

A NEST RECORD SCHEME FOR NEW YORK STATE

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(Text of talk given at the Federation of New York State Bird Clubs meeting, Jamestown, 1963).

This paper describes a co-operative scheme for the accumulation of information on the breeding biology of birds. This scheme has been run very successfully in the British Isles for a number of years. Information obtained from the British nest record card program is used to illustrate the value of the scheme. At the end of the article plans that have been made to run a similar scheme here are outlined.

In essence the scheme is very simple, as all good schemes should be. Each observer fills in a card recording the data noted for every active nest found. The form of the card is shown in figure one.

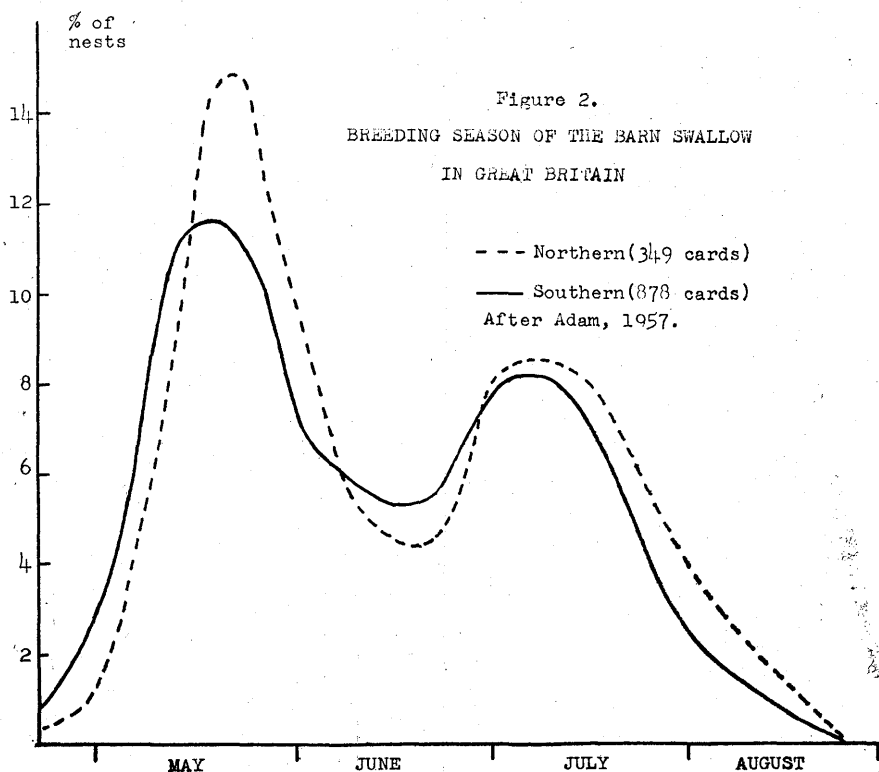
Figure 1.

[illegible]

Separate cards are used for each nest, but subsequent visits to the same nest are recorded on the same card. Several visits to the same nest increase the value of the card. The completed cards are sent, at intervals or at the end of the season, into the central agency. Here they are sorted and when enough cards are available they can be analysed.

The first piece of information that can be obtained is a picture of the breeding season. To illustrate this I have selected one of the few species common to both continents for which analysis is available. The breeding season of the Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) is shown in figure two. The Handbook of British Birds, a fine reference work, say

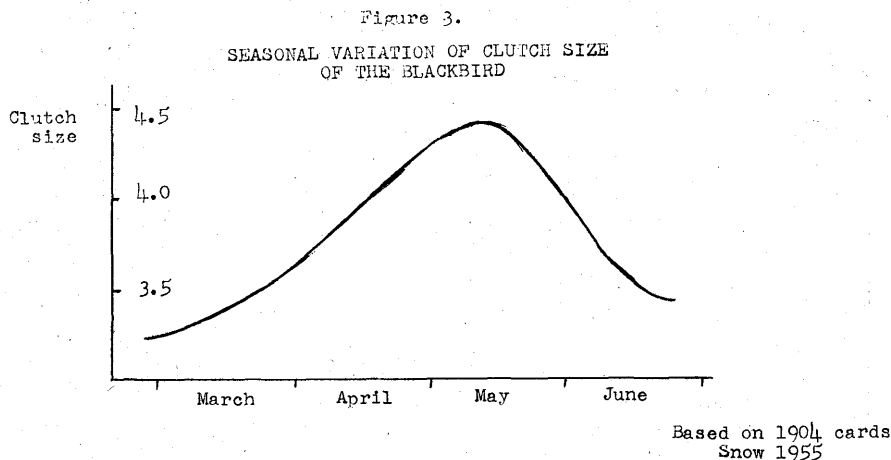
this about the breeding season of the Barn Swallow "from mid-May onwards, rarely earlier, to Sept-Oct". How much more informative is figure two.



It is seen that the breeding season starts in late April and, in fact, is noticeably earlier than the sentence in the Handbook suggests. The data in figure two is analysed separately for northern and southern England. It will be seen that the first peak is about a week later in the north. The second peak is less sharply defined than the first and this is probably due to a combination of second and third broods.

For very common species it is possible to plot the breeding season for each year and thus determine the influence of climate on the breeding season.

Another facet of breeding biology that can be examined is clutch-size. The variation of clutch-size with breeding season for the Blackbird (*Turdus merula*) is shown in figure three. The species referred to here is not the Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) but a true thrush, the European counterpart of the American Robin (*T. migratorius*).



Referring to the Blackbird, the Handbook of British Birds states "4-5, often 3, rarely 6", again much more information can be obtained from nest record cards. It should be mentioned that the variation of clutch-size with season of the Blackbird is larger than found in many other species. In the closely related Song Thrush (*T. ericetorum*) the variation is much less. Nevertheless, this pattern of clutch-size with breeding season is found in many species.

The breeding success can be calculated from the cards. The relationship of breeding success to the breeding season and clutch-size has been considered. However, one of the greatest values of the scheme might be in the much disputed field of the effects of insecticides. Much has been talked about the lack of breeding success due to insecticides, but with nest record cards we should be able to compare areas treated with insecticides with untreated areas. Hard facts would replace speculation.

Details of the methods of analysing data from cards are not given here, since they are not considered to be of general interest. Also references are not given since these are entirely found in British journals which are not readily available here. However, details of methods of extracting data and list of references can be obtained from the author.

Having, I hope, given some idea of the value of this scheme in the collection of ornithological information I would like to outline plans that have been made for starting such a scheme here. The idea is that the scheme is to be based on the Laboratory of Ornithology at Cornell University. I am sure that no more suitable place could have been found. I am grateful to the director, Dr. Sewall Pettingill, for making this possible, to Dr. Sally Hoyt the executive secretary for her enthusiastic support and to the executive committee of the Onondaga Audubon Society for underwriting the cost of starting the scheme.

A stock of cards has been printed and these may be obtained free from the Laboratory of Ornithology, Sapsucker Woods, Cornell University, Ithaca. At the end of the season completed cards are sent to the Laboratory of Ornithology. The success of this scheme depends on wide-spread support and it is hoped that even those who find only a single nest will help by recording it.

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Information wanted on Cliff Swallow colonies.

The writer would appreciate learning the exact location of active Cliff Swallow (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) nesting colonies in New York State, and the approximate number of nests involved. Information would also be welcome concerning any colonies recently abandoned, with reason for abandonment, if known. Sally F. Hoyt, Laboratory of Ornithology, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York

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