

Target Species

It has become clear after analysis of the county database that there is a downward trend of records received for some species. Whilst the number of records received annually does not necessarily reflect the population status of a particular species, it is a good indicator. It is easy to make assumptions about the variation in the number of records received – changes to the nature of habitats, the fall-off after a census year and changes to observer interests are just a few. However, it needs to be ascertained if the decline in received records reflects a real decrease in bird populations.

Other than those who report a complete list through *Birdtrack* there is a variation in the species which are reported by individual observers. We all have our favourites! It is hoped that the concept of “Target Species” will overcome this variation and provide a more complete picture of the abundance of certain species within the county. From next year (2018) birders will be asked to submit either every sighting or the breeding records of three selected species that will be notified before the beginning of the year. This is not an organised survey or census. Just a request to ensure that you report all your sightings or breeding evidence of the nominated species. Species under scrutiny in subsequent years will be notified well before the start of the year in question.

Analysis has shown some interesting trends. Whilst the norm is that a decrease in records received reflects a decrease in abundance that follows the national trend, that is not true of all species. Some appear to be increasing in Berkshire against the national trend and *vice versa*. Whether these are true population trends or a consequence of the many variables that impact on the recording process is unclear. A more structured approach by recording annually nominated species may help to resolve some of these anomalies.

From a list of species in apparent decline three species have been selected as being in urgent need of population assessment. The target species for 2018 are:- **Little Grebe, Great Crested Grebe** and **Little Owl**. We would like you to record and submit all breeding evidence of Little Grebe and Great Crested Grebe. We would also like *all* sightings of Little Owl to be submitted. There are no census forms to complete. Just submit your records through your usual chosen medium.

Thank you for your help.

Richard Burness
County Recorder