

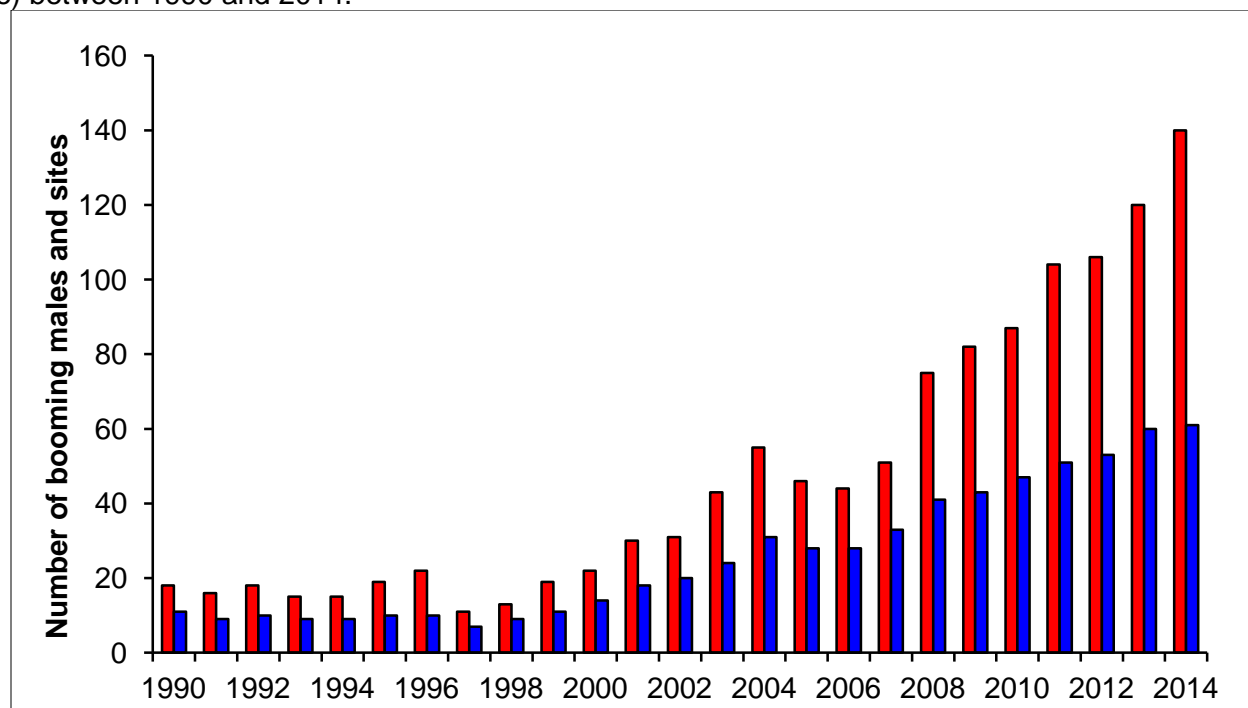
This report provides a brief summary of the results of the Bittern Monitoring Programme in 2014. Although there were no dedicated Bittern monitoring field staff again in 2014, it was encouraging to see the excellent coverage of sites across the country. Many thanks to all the volunteers, conservation site staff and landowners who helped to monitor sites in 2014.

## 2014 Results

There was another encouraging increase in the number of confirmed booming Bitterns in 2014, with a minimum of 140 boomers recorded at 61 sites, compared to 120 at 60 sites in 2013. Somerset is now very much the predominant county for breeding Bitterns, but increases elsewhere, particularly in Cambridgeshire and Yorkshire, are encouraging for future population growth.

It was not possible to monitor all sites for nesting activity in 2014, which has now been the case since the last full survey in 2011. From the sites monitored in 2014, there was confirmed or probable nesting at 26 sites, with a minimum of 70 nests recorded. The previous highest count was in 2011, when 63 confirmed or probable nests were recorded at 26 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 2014.



**Table 1.** The minimum number of booming male Bitterns in the UK since 2001 and the number of occupied sites involved each year (with the maximum figures shown in brackets).

