

Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society

Meeting of the Natural History section, 7th January 2012: Bird Atlases,
National and Local

At our meeting on 7th January Rob Grimmond, from the Somerset Ornithological Society, talked to us about work by the British Trust for Ornithology between 2007 and 2011 to compile a new national bird atlas, as well a major project locally to produce for the first time an atlas of breeding and wintering birds in Somerset.

Rob summarised for us the various levels of evidence required to be able to say whether particular bird species are likely to be breeding within a given area, and explained the methods being used to ensure even coverage of the whole country. A remarkable number of bird-watchers have been involved in the fieldwork for this project, which covers the whole of Great Britain and Ireland. The aim has been to record systematically for each 10-kilometre square of the National Grid the birds present within eight 2-kilometre squares (called tetrads).

For the county Atlas, the Somerset Ornithological Society are continuing fieldwork for one further breeding season, in the hope that all remaining tetrads can be surveyed to give a comprehensive coverage of the county at tetrad level. Rob explained that in Somerset a number of species seem to have been particularly poorly recorded, including woodcock, tawny owl, barn owl and jay. SANHS members are being urged to send in records of any sightings of these species over the next six months.

It is hoped that both national and county Atlases will be published in 2013. It will be fascinating to see how the results nationally compare with findings of earlier Atlases covering the periods 1968-72 and 1987-1991. But more than this, we will have a clear and definitive picture of

the current distribution of Somerset's breeding and wintering birds – which will be of enormous interest and value to naturalists and conservationists alike.

The next meeting of the Natural History section will be at the Wyndham Hall at 2.30 p.m. on Saturday 4th February, when Nigel Hestor will be talking to us about the natural history of the Holnicote Estate.