

REVIEW

Bird Census Techniques, by Colin J. Bibby, Neil D. Burgess and David A. Hill, Academic Press, London, 1992.

This book brings together many widely used methods for censusing (or indexing) birds, mapping bird distributions, and relating these data to habitat features. The first two chapters introduce the questions: what is the purpose of the study?, what is the most appropriate method?, and what are the potential sources of error?. The next six chapters describe in detail the field methods, the assumptions and the interpretation of results for: territory mapping, line transects, point counts, catching and marking, counting individual species, and counting colonial nesting and flocking birds. The book concludes with chapters on distribution studies and quantifying bird habitats.

Throughout, the book is well illustrated with clear worked examples either from real studies or from hypothetical situations when particular points are to be emphasised. The worked examples are livened by many illustrations and graphs.

The book has been written by three experienced field ornithologists from the RSPB and BTO in Britain, and so is practical and authoritative. However, there is a distinct bias towards methods used in Britain where the terrain (and especially forest habitat) is quite different from in New Zealand; there are many more ornithologists per square kilometre than in New Zealand and so some national schemes such as the Common Birds Census are possible; and, where several non-government bodies are in place to organise and support much amateur and professional ornithology. In New Zealand, most work in the bird censusing field has been from national counts of waders and single species (both common and threatened), home range mapping from radio-telemetric studies, and from "five-minute bird counts" in native forest where the aim is generally to compare bird populations in different habitats, in different seasons, or over time. This last technique falls within the chapter "Point Counts" which provides very useful reminders about the assumptions made in point counts, but then rather dismisses the value of obtaining an index of relative abundance and the robustness of the technique, and does not provide any support on how to analyse such data.

I would have liked to see the section on assumptions before the section on interpretation of results in each chapter; also, some discussion on the assessment of the cost-effectiveness of the different methods would have been valuable (see Dawson, D.G. 1981. *Studies in Avian Biology* 6: 554-558).

Some sections are overly simplistic, yet others are technically complex, but overall, I consider that this will be a very useful reference book for keen amateurs and professionals, and should help to guide the planning and execution of future studies at both the back-garden and the national level.

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