

Summary of the 2013 Bittern breeding season

This report provides a brief summary of the results of the Bittern Monitoring Programme in 2013. Although there was no dedicated Bittern monitoring field staff again in 2013, it was encouraging to see the excellent coverage of sites across the country. Many thanks to all the volunteers, conservation site staff and landowners who helped to monitor sites in 2013.

2013 Results

There was another encouraging increase in the number of confirmed booming males in 2013, with a minimum of 120 boomers recorded at 60 sites, compared to 106 at 53 sites in 2012. There was evidence of a range increase, with booming reported from two counties for the first time in several decades. Overall, there was confirmed booming at nine new sites in 2013.

As in 2012, it was not possible to monitor all sites for nesting activity in 2013. From the sites monitored, nesting was confirmed at 22 sites in 2013, with a minimum of 51 nests recorded. In 2012, 44 nests were confirmed at 20 sites.

Figure 1. The minimum number of booming male Bitterns (in red) in the UK and the number of occupied sites (in blue) between 1990 and 2013.

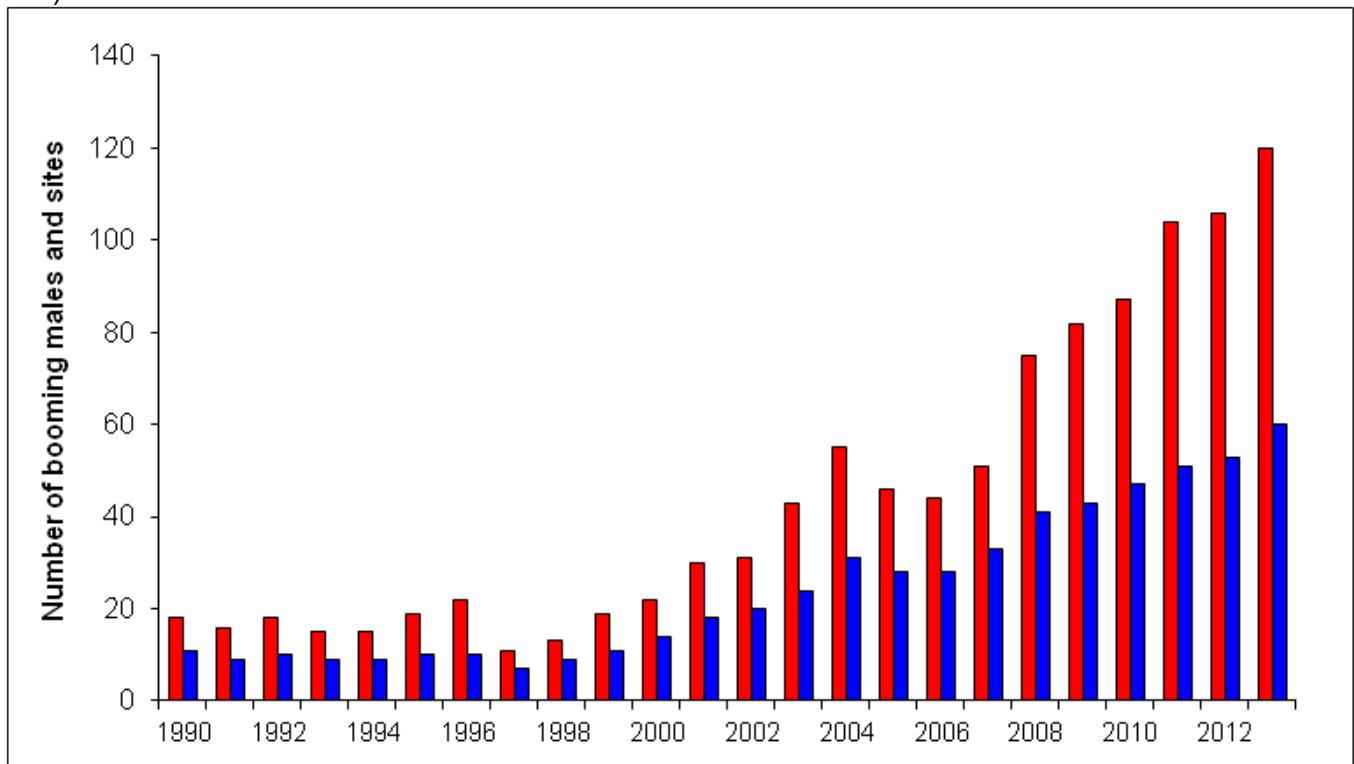


Table 1. The minimum number of booming male Bitterns in the UK since 2000 and the number of occupied sites involved each year (with the maximum figures shown in brackets).

