

A County wide Project on Kestrels – appeal for volunteers

Thanks to the intensive fieldwork for the Avifauna, we have a reasonable understanding of the current status of Shropshire birds. For the Kestrel, once our most abundant raptor, the world is changing apparently not for the better and the Avifauna has demonstrated a decline in the range and abundance in our county.

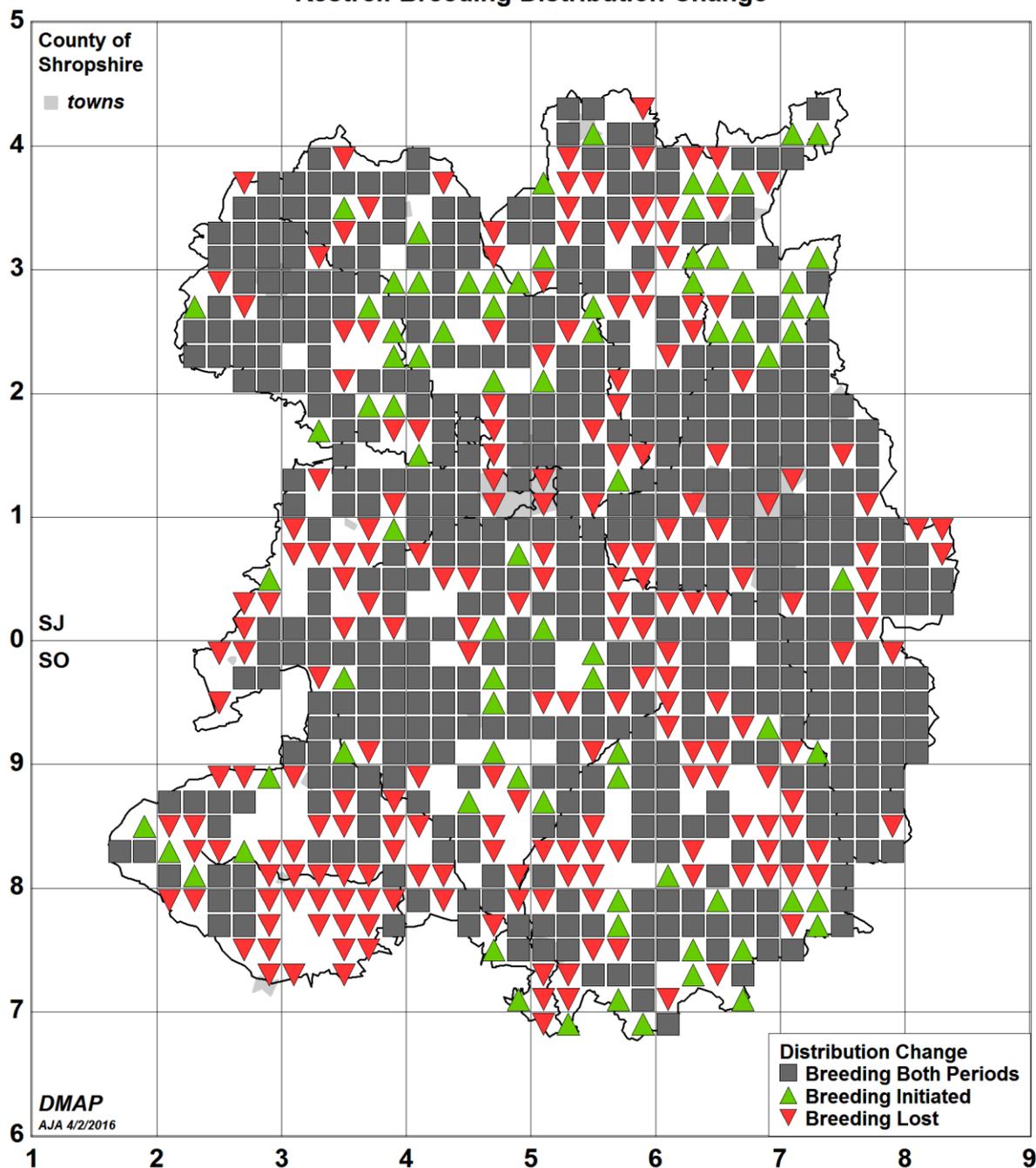


Kestrel Chicks a few days of age, north Shropshire

The 1985-90 Atlas project recorded confirmed, probable or possible breeding in 718 tetrads. By 2009-13 this declined to 589 tetrads representing a range contraction of 18% but this increases to a 26% decline if the analysis is limited to confirmed and probable breeding only.

The decline in range was steepest in the south of the county where 25% of the 'SO' tetrads lost birds, compared to 13% of 'SJ' tetrads. In particular birds disappeared from many tetrads in the extreme south of the county between Clun and Ludlow.

Kestrel: Breeding Distribution Change



A number of theories to explain the decline have been put forward, including agricultural intensification and loss of marginal land, the increases in medium sized birds of prey such as Goshawk, Buzzard and Peregrine and the persistence of some pesticides in particular rodenticides.

The decline in Shropshire parallels the similar decline across the UK and in Europe too.

The species has been assessed as Red on the County List of Breeding Conservation Concern. The Species Recovery Working Party of the Conservation sub-committee is putting together a Species Action Plan with the help and guidance of the Raptor Group.

One of the key objectives of the Action Plan will be to try to understand more about the causes of the decline and the immediate focus will be on finding out more about the breeding success and population changes within the county.

To these ends a part of the project will be to find and monitor nests including the provision of nestboxes in selected study areas. Nests will be followed through the season and nest record cards completed and the data published each year either in the Buzzard or the county Bird Report. Though the focus will be on specific study areas, any nest or nestbox within the county will be incorporated into project so long as we have a volunteer to monitor and maintain the nestbox.

If you know of a nest-site or already monitor a nestbox and wish to contribute or help in any way please contact the project email address:- shropshirekestrels@gmail.com. All volunteers will be acknowledged.

