

Herts Bird Club 2015 Rookery Census

The last complete census of breeding Rooks in the county was carried out in 1993. Previous complete surveys were carried out in 1960-61, 1971 and 1975. Fieldwork for the 2008-12 county breeding atlas showed a small increase over 20 years in the number of tetrads in which breeding was confirmed. This survey aims to estimate the population by locating all rookeries within the county and counting the numbers of nests at least once between mid-March and the end of April 2015.

There will be two components to the Herts Bird Club 2015 Rookery Census. The general survey will aim to obtain a single count of the number of nests in all rookeries in the county, whilst the special survey will gather more detailed information on a smaller number of breeding colonies.

Method – General Survey

The aim of the General Survey will be to count the numbers of nests in all rookeries throughout the county during the 2015 breeding season. This should be done by means of a single visit to each rookery between **15 March and 30 April**. To allow comparison with earlier studies, an initial nest count should be made without attempting to assess whether individual nests are active. If time and conditions permit a second count of active nests should be made on the same visit. The presence of birds at or on the nest should be used to determine 'active' nests. All rookeries identified in the 1993 survey are marked on the survey form, but please check for new rookeries within the tetrad.

Where several groups of nests are nearby, or satellite colonies have formed, those groups more than 100m from the next nearest group should be counted separately and entered as different rookeries on the recording form.

Unless the spring is unusually early, the survey period should mean that counts will be completed before trees break into full leaf. It may be wise to prioritise visits to rookeries in tree species (such as Horse Chestnut) which gain dense foliage early in the season.

Method – Special Survey

As a subsidiary survey, we would like a small number of rookeries to be counted throughout the breeding period, to assess the accuracy of single visit counts. In the 1993 this information allowed a better estimate of the overall breeding population. For this survey, only sites which are particularly easy to count are needed (as they will become much more difficult to count as the season progresses), preferably where access to land beneath the breeding trees is possible. Also only rookeries of at least 20 nests are to be selected for this survey.

A total nest count should be performed as often as possible, preferably every two weeks from mid-March to the end of May. To help identify changes in nest numbers between visits, you may find it helpful to draw a sketch of the site so that individual trees are identifiable from one visit to the next.

Further information

If this is unclear or you have further questions, please contact the survey organiser, Chris Dee by email (hertsrooks@birdsurvey.org.uk) or telephone (01279 755637). Please return recording forms by 30 June.