

The newsletter for the BTO Community in Cornwall

Summer 2019

Welcome to the BTO Cornwall Newsletter

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A reminder please for Breeding Bird Survey volunteers to upload their records before the end of August so the National Organiser Sarah Harris can then begin her job in a timely manner of compiling the 2019 BBS Report. Those that submit on paper PLEASE send your forms back to Michael Williams (not Thetford) so we can compile our own local report in a timely manner for the BTO Cornwall Newsletter.

“Talk from the Team” will now form a regular feature and will enable the BTO Community to get to know us better through our experiences over the last quarter.

Simon Taylor

I was really looking forward to getting to grips with our Rookery survey, unfortunately I hadn't bargained on breaking a bone in my foot on the first day of April rendering me useless for most of the recording period. Over the lovely Easter weekend, I was just about able to complete my two BBS squares albeit rather slowly and painfully but for me that Bank Holiday weekend saw the first of the breeding migrants arriving. I recorded my first Swallows and Willow Warblers, both species watched on the BBS surveys and the historical peak count of Blackcap's was smashed recording a double figure count in one of the 1km squares. After a pretty grim winter filled with illness and bad weather the feel-good factor had returned with the young of Rooks being heard and other species witnessed building their nests. I haven't been able to monitor any of my nest boxes requiring a ladder (approx. 140 of them) as the foot didn't recover sufficiently in time. May brought a returning pair House Martin to the street and they quickly set about repairing last year's nest. But they didn't come alone – 6 others were with them and they were observed prospecting houses nearby. Young from last year I wonder? I also witnessed a migrant Red Kite passing through near home. Swallow numbers built up around SW63, my 10km area and the first Swifts down at Treskillard put a smile on my face as they screamed around the derelict engine houses. A particularly interesting hour was spent at St Gothian Sands watching Swift, Swallow, House Martin and Sand Martin all feeding together, some great birdwatching. Another treat was walking up the main road out of the village and hearing a Cuckoo calling from the moor, a great addition to a Complete List on a BirdTracking walk in the local area. Also, for the first time in 12 years of using BirdTrack, I was able to record six species of corvid on a Complete List after visiting the Lizard. To see Chough, Magpie, Carrion Crow, Rook and Jackdaw all within 50m of each other feeding with a Raven above them was an absolute treat, again, supplemented by plenty of breeding migrants in the form of singing Whitethroat. Just Hooded Crow missing! I may have lost untold data from my nest boxes this year, but it's been replaced with some short but great local BirdTrack walks.



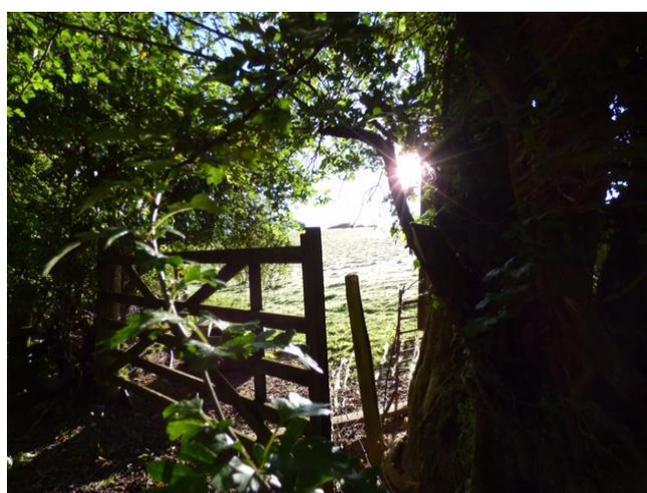
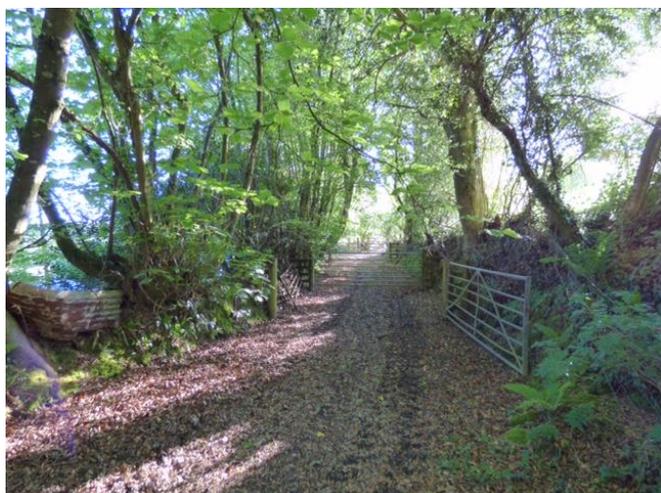
Choughs and Whitethroat (T Taylor)

