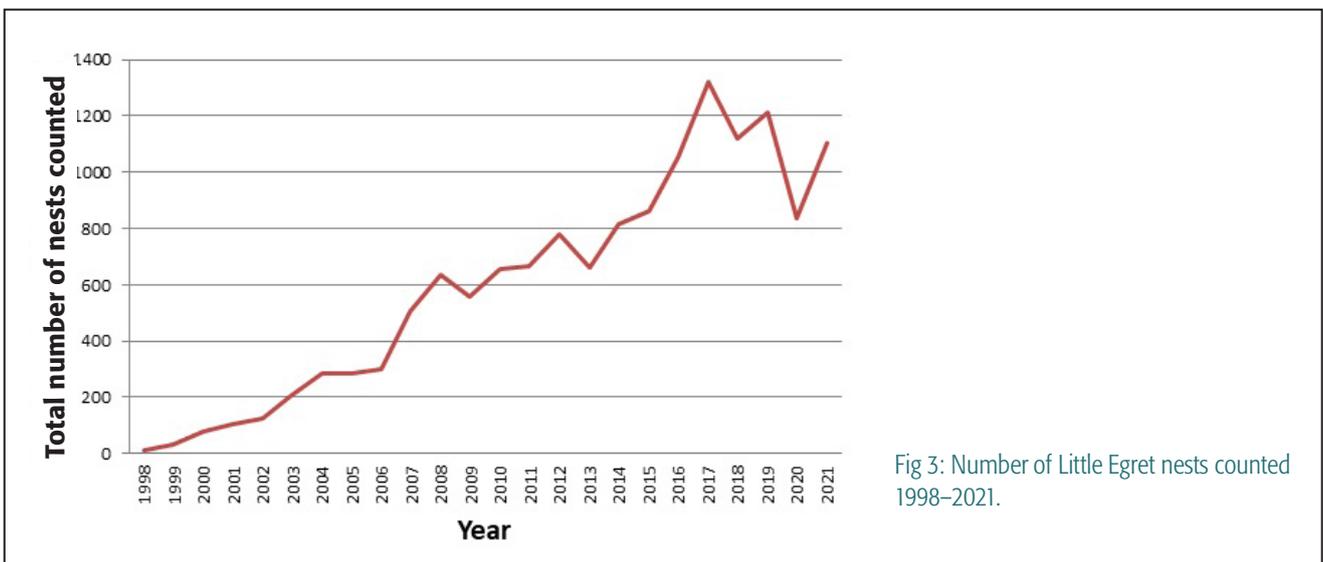


LITTLE EGRET

A total of 1,102 apparently occupied nests were submitted from 122 sites, with the largest count being made in Kent (94 nests). The total is down on the 1,215 nests at 126 sites in 2019 and well below the peak of 1,312 counted in 2017 (Fig 3). All totals are actual counts rather than estimates so do not take variation in site coverage into account, but seem to suggest that numbers have dipped slightly since 2019. As for Grey Heron, though the reason for this slight decrease is unclear, it seems possible that the stormy weather in the 2019/20 could possibly have contributed to increased mortality in spite of the warmer than average weather.



JOHN HARDING / BTO



CORMORANT

A total of 1,557 apparently occupied nests was counted at 38 Heronries Census sites, similar to the 1,576 nests counted at 45 sites in 2019 (Fig 4). As for Little Egret, the totals are actual counts rather than population estimates. The sites with missing counts in 2021 include several medium-sized colonies and it is likely that the total will be the highest ever if data are received from these colonies (the current high is 1,592 nests at 30 sites in 2007). We encourage observers to submit counts of tree-nesting Cormorants to the Census (including those which are not nesting with herons), in particular those nesting inland or at other sites not covered by seabird surveys. This will help ensure we can get an accurate understanding of Cormorant population trends.



