

EBBA2 — A New European Atlas of Breeding Birds

Verena Keller

Swiss Ornithological Institute. Seerose 1. CH-6204 Sempach, Switzerland.

verena.keller@vogelwarte.ch

Abstract. The European Bird Census Council (EBCC) started a new European bird atlas to document the distribution of breeding birds around thirty years after the production of the first atlas. The main fieldwork period is planned for 2013 to 2017, and in many countries is well under way. This continent-wide project needs a strong collaboration between very diverse countries and poses particular challenges in east and southeast Europe.

Introduction

The first European Breeding Bird Atlas (Hagemeyer & Blair 1997) was a milestone in European ornithology. Its outputs and data have been widely used in nature conservation and scientific studies. But the European landscape and climate are rapidly changing. We need to understand the consequences of these changes for biodiversity in order to better protect it. The European Bird Census Council (EBCC) therefore started a new atlas project, with fieldwork concentrating on the years 2013 to 2017.

Organisation

First ideas for a new atlas were presented by the board of the EBCC at a workshop during the EBCC conference in Cáceres in 2010. Following the support by delegates the Board started work on this new and challenging project. In 2011 it set up an atlas steering committee (ASC), consisting of members and observers on the Board: Verena Keller (chair), Hans-Günther Bauer, Lluís Brotons, Ian Burfield, Mark Eaton, Ruud Foppen, Mikhail Kalyakin, and David Noble. Lacking a central coordinator, the first tasks were carried out by members of the ASC. In 2012 the small amounts of funding available allowed to set up a coordination team consisting of Sergi Herrando from the Catalan Ornithological Institute (ICO) and Petr Voříšek from the Czech Society for Ornithology (CSO), under the supervision of Verena Keller from the Swiss Ornithological Institute as chair of the ASC.

This decentralised organisation is very much in line with the structure of EBCC and allows a strong collaboration with other projects EBCC is involved in, in particular the Pan European Common Bird Monitoring Scheme (PECBMS), which is also coordinated from Prague and involves much the same network of national organisations for data collection. In summer 2014, an additional part-time post could be created at CSO, which has been taken up by Martin Kupka. So far, work concentrated on defining the methodology (see article by Herrando *et al.* in this volume) and supporting countries in data collection at national level. A few examples of national atlas projects from across Europe are presented in this volume.

Aims and planned outputs

The new atlas will document the distribution and abundance of breeding birds across the whole of Europe (Fig. 1), and determine changes in relation to the situation 30 years ago. It will help our understanding of the many environmental changes that have impacted on populations of birds across Europe and thus contribute to improving the conservation status of European breeding birds by helping to target conservation action. The provision of up-to-date data on range and abundance of all breeding bird species will improve European trend indices and indicators, enable better Red-List assessments across Europe and at EU level and help set conservation

priorities for the coming years. The project will provide a rich source of data for multiple future uses. It will help countries to meet governmental reporting requirements and will be a starting point for further scientific research.

The decentralised organisation, involving thousands of citizen scientists across the entire continent of Europe as well as professional ornithologists, will increase capacity for monitoring and conservation, particularly in regions of Europe with less well developed networks of ornithologists. Experience in many countries has shown that atlas projects are ideal for recruiting and training new volunteers, and that many of the participants continue to collaborate in monitoring projects when an atlas has been finished. The common goal of producing a European atlas will also strengthen existing networks of ornithologists across Europe providing a strong platform for future projects.

Challenges of data collection

Europe is a diverse continent. The size of a country, accessibility for bird surveys, availability of ornithologists for surveys and coordination, tradition in volunteer work, and financial resources all influence the possibilities for fieldwork. In Europe, the first national atlases were produced in the 1970s, and for many countries the first EBCC atlas project spurred the collection of field data and the production of national atlases in the course of the 1980s and 1990s (Gibbons *et al.* 2007). Since then, atlas work has been progressing fast but at the same time the gap between countries mostly in western Europe which have already produced one or two repeat atlases using advanced analytical tools and those countries that still lack distribution data for large parts of their country has widened. At the same time, political changes have opened new possibilities for collaboration across Europe. The most important step towards coverage of the whole of Europe has been made in Russia. The European part of Russia alone makes up around 40% of the surface area of Europe but there were hardly any data available for the first EBCC atlas. Today, the Russian atlas is well under way (see Kalyakin & Voltzit in this volume).

A European atlas project has to find the balance between the very detailed information available

in some western European countries and the possibilities in countries with fewer resources. A questionnaire sent to the EBCC delegates in 2011 clearly showed that, while the enthusiasm to collaborate in this European project was great, there would be enormous challenges in particular in east and southeast Europe. A workshop for countries from this region that had indicated a need for support, was therefore held in Barcelona in 2013. General guidelines and supporting documents have been made available on the EBCC website (<http://www.ebcc.info/index.php?ID=506>) and individual technical support is provided to national coordinators where needed.

Many countries will need help in data collection by foreign observers to cover gaps. Several short expeditions have already taken place e.g. by German birdwatchers to Albania (Ernst 2013), Czech ones to Macedonia and Moldova (<http://www.ebcc.info/index.php?ID=555>), and by a team from Catalonia to Montenegro and Turkey (<http://www.ebcc.info/index.php?ID=567>). With more countries now well advanced in the organisation of their national projects, support from visitors will become more important in the coming years and can be targeted in collaboration with national coordinators. Modern tools for online entry of observations will play an increasingly important role also for the collection of data by travelling birdwatchers (see guidelines <http://www.ebcc.info/index.php?ID=545>).

Outlook

Thanks to thousands of skilled volunteers and professional ornithologists, we will be able to determine the distribution and numbers of birds across Europe. In parallel to data collection setting up a database and developing data analysis procedures will be the main tasks for the coordination team. Funding for this huge project is not secured yet. Information and fundraising will have a high priority, too. The articles gathered in this issue of Bird Census News give an insight into the work in progress and will hopefully increase the collaboration between partners across Europe. The EBCC has always shown its strength in achieving projects with the help of a dedicated network of individuals and organisations, and EBBA2 will be no exception.



Figure 1. The second European Breeding Bird Atlas covers the whole of Europe, including Turkey and the European part of Russia, for which only few data were available for the first EBCC atlas.

References

- Ernst, S. (2013). Impressionen von einer ornithologischen Exkursion 2013 durch die Berge Albaniens. *Ornithologische Mitteilungen* 65: 133–148.
- Gibbons, D.W., Donald, P.F., Bauer, H.-G., Fornasari, L. & Dawson, I.K. (2007). Mapping avian distributions: the evolution of bird atlases. *Bird Study* 54: 324–334.
- Hagemeijer, W.J.M. & Blair, M.J. (1997). *The EBCC Atlas of European Breeding Birds. Their distribution and abundance*. T. & A.D. Poyser, London.
- Keller, V. et al. (2012). Questionnaires to EBCC Delegates 2011 — Summary Report. European Bird Census Council. <http://www.ebcc.info/index.php?ID=506>

Received: 7 July 2014
Accepted: 16 July 2014