Sara Booth

Wild Wanderings

For me, April and May gave me the chance to get out to different places bird watching. This time of year is the time for the Breeding Bird Survey. My particular survey area is slightly off the beaten track at Downend, near Lostwithiel. For those who do not know how the survey works, you follow two transects, surveying what you see and hear every 200m for one kilometre. My first transect is on private farmland. The farm house on the land has been there since Tudor times. It's a picturesque area consisting of sheep grazed fields and established woodland. Highlights from this area for my visit this year were drumming woodpeckers, Yellowhammer, Pied Wagtail and newly returned Swallows. Transect two consists of walking along a road bordered by high hedgerows, with cattle grazed fields at the start of the transect and mature woodland at the end of the transect. Highlights from this area were Willow Warbler singing, Linnet flying between the hedgerows, Swifts screaming and another Great Spotted Woodpecker. I love visiting this area in the spring as its filled with different species that I do not normally see on my local patch or during my other surveying activities. Getting out into these different spaces is rewarding in many ways, we get the data for the survey, but as many of us know being close to nature can have a positive effect on our health and wellbeing. So why not try straying away from your local patch and venturing somewhere new? I bet you will be rewarded for your effort.





Michael Williams

I have been surveying one of my BBS squares since 1994. During that time there have been clear losers- spotted flycatchers and greenfinches- and some winners, well that is goldfinches really but there has also been a bit of a recent rally for song and mistle thrush and house sparrow. Each year I approach the survey with a mixture of hope and apprehension. How are the skylarks faring now that there has been a change from maize to oilseed rape? Will this be a good year for whitethroat and willow warblers? But the biggest emotional moment is always in checking whether the yellowhammers have held on. Their numbers have declined on my patch, and I don't think that is just my hearing, but right at the very end of the survey, there at the end of section 10 they have for some reason, thankfully, managed to retain their position. Each spring it has been a joy to see and hear them again (I have to be careful not to distort survey methods by continuing to record until I do hear them!). I just hope that they will continue to be there for the enjoyment of future generations.

Tony Bertenshaw

It's been a busy Spring so far for BTO activities, what with GBW, BBS, WBBS (hope you know all these acronyms!) and the English Farm Woodland survey; and Simon had me counting nests in a local Rookery. Added to which a non-BTO survey is in prospect at a 700-acre estate in Cornwall where the owner is interested in a wilding project along the lines of the well-publicised one at the Knepp estate in Sussex though the habitats are quite dissimilar.

Whilst my BBS is reasonably straightforward, the same can't be said of my WBBS which is carried out along the River Camel between St Breward and Helland, (i.e. to Hell and back). For my part, I have to battle through waist high brambles and other pernicious plants, wade through bogs, climb over unforgiving wire fences, climb up slippery banks, jump across streams entering the river and, as far as possible, ignore the cattle which inevitably believe I have copious amounts of food for them, all with the intention of keeping as close as possible to the waterway. I think half my time is spent negotiating hazards and the other half spotting birds! Oh, for a canal bank with a recognisable path!! We love doing it, though at my age my family believe I should throw in the towel before I seriously injure myself. But we do it for the birds, don't we?