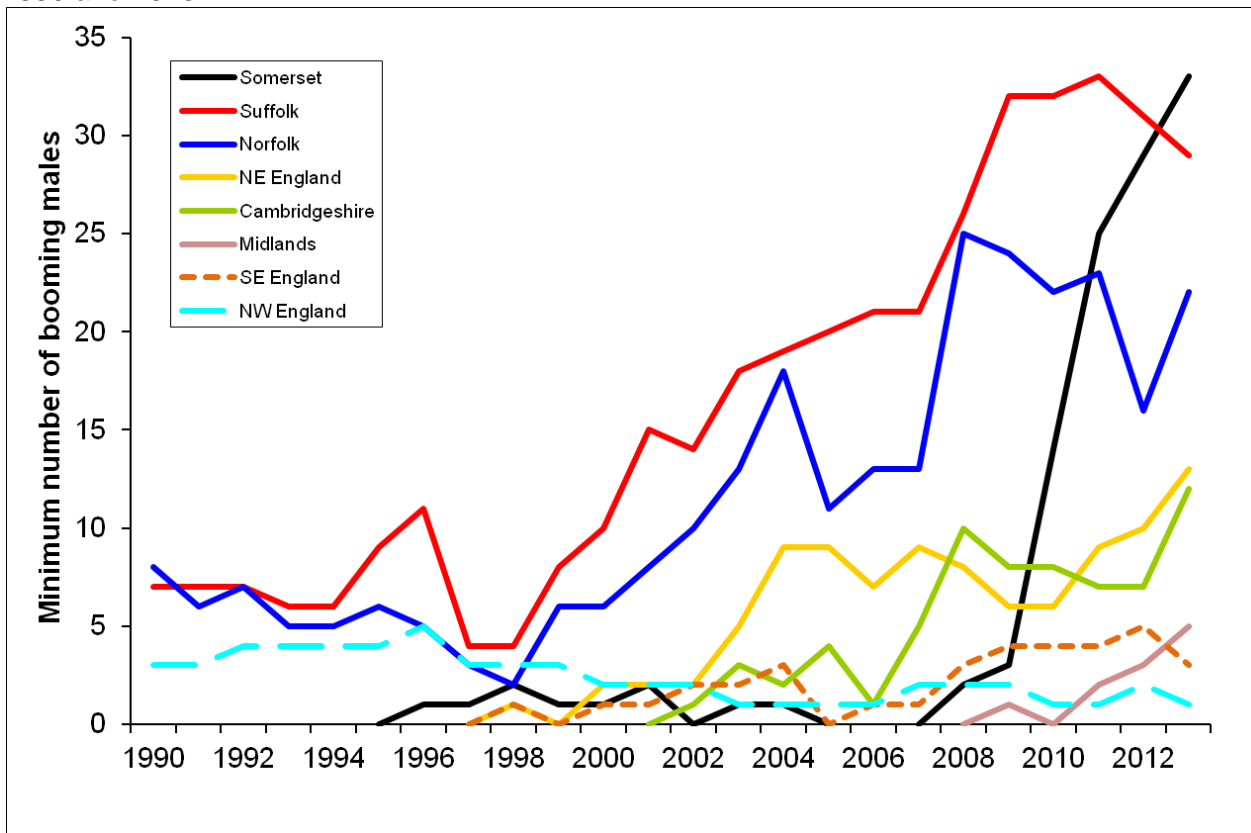
| | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 |
|--------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Males | 22 (28) | 30 (33) | 31 (37) | 43 (52) | 55 (65) | 46 (54) | 44 (63) | 51 (63) | 75 (87) | 82 (100) | 87 (106) | 104 (128) | 106 (129) | 120 (139) |
| Sites | 14 (16) | 18 (18) | 20 (23) | 24 (29) | 31 (33) | 28 (30) | 27 (35) | 33 (40) | 41 (47) | 43 (55) | 47 (58) | 51 (63) | 53 (65) | 60 (70) |

Numbers in the Avalon Marshes, Somerset, continue to rise, with 33 booming Bitterns confirmed in 2013, mainly on Natural England, RSPB and Somerset Wildlife Trust land. Booming numbers in the Norfolk Broads also recovered well from the dip in 2012, with booming reported from three new sites (with no previous records since annual monitoring began in 1990).