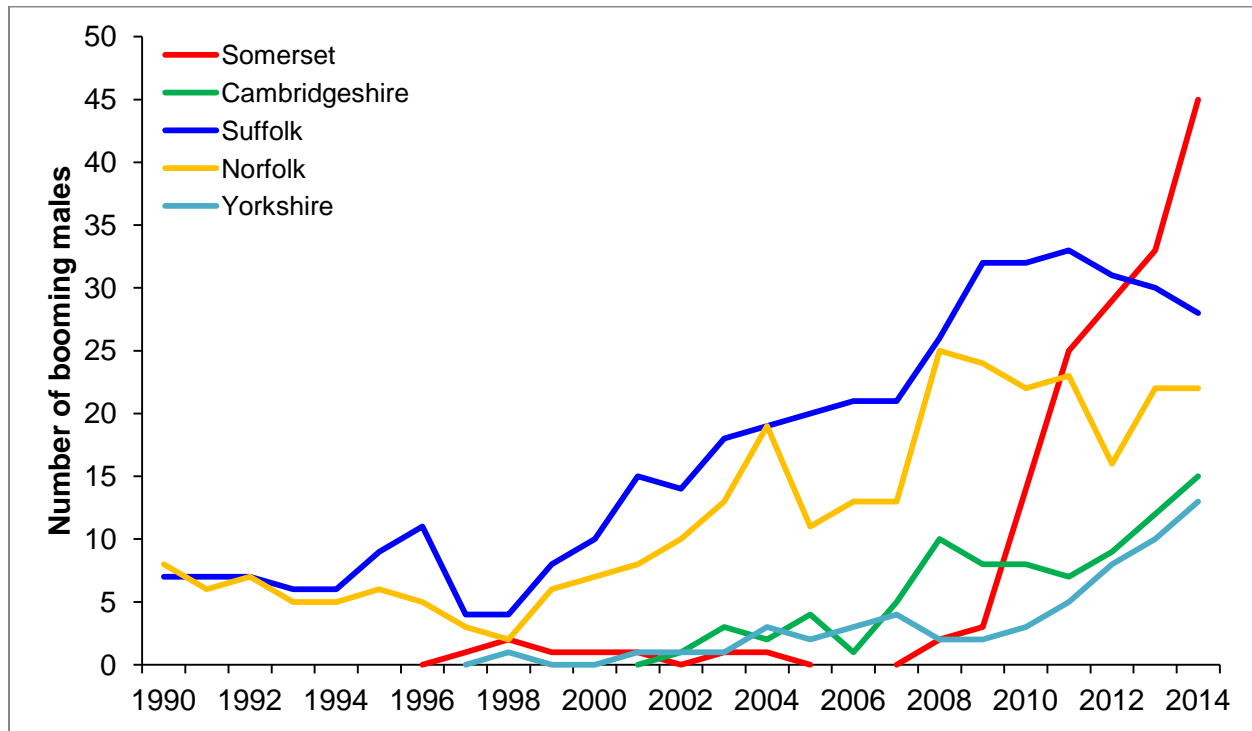
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
<b>Males</b>	30 (33)	31 (37)	43 (52)	55 (65)	46 (54)	44 (63)	51 (63)	75 (87)	82 (100)	87 (106)	104 (128)	106 (129)	120 (139)	140 (153)
<b>Sites</b>	18 (18)	20 (23)	24 (29)	31 (33)	28 (30)	27 (35)	33 (40)	41 (47)	43 (55)	47 (58)	51 (63)	53 (65)	60 (70)	61 (68)

Bitterns are continuing to increase in Somerset, with 45 booming males confirmed in 2014, mostly on Natural England, RSPB and Somerset Wildlife Trust reserves in the Avalon Marshes, up from 33 boomers in 2013. Numbers in the Fens and NE England have also continued to rise. For the first time, more booming males were recorded in the Fens than on the Suffolk coast, although most of the Suffolk coast reedbeds, except for Minsmere, were adversely affected by saltwater inundation during storms in December 2013.

**Table 2.** The minimum number of booming males located within regions in England between 2001 and 2014 (the maximum booming numbers are shown in brackets).

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	% change 12-13
<b>Somerset</b>	1	0 (1)	1	1	0	0	0	2 (3)	3 (5)	14 (17)	25 (28)	29 (34)	33 (35)	45 (49)	+36
<b>The Fens</b>	0	0	3	2 (3)	4	2 (3)	6	12 (13)	12 (14)	14 (16)	15 (19)	15 (17)	16 (21)	22 (24)	+37
<b>Suffolk Coast</b>	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)	21 (22)	-16
<b>Norfolk Broads</b>	7	10 (11)	12 (15)	17 (22)	8	10 (12)	10 (17)	21 (25)	19 (23)	17 (20)	20 (25)	13 (15)	19 (19)	18 (20)	-5
<b>NE England</b>	2	2	5 (8)	9 (10)	9 (12)	7 (9)	9	8 (9)	6 (8)	6 (8)	9 (10)	10 (15)	13 (19)	16 (18)	+23
<b>SE England</b>	1	2	2 (3)	3 (4)	0 (2)	1 (2)	1 (2)	2	4 (5)	4 (5)	4 (5)	5 (7)	3 (4)	7	+133
<b>N Norfolk Coast</b>	1 (2)	0	0	2 (3)	3	3 (4)	3	4	5	5 (6)	3 (4)	3 (5)	3 (4)	4	+33
<b>East (S) England</b>	0	0	0 (1)	0	0	0	0	0 (1)	1 (2)	0 (1)	0	1	2	3	+50
<b>NW England</b>	2	2	1	1	1	1 (2)	2 (3)	2	2 (3)	1 (2)	1 (2)	2 (3)	1 (3)	2	+100
<b>Midlands</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1 (2)	0 (1)	2 (3)	3	5	1 (2)	-80
<b>SW England</b>	1	0	0	0	1 (2)	0 (1)	0	0	0	0	0	0 (1)	0	1	na
<b>Scotland</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0 (2)	0	0	0	na
<b>Wales</b>	0	0	0	1	0 (1)	0 (1)	0	0	1 (2)	0 (1)	0	0 (1)	0	0 (1)	na
<b>UK TOTAL</b>	<b>30 (33)</b>	<b>31 (37)</b>	<b>43 (52)</b>	<b>55 (65)</b>	<b>46 (57)</b>	<b>44 (63)</b>	<b>51 (65)</b>	<b>75 (87)</b>	<b>82 (100)</b>	<b>87 (106)</b>	<b>104 (128)</b>	<b>106 (129)</b>	<b>120 (139)</b>	<b>140 (153)</b>	<b>+17</b>