Nestlings will be ringed wherever possible including with colour rings with a view to determining survival rates of the young birds and perhaps the recruitment back into the breeding population. The project can supply colour rings to ringers in the county who monitor nest sites.

A second part of the project will be to understand population changes rather better than we do and to determine how the population can be better monitored between Atlas 'years'. Two approaches to this will be followed. Leo Smith and the Community Wildlife Groups will look for breeding Kestrels in their usual study areas across the county where we hope therefore to get detailed population estimates of these areas. Additionally, we are trialling a more adhoc approach to see whether or not adhoc observations of Kestrels in the breeding season might help to monitor the population and will compare these results to those of the Community Wildlife Groups.

For this part of the project any observations of Kestrels between March 1 and July 31 this year will be valuable. As a minimum the information required will be:-

6-figure Grid Reference or what3words location; A Location Name; The Observer Name and initials; Date and ideally also sex of the bird if seen well and any behavioural notes e.g., sitting on wires, hovering, chasing Carrion Crows etc.

The six-figure grid reference is important as often the male bird will sit in a location where he has a good view towards the nest site so a regular spot may indicate the nest isn't too far away.

If you come across any sightings between these dates (even for the same location on different dates), please record them to shropshirekestrels@gmail.com, or enter them in **Birdtrack** if you have a Birdtrack account. The latter is preferred as these will then be retained in your name for your review at any time. You can set up sites to a 4 -figure grid reference in Birdtrack easily but please add the 6-figure reference to the Comments box together with any details of your observation.

As with the nest monitoring results, results will be published each year.

The Kestrel remains a reasonably common bird in the county with a population of 300-350 pairs (Avifauna), and we hope this project will help us to better understand what drives the population changes here and inform conservation measures.

Gerry Thomas, on behalf of the Shropshire Raptor Group and Conservation sub-committee