Table 2. The minimum number of booming males located within regions in England between 2000 and 2013 (the maximum booming numbers are shown in brackets).

| | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | % change 12-13 |
|-------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------|
| Somerset | 1 | 1 | 0 (1) | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 (3) | 3 (5) | 14 (17) | 25 (28) | 29 (34) | 33 (35) | +14 |
| Suffolk Coast | 10 (13) | 15 (27) | 14 (19) | 18 (19) | 19 (20) | 20 (24) | 20 (29) | 20 (25) | 24 (27) | 28 (31) | 26 (29) | 25 (30) | 25 (27) | 25 (27) | 0 |
| Norfolk Broads | 5 (6) | 7 | 10 (11) | 12 (15) | 17 (22) | 8 | 10 (12) | 10 (17) | 21 (25) | 19 (23) | 17 (20) | 20 (25) | 13 (15) | 19 (19) | +46 |
| The Fens | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 2 (3) | 4 | 2 (3) | 6 | 12 (13) | 12 (14) | 14 (16) | 15 (19) | 15 (17) | 16 (21) | +7 |
| NE England | 2 | 2 | 2 | 5 (8) | 9 (10) | 9 (12) | 7 (9) | 9 | 8 (9) | 6 (8) | 6 (8) | 9 (10) | 10 (15) | 13 (19) | +30 |
| Midlands | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 (2) | 0 (1) | 2 (3) | 3 | 5 | +67 |
| Norfolk Coast | 1 (3) | 1 (2) | 0 | 0 | 2 (3) | 3 | 3 (4) | 3 | 4 | 5 | 5 (6) | 3 (4) | 3 (5) | 3 (4) | 0 |
| SE England | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 (3) | 3 (4) | 0 (2) | 1 (2) | 1 (2) | 2 | 4 (5) | 4 (5) | 4 (5) | 5 (7) | 3 (4) | -40 |
| East (S) England | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 (1) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 (1) | 1 (2) | 0 (1) | 0 | 1 | 2 | +100 |
| NW England | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 (2) | 2 (3) | 2 | 2 (3) | 1 (2) | 1 (2) | 2 (3) | 1 (3) | -50 |
| SW England | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 (2) | 0 (1) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 (1) | 0 | na |
| Scotland | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 (2) | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Wales | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 (1) | 0 (1) | 0 | 0 | 1 (2) | 0 (1) | 0 | 0 (1) | 0 | 0 |
| UK TOTAL | 22 (28) | 30 (33) | 31 (37) | 43 (52) | 55 (65) | 46 (57) | 44 (63) | 51 (65) | 75 (87) | 82 (100) | 87 (106) | 104 (128) | 106 (129) | 120 (139) | +13 |

Figure 2. The minimum number of booming male Bitterns within key English counties and regions, between 1990 and 2013.



Bittern monitoring in 2014

Please be aware that RSPB will not have dedicated Bittern monitoring field staff on the ground again this year. The RSPB will, however, still be coordinating Bittern monitoring across the country next year, through the Bittern Monitoring Programme, an *Action for Birds in England (AfBiE)* project. Under the *AfBiE* agreement, a conservation partnership between Natural England and RSPB, it is proposed that there will be periodic, rather than annual, full surveys every few years from now on.

For 2014, we would request that the many volunteers, conservation site staff and landowners continue to monitor sites for booming males and nesting attempts as has happened this year. It will be useful to see if the Bittern population has been affected by the severe flooding across the country this winter, particularly in the Somerset levels, and specifically by the tidal surge that inundated a number of regular Bittern sites along the east coast in December. The RSPB will aim to collate all of the records, with the intention of producing a similar report next year. To report any observations this season, or to request a copy of the survey methods and recording forms, please contact me on the details below.

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