

*Woodpecker and Nuthatch  
Survey 1994-95*



*Roy Atkins and John Callion*

# Woodpecker and Nuthatch Survey 1994-95

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## Introduction

The aim of this survey was to identify the distribution and range within Cumbria of the woodpeckers and Nuthatch. These are a closely related group of birds that occupy broadly similar habitat, that of deciduous woodland. This habitat is fairly abundant over large parts of the county and is likely to be secure and unchanged at least within the boundaries of the Lake District National Park.

A variety of questions were also in the back of our minds, based on the apparent trends within the populations of these species: – is Green Woodpecker really declining in the north? – is the recently recorded spread of the Nuthatch still continuing at the same pace? – is Lesser Spotted Woodpecker really as rare in the county as we think? – indeed is the Great Spotted Woodpecker as stable as it appears?

These four species lend themselves to being part of the same survey as there are many similarities between them. All four are resident within Britain, though none are present in Ireland. There is little evidence to show that any of them move far within Britain, though there are some autumn immigrant Great Spotted Woodpeckers from northern Europe. Each of them is a hole nester, with the three woodpeckers excavating their own while the Nuthatch uses natural cavities, including an increasing uptake of nest boxes both in natural woodland and in rural gardens. All species are fairly noisy especially in the spring-time, consequently are reasonably easy to discover, however actual nest site location can be particularly difficult.

## Method

To organise the survey Cumbria was divided into four areas. A coordinator for each area allocated 10km squares to surveyors.

Surveyors targeted any areas with trees, ranging from farmland with scattered trees though to woodland. Survey work was conducted during the breeding season from April to July inclusive and ideally all suitable nesting habitat was to be visited at least once during the breeding season.

Surveyors recorded data on field sheets. The same criteria were used as in the British Trust for Ornithology's *The Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland* (1968-72), (possible breeding – recorded in breeding habitat, no other evidence; probable breeding – singing male or pair in territory; confirmed breeding – various criteria including adults entering or leaving nest site; fledged young etc.)

Maps of presence/absence of each species were generated using the *Recorder* database at Tullie House Museum, where the more detailed breeding information is stored.

Habitat data were also collected, recording the dominant and second most dominant tree species within 25m of the bird. Nest data consisted of tree species, height of nest, whether the tree was dead or alive and altitude. People were encouraged to send in supplementary records and these were included in the data set.

Over 90% of suitable nesting habitat was surveyed. Data was entered on the mapping database, 'Recorder', at Tullie House Museum and tetrad distribution maps were produced.

Finding nest holes proved very difficult for most observers; only Great Spotted Woodpecker and Nuthatch sites were found in good enough numbers to invite analysis.

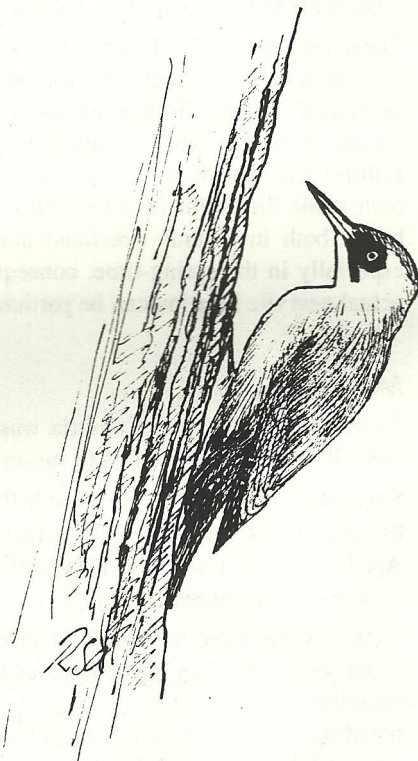
### Green Woodpecker

The species is not difficult to discover during the breeding season due to its loud, laughing 'yaffle' cry. The survey shows that the Green Woodpecker has consolidated in the south and west Lake District since it was first found, as recently as 1945, though both the 1988-91 and this survey shows evidence of a continuing decline in the north-east of the county.

The map suggests that Green Woodpeckers find river valleys important. The species is largely absent from areas of managed arable farmland.

In some areas, eg. Whinlatter and Ennerdale, Green Woodpeckers were present in coniferous forestry woodland, managed as an economic concern, though they were thought to be nesting in nearby deciduous stands; if the present policy of integrated mixed woodland is continued by the Forestry managements the future for Green Woodpeckers could be brighter.

Surprisingly no nest sites were recorded.



# Green Woodpecker

Symbol: tetrads Key: ● 1994-5