The other part of my spare time is given over to promoting Garden Bird Watch. As an Ambassador (without CD plates!) for the BTO I'm keen to extend its coverage in Cornwall. So, I try to stimulate interest in this activity by giving talks to various groups in my part of Cornwall. So far, I have kept members of Garden Clubs and Probus groups on the edge of their seats as I wade through a variety of exciting slides which are intended to catch the imagination of the audience. They seem to stay awake and enjoy the experience but whether they sign up remains to be seen. I may have more success with a newly established Wildlife and Conservation group which has been set up in my village at St. Breward though I think they seem at the moment to be more interested in butterflies! So, it's works in progress. I'm sure there must be many local BTO members who could spend a little of their spare time logging the birds they see in their gardens. It's not a big deal – you can spend as much time each week as you prefer though the BTO do recommend not less than 20 minutes a week, and consistency of approach is the watchword. And in my view, it's very rewarding as you learn over the years what species you are lucky enough to have in your patch and how the species and numbers fluctuate. There is no restriction on the size of garden and the BTO are interested equally in rural, suburban and urban gardens. If you've done the annual RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch, then you're already a garden birdwatcher! If you'd like to know more about the survey, log onto the BTO website and follow the links, or I would be happy to answer any questions you may have. You can contact me at tony@bertenshaw.me.uk

And Tony's write up takes us quite nicely into this little surprise.

Back in April BTO Member and GBW'er Jane Booth wrote to me to show me a bird which she had observed in her garden on the feeding table. This beautiful Hawfinch was present for two days.



Images courtesy of Jane Booth

BTO Cornwall Meeting (Victoria Inn)

Due to work and life commitments, meetings between myself, Michael, Tony and Sara are rare and difficult to organise but during the first week of May we managed it. The meeting was intended to discuss our plans for the next twelve months. Things that we discussed were the project Tony spoke about earlier involving a Winter and Breeding bird survey along with the provision of nest boxes on a private estate. We also discussed the progression of the GBW survey including a possible Social occasion, a workshop, possibility of getting GBW into schools and maybe a talk and table in the Horticulture Tent at Royal Cornwall (next year). An update of BBS was provided - both the National Survey and local picture and our own local survey at Cothele working with the National Trust. We also discussed the social evening in October (below), planning for a Social Pelagic out of Falmouth (below), Rookery Survey, more Training events at Duchy College in Callington with Newquay also being investigated along with the Bude area, maybe on the Roseland and in Fowey. We are also looking at running some BirdTrack Workshops.

BTO Social Evening October 2019

The location for this event will be the Colliford Lake Tavern on the evening of Saturday October 5th. The menu is below, price per head is £15 for a two-course meal followed by a talk. The speakers will be Derek Spooner and Bruce Taggart with a joint talk entitled "***Underneath the Arches: Nest recording and ringing Dippers and Wagtails in East Cornwall*** "

If you wish to come, please email me to book a place. All places must be booked so we can let the Hosts know the required meals a week in advance so that everybody can be served at the same time. It worked really well in Truro.

The Menu –

Main choices –

Breaded Scampi with chips and peas

Beef or Vegetable Lasagne

Ploughman's Lunch (Cheese or Ham)

Kerulan Cauliflower and Red Pepper Curry (vegan) served with basmati rice and vegan chutneys

Dessert choices –

Steamed Toffee Pudding served with custard or vanilla ice cream
Deep filled shortcrust Apple Pie served with custard or vanilla ice cream
Luxury Chocolate and Orange Torte (Vegan)
Sticky Chocolate and Orange Cake

BTO Social Pelagic (September 15th)

On Sunday 15th September we have chartered the "Free Spirit" a boat run by AK Wildlife Cruises operating out of Falmouth.