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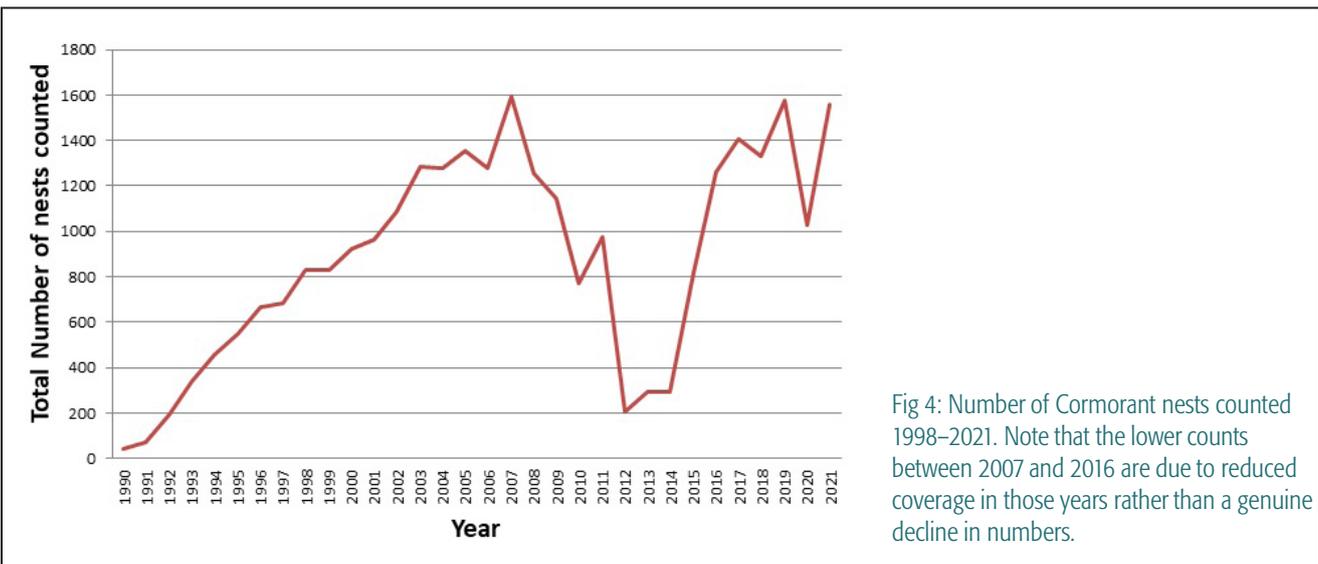


Fig 4: Number of Cormorant nests counted 1998–2021. Note that the lower counts between 2007 and 2016 are due to reduced coverage in those years rather than a genuine decline in numbers.

SCARCER SPECIES

The Heronries Census also collects data on other colonial birds nesting within heronries, to help keep track of the population growth of these species if, as expected, they continue their recent range expansion across the UK. In 2021, we received records of 55 Cattle Egret nests at seven sites, more than three times the 15 nests recorded in 2019. There were 22 Great White Egret nests at three sites and 45 Spoonbill nests at one site (Holkham in Norfolk; see *British Birds* **114**: 316–330 & **114**: 511–525). However, we are aware that these records do not give the full picture and we encourage observers to submit records of scarcer heron species to the Heronries Census. This will mean that we can accurately monitor population changes if the populations continue to increase in future years and the direct reporting of breeding to the Rare Breeding Birds Panel (RBBP) begins to drop off. All records of scarce colonial species reported to the Heronries Census will be kept confidential and will be forwarded to the RBBP.

SURVEYTIMETABLE AND TASKS



REMEMBER TO INFORM YOUR REGIONAL ORGANISER (RO) OF ANY NEW HERONRIES SITE YOU FIND.

SPECIAL THANKS

We would like to thank all surveyors and Regional Organisers for their work on the 2021 Census. Space does not permit all observers to be acknowledged individually, but we would especially like to thank the ROs for their efforts.



