

On 27 Mar 2015, at 11:16, Nick Rossiter <[nick.rossiter1 at btinternet.com](mailto:nick.rossiter1@btinternet.com)> wrote:

To: Editor,  
British Birds  
Roger Riddington  
[editor at britishbirds.co.uk](mailto:editor@britishbirds.co.uk)  
Dear Roger

I always look forward to the scarce migrants report in British Birds. The attempt to keep track of the often very variable fortunes of such species is a very valuable exercise for monitoring trends and preserving material from diverse sources for posterity.

It was therefore with great disappointment that the graph (Figure 6) in the Honey-buzzard account (BB 108 pp.138-139) was published omitting the two most important years for migration, those for 2000 and 2008. This surely cannot be because of presentational problems: there are techniques in all graphical packages for handling a few much higher values than the norm, such as showing a broken column with the actual value at the top.

The impression given to the casual reader is that these years were blanks for Honey-buzzard. Now of course, if you read the text and the caption, it is pointed out that the counts for 2000 and 2008 have been omitted but the actual counts are only given incidentally in the *Other annual maxima* as 2,188 in 2000 and 795 in 2008. To relegate these exciting figures to a state of obscurity seems to directly contradict the stated British Birds aim: “[to] maintain its position as the journal of record” [contents page of the issue in question].

If you look at the *Annual means 1986-2012* you find a much higher figure for the period 2000-2009 of 437 birds/year than in the previous decade from 1990-1999 of 125 birds/year. Nowhere in the text is this specifically mentioned. Instead a lot of emphasis appears to be placed on the lower migration totals in 2011-2012, which is far too short a period on which to make any assessment of trends.

Scientifically there are a number of weaknesses in the graphical approach taken by the authors:

- 1.A graph should be as complete and accurate as possible without recourse to details in the text and caption;
- 2.A graph should give a clear representation of the base data before any manipulation is done.

The problem in not publishing the base data in full is compounded by an analysis being done on the graph, missing the years 2000 and 2008, to draw a line which attempts to show a trend. I am afraid that the result lacks integrity with the base data being corrupted in order to facilitate an analysis which presumably satisfies the authors, for whatever reason.

Many scarce migrants do show wide variations from year to year in their numbers. But surely the whole point is to try and understand the reasons for the

variations and not to discard the maximum figures. The authors' treatment of Honey-buzzard is moving in the opposite direction.

I cannot see the same treatment for any other species in the article even for those where there is very considerable variation from year to year, such as Temminck's Stint, Grey Phalarope, Sabine's Gull, Alpine Swift.

I would hope that the matter can be corrected. I would like to see, with some urgency, in a forthcoming issue the base data produced without any omissions or massaging by the authors. It should also be pointed out with this new graph that the graph published as Figure 6 results from an analysis by the authors, using a major modification of the base data. In this way British Birds can maintain its reputation for integrity and its position as a journal of record.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards

Nick Rossiter

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