The start time for this pelagic trip will be around 10.30-11am in the morning and it's hoped it will last approx. 7 hrs subject to weather on the day. We will be looking for petrels, shearwaters, auks, akuas and many more pelagic seabirds. Dolphins, seals, Porpoise and who knows, maybe even a whale may also feature. Booking will be via the booking office for AK Wildlife Cruises so please do not email me to book a place. Credit Card transactions come with a £3 surcharge however Visa Debit is free.

Places are restricted to 10 people for comfort.

When booking you will pay up front, £50 for a four-hour trip which is guaranteed unless the weather is really bad. If the weather is looking favourable a few days beforehand then the decision will be made to run the 7-hour trip with the extra money being made payable on the day (£30). Should the trip have to be cancelled due to weather etc then a full refund will be given.

Capt Keith is a very enthusiastic wildlife fan and this day will provide an exciting opportunity for the lesser experienced in the BTO Community to mix with the more experienced people within the local BTO. This will provide an excellent opportunity to view seabirds in their marine environment and for people to see birds they may not have seen before. Please do not be put off by your ID Skills, this is a Social Event aimed at being fun whilst watching some amazing sea birds do their stuff whilst they pass through on migration to Patagonia and in some cases - further!

The Marina from which we depart has a free car park and a café if anyone wants tea, cake and a chat to settle in before boarding "Free Spirit".

These images from a recent trip aboard the Free Spirit have been taken by David Matheson, a wildlife photographer and conservation student at Exeter University. David also has his own website which can be found here - <https://www.davidmatheson.co.uk/>



Common Dolphin (David Matheson)



Common Dolphin (David Matheson)



Puffin (David Matheson)



Storm Petrel (David Matheson)

Ticks and Birds

The BTO were approached by Exeter University (Penryn Campus) to participate in a pilot study into a hypothesised relationship between bird diversity and the frequency of ticks. Our dog and I are regularly irritated by bites, there are a lot of deer in our area, but the risks of Lyme Disease and other tick-borne diseases has made tick infection a matter more serious than mere irritation.

The study will be based on the survey routes established in BBS squares; eleven BBS squares in west and central Cornwall were selected to participate. However, a precondition for using a BBS square in this way is that the surveyor for that square has first agreed, which surveyors in nine of the squares have so far done. The Exeter project team have been impressed by the enthusiasm and knowledge that the BBS volunteers have shown; it is anticipated that their input will assist in shaping how the project develops. A big thanks from me and BTO HQ as well as Exeter University to those participating. If anyone want to know more, please contact me on michael.williams@hotmail.com.

Training Weekend

At the end of April, we held a Training weekend at the Duchy College, Stoke Climsand. BTO's Training Manager Nick Moran made a 6hr journey down from Norfolk to deliver a day's Training on Basic Bird ID by Sight and Sound followed by a day's BBS training. The ID course was attended by around 16 delegates looking at the how to use a Field Guide correctly, the process of how to identify a bird by sight followed by an afternoon session of how to learn bird song and two practical sessions in the field. The day in question turned out to be quite windy, far from ideal however it didn't deter us and the afternoons view of a Treecreeper picked up by Nick on sound was thoroughly enjoyable.

The following day was a Breeding Bird Survey Day attended by four people which may not sound many, but the result was great – one square taken for this year, two squares set aside for next year. We'd much rather have this than twenty people attending from the west where we have no available squares to give them! The purpose of this day was purely to help people with survey technique. The other idea of the day was to provide the tools so myself and Michael can deliver the course where and when necessary.