HERONRIES CENSUS REGIONAL ORGANISERS IN 2021

ENGLAND

Avon	Eve Tigwell
Bedfordshire	VACANT
Berkshire	Sean Murphy
Birmingham & West Midlands	Steve Davies
Buckinghamshire	Phil Tizzard
Cambridgeshire	Charlie Kitchen
Cheshire (Mid, North-East, South)	Phil Hampson (now VACANT)
Cleveland	Michael Leakey
Cornwall	Simon Taylor
Cumbria	Colin Gay
Derbyshire (North, South)	Dave Budworth
Devon	Stella Beavan (now VACANT)
Dorset	Greg Lambe
Durham	David Sowerbutts
Essex (North-East)	Steve Hallam
Essex (North-West)	Graham Smith
Essex (South)	VACANT
Gloucestershire	Michael Smart
Hampshire	Glynne Evans
Herefordshire	Chris Robinson
Hertfordshire	Murray Orchard
Huntingdon & Peterborough	Derek Langslow
Isle of Wight	Jim Baldwin
Isles of Scilly	Will Wagstaff
Kent	Brian Watmough
Lancashire (East)	(VACANT) now Bernard Bracken
Lancashire (North-West)	Jan Roberts
Lancashire (South)	Stephen Dunstan (now VACANT)
Leicestershire & Rutland	Dave Wright
Lincolnshire (East, North, South, West)	Barrie Wilkinson
London (North)	Sabrina Schalz
London (South)	Richard Arnold
Manchester	Nick Hilton
Merseyside	VACANT
Norfolk (North-East)	Chris Hudson
Norfolk (North-West)	VACANT
Norfolk (South-East)	Rachel Warren
Norfolk (South-West)	Vince Matthews
Northamptonshire	Bob Bullock
Northumberland	Tom Cadwallender
Nottinghamshire	VACANT
Oxfordshire (North)	Frances Buckel
Oxfordshire (South)	John Melling
Shropshire	Jonathan Groom
Somerset	Eve Tigwell
Staffordshire (North, South, West)	Scott Petrek
Suffolk	Mick Wright
Surrey	Ray Phillips
Sussex	Helen Crabtree
The Wirral	Phil Hampson (now VACANT)
Warwickshire	Annette Jarratt-Knock
Wiltshire (North)	John Sealy
Wiltshire (South)	Phil James
Worcestershire	Mervyn Needham
Yorkshire (Bradford)	Mike Denton
Yorkshire (Central)	Mike Brown
Yorkshire (East, Hull)	Brian Walker
Yorkshire (Leeds & Wakefield)	Rachael Dixey (now VACANT)
Yorkshire (North-East)	Nick Gibbons
Yorkshire (North-West)	Alex Gould (now VACANT)
Yorkshire (Richmond)	Mike Gibson
Yorkshire (South-East)	Grant Bigg (TEMP)
Yorkshire (South-West)	Grant Bigg
Yorkshire (York)	Rob Chapman

SCOTLAND

Aberdeen	Moray Souter
Angus	Steve Willis
Argyll (Mull, Coll, Tiree & Morven)	Ewan Miles
Argyll (mainland & Gigha) & Bute	Nigel Scriven
Arran	James Cassels
Ayrshire	Dave McGarvie (now Susan McCourt)
Benbecula & The Uists	Yvonne Benting
Borders	Malcolm Ross
Caithness	Donald Omand
Central	Neil Bielby
Dumfries	Andy Riches
Fife & Kinross	Paul Blackburn
Inverness (East & Speyside, West)	Hugh Insley
Islay, Jura & Colonsay	David Wood
Kincardine & Deeside	Claire Marsden
Kirkcudbright:	Andrew Bielinski
Lanark, Renfrew & Dumbarton	Gordon Brady
Lewis & Harris	Craig Ferries
Lothian	Stephen Metcalfe
Moray & Nairn	Melvin Morrison
Orkney	Colin Corse
Perthshire	Mike Bell
Rhum, Eigg, Canna & Muck	Bob Swann
Ross-shire	Simon Cohen
Shetland	Dave Okill
Skye	Stephen Bentall
Sutherland	VACANT
Wigtown	Andrew Bielinski (TEMP)

WALES

Anglesey	Ian Hawkins
Brecknock	Andrew King
Caernarfon	Rhion Pritchard
Cardigan	Naomi Davis (now VACANT)
Carmarthen	VACANT
Clwyd (East)	Anne Brenchley
Clwyd (West)	Mel ab Owain
Glamorgan (Mid, South)	Wayne Morris
Glamorgan (West)	Lyndon Jeffrey
Gwent	Richard Clarke
Merioneth	Dave Anning
Montgomery	Jane Kelsall (now VACANT)
Pembrokeshire	Annie & Bob Haycock
Radnorshire	Carlton Parry

NORTHERN IRELAND

All regions	Ian Enlander
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CHANNEL ISLANDS

Channel Islands (excl. Jersey)	Chris Mourant
Jersey	Tony Paintin

ISLE OF MAN

Isle of Man	Pat Cullen
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We would be grateful for help organising the Heronries Census in regions currently without a Regional Organiser (marked VACANT), or those currently being covered on a temporary basis (marked TEMP). If you live in one of these regions and would be interested in taking on the role, please let us know.

Many thanks are due to the ROs listed who stepped down during 2021.

Finally, we would like to thank all the landowners who kindly allow volunteers access to their land to carry out Heronries Census visits.