Delegates drawing a bird from someone else's description for identification

Annual Rookery Survey

This survey was aimed at finding which sites from the last National survey in 1975, the last full county survey as it happens, were still active and which ones were unoccupied. The survey was a roaring success, again proving that Cornwall has a receptive and positive BTO Community. The popularity of the survey was a huge unknown, a gamble. It's not an official BTO Survey and with that there was no online allocation system or online recording system. Because it's a nest count, BirdTrack is also unsuitable for storing records. The target was to gain a count or zero count for 200 sites officially, unofficially I was hoping for 300. We actually recorded over 450 sites, a tremendous effort and a great base from which to start the survey proper next year. Talking of next year, it will still only be a local survey there should be an online tetrad allocation system and we'll be adding tree species in, habitat and any other tit bits. Some of you sent extra information for which I am extremely grateful, but who were the winners and who were the losers? The biggest site in 1975 is now one of the smallest sites but two other sites have grown up into century sites, one of them was not in existence in 1975. Where? You'll have to wait for the report which will hopefully be issued in the Autumn.

Again, a huge thankyou to the BTO Community that went out and counted sites, also thanks to Claire Hoddinott for raising awareness within the Friends of Fowey Estuary, Carol Hughes with Wild Roseland, John Rance for spreading word of the survey within the Cornwall Wildlife Trust, Nicola Chance from Cornish Choughs for her help within the Cornish Chough Community and to Dan Chaney for allowing me to advertise it on the CBWPS website.

Farmland Bird Survey

This survey has been problematic and is still ongoing. Whilst being run from Thetford because of the GDPR Regulations, the Forestry Commission were responsible for contacting landowners. Nationally, a lot have refused permission or failed to respond to any correspondence. Regional Reps were asked to promote the survey with BTO hoping each region could cover 5–10 squares. As always with Cornwall, the team will try to provide as much coverage as possible. Many squares were refused access and there was a huge gap in N. Cornwall. There were 92 squares in total throughout the county of which 76 were requested. Of the remaining 16 unrequested squares, 14 were situated between Camelford and Bude mainly due to lack of population and BTO presence here. A more extensive report will hopefully be given towards the end of the year.

Breeding Bird Survey (BBS)

BBS and WBBS

There has been a good take up of squares for these surveys and a fair amount of data have already been entered but the full picture will only emerge at the end of the season. In the next newsletter I will give an update on how Cornwall has done this year.

English Winter Bird Survey

The time for entering data for the survey was extended until 30th June but I believe that after that date any results submitted would not be usable. So, please, if you have any unentered data it would be great if you can get it on the system as soon as possible. If you have any problems with this just let me know. For example, if you have not got time to enter the data, I am very happy to take delivery of the paper copies and enter the results for you. (Let me know on michael.williams@hotmail.com.) So far results have been entered for 34 squares, which is very encouraging, but there are possibly a few more results to come. In addition, it may be that there are additional data for some squares ie later visits which have not yet been recorded.

Wetland Bird Survey

We were saddened to hear that Gladys Grant recently passed away. She had been coordinator of the Tamar Complex for WeBS for many years (from at least 2000), and did a great job over those years.

If anyone is interested in taking on the role of Local Organiser for the Tamar, please contact webs@bto.org

BirdTrack

The number of records being submitted on BirdTrack continues to grow. April saw a new record when 850,000 records were uploaded during the month nationally. National stats are one thing, but how have we done here in Cornwall. For the first four months of the year, Cornwall had a provisional 46,116 records submitted at the time of writing.

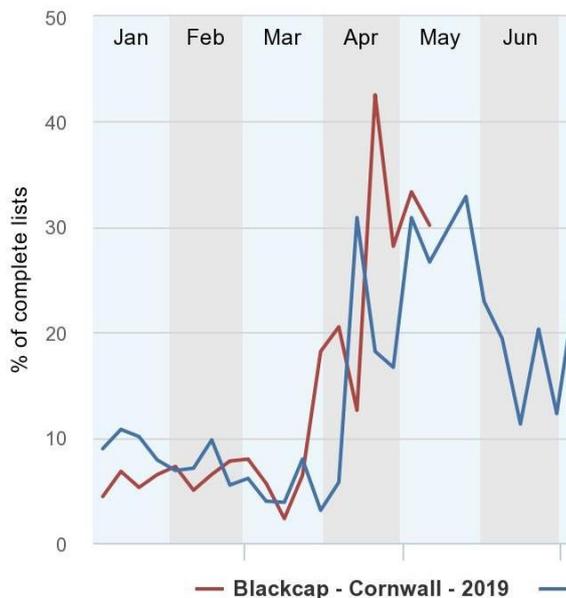
Month	No of records	No of species recorded	No of Complete Lists
January	13,595	179	541
February	11,484	178	498
March	10,843	186	510
April	10,194	193	495

So, what is a Complete List? A Complete List means that you have recorded everything you have positively identified by sight and sound. If you hear a bird song and do not know what it is, it does not mean that you cannot record a Complete List, remember it's everything you **identify**. A Complete List has far more benefits than Casual Records. Casual records are good for County Recorders to identify distribution of a species but depending on experience, length of visit, size of recording area etc a Complete List not only tells you what was present, but it can be used to produce reporting rates for species.

The local and national results are available on the website for everyone to look at - you don't have to be a BirdTrack recorder. Every night the BTO computer will summarise that day's records and produce up-to-date maps and graphs showing the latest in migration, movements and distribution. These include animated maps showing the arrival and departure of migrants and the seasonal movements of birds. Take a look: www.birdtrack.net

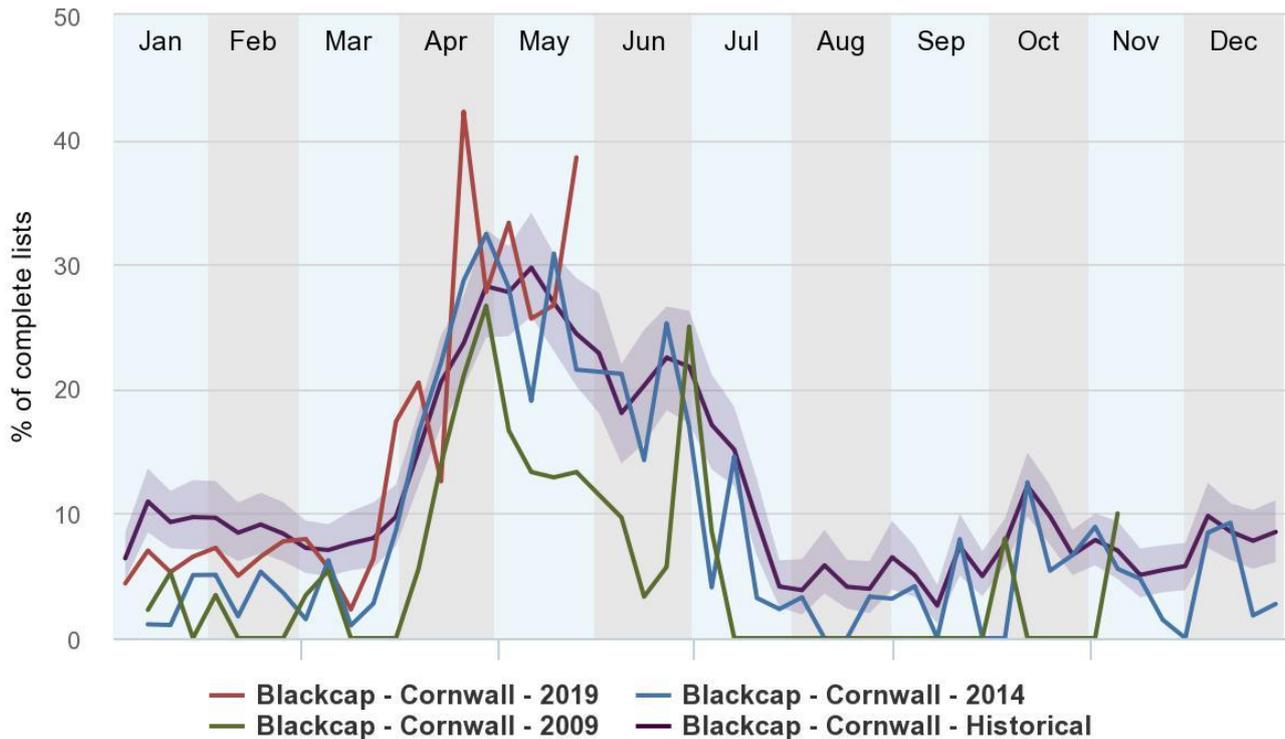
So, what can BirdTrack tell us about the arrival of Blackcap in Cornwall this year –

Reporting rate



The graph on the left shows Blackcap arrival for 2019 in red. There is a clear picture of the big rise in numbers in Week 16, a week later than 2018. During Week 14 in 2018 Blackcap were reported in 5.75% of Complete Lists compared to 20.51% for the same period in 2019.

Reporting rate

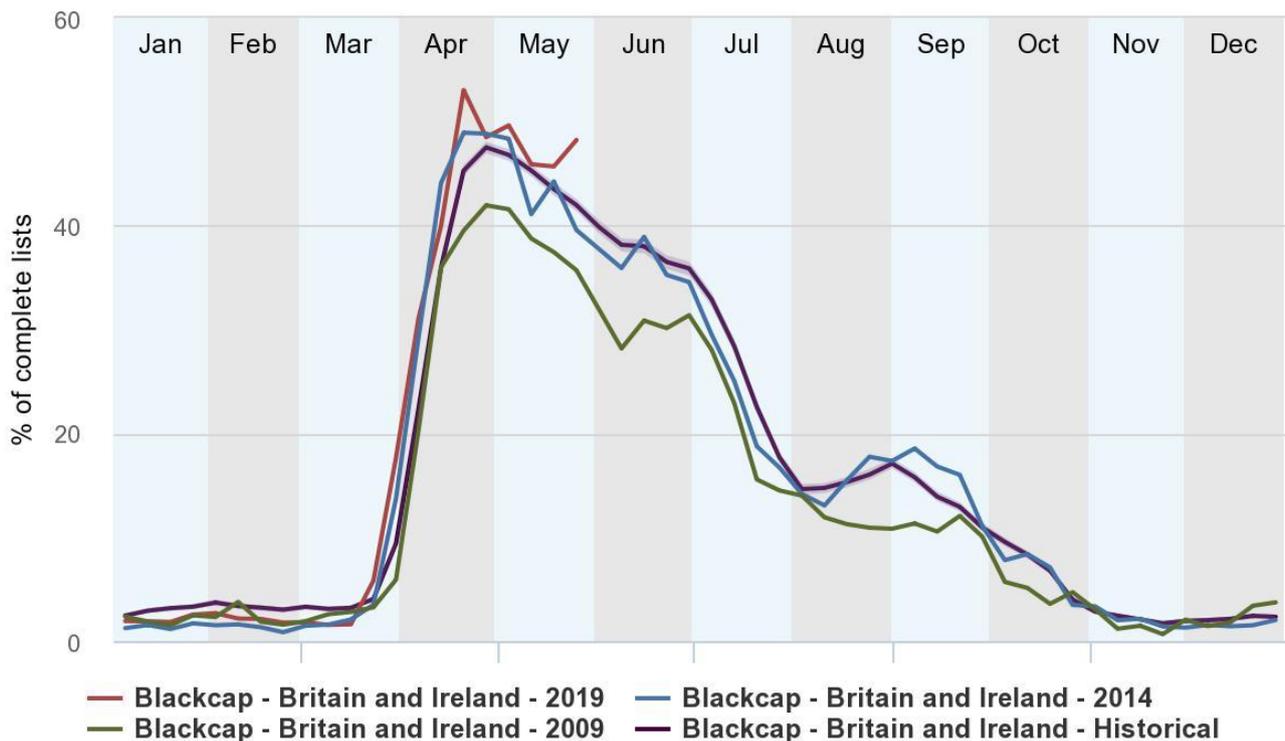


www.birdtrack.net

The chart above shows the Reporting Rates for this year, 5 years previously, 10 years previously and the historical average. For 2019 we can see that up until Week 12 towards the end of March, Blackcap sightings were fairly average however the spike from all those arriving birds over Easter can clearly be seen. Another rise in reported birds also appears at the end of May in Week 21

How does this fit in with the national picture? The same graph appears below

Reporting rate



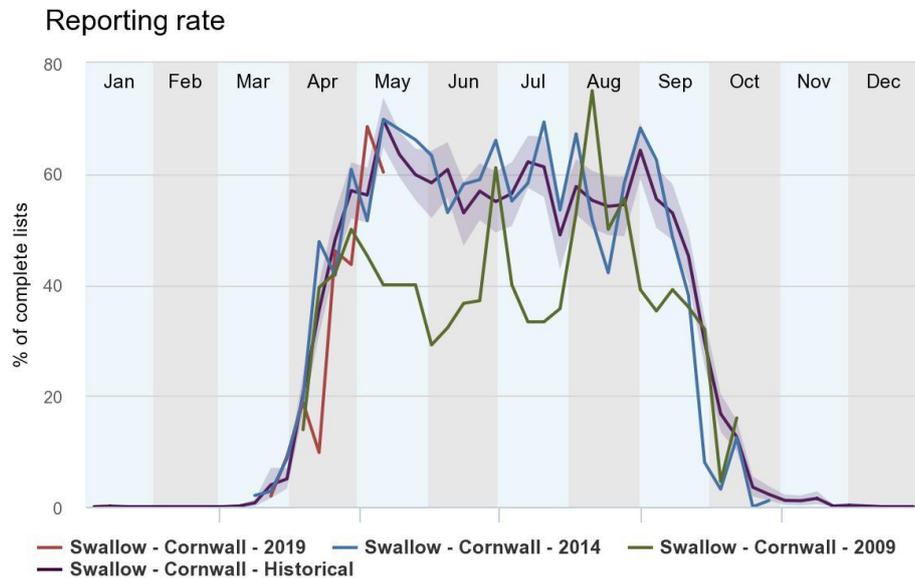
www.birdtrack.net

The spike in Week 16 can be clearly seen in the National picture as can the rise again in Week 21.

In both graphs you'll also see that 2009 was well below average for Blackcap in Cornwall and Nationally.

In April many people were expressing concern on Social Media about a lack of Swallows in their local areas but were people expecting them back too early?

This Reporting Rate graph for Swallows suggests the answer is possibly yes



BirdTrack is an excellent tool to store your own records, it can become your electronic diary. You can create sites tailored to suit your own needs such as your local walk, a specific reserve and many other things. Without records we have no conservation be it a local wood, open meadows etc.

The survey to Gull Rock (below) has been set up on BirdTrack and is inclusive of the islet only –



More details about BirdTrack can be found here – www.birdtrack.net

BTO / AK Wildlife Cruises Survey of Gull Rock

On the evening of the 22nd May, a group of BTO volunteers joined Capt Keith and Georgia to take their boat “Free Spirit” up to Gull Rock off Nare Head. This is the first of an anticipated joint annual survey to monitor the declining seabirds on the islet. There have been many reports in the past of the rock being white with guano, these days its more green than white.

We recorded numbers of Cormorant, Shag, Great Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Razorbill and Guillemot. One pair of “bridled” Guillemot have so far been identified from the photos. Results are –

Species	No of birds	No of nests
Guillemot	256	-
Razorbill	4	-
Cormorant	20	10
Shag	64	37
Herring Gull	21	16
Gt Black-backed Gull	38	19



Left to right S Dabb, D Beadle, SF Jackson, T Taylor, SM Taylor



Gull Rock (S Taylor)



Guillemot on breeding ledges (S Taylor)



A pair of Shag with their young (S Taylor)

Any feedback or contributions, please contact Simon Taylor.

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