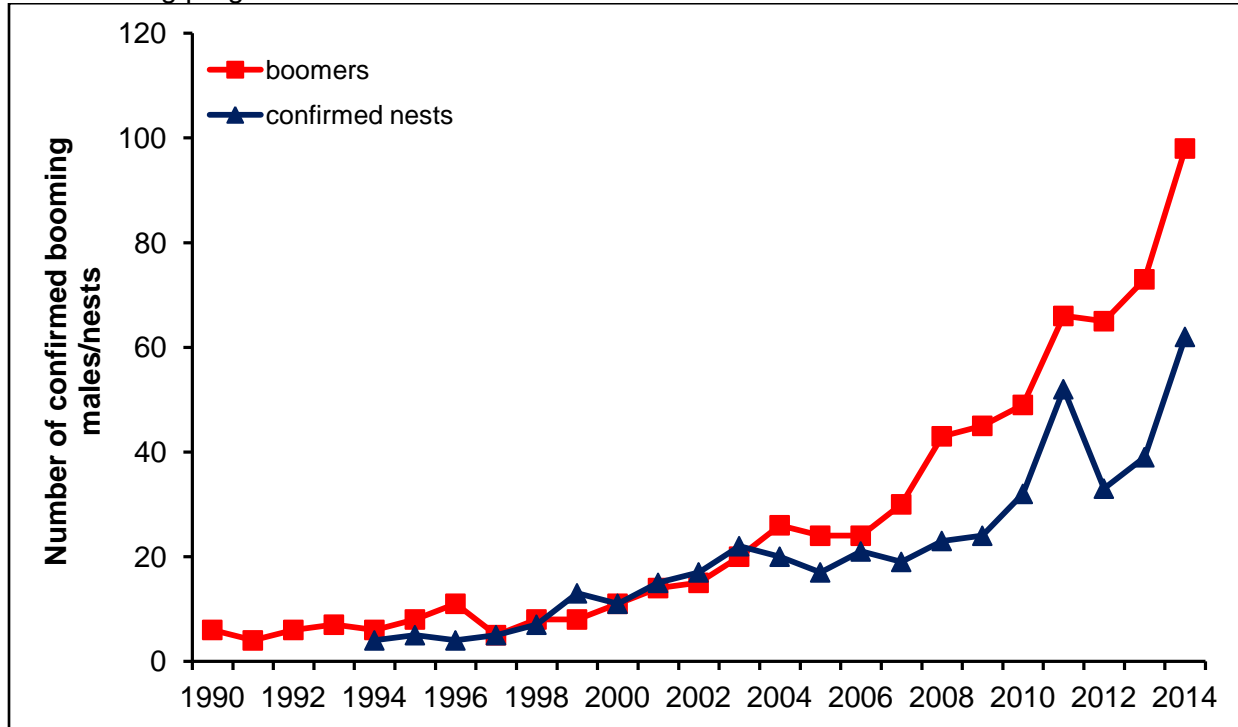
**Figure 2.** Changes in the number of booming males in key counties for breeding Bitterns, between 1990 and 2014.



Despite not all sites being monitored for nesting activity, the 70 confirmed or probable nests in 2014 is the highest recorded total since the start of the annual nest monitoring in 1994. The previous high count was in 2011, when 63 nests were recorded, and the last year when all booming sites were monitored for nesting activity. There were at least 20 nests in Somerset, of which most were found at Ham Wall, Shapwick Heath and Westhay Moor in the Avalon Marshes. Of the 17 nests found on the Suffolk coast, 12 were at Minsmere, the most ever recorded here. Fifteen nests were recorded in the Fens, including six at Ouse Fen and five at Lakenheath Fen – two reedbeds that have been created for breeding Bitterns. The increase in nesting activity in NE England is encouraging, with 11 nests recorded at six sites, including Potteric Carr for the first time (<http://www.ywt.org.uk/news/2014/08/14/bitterns-booming-potteric-carr>).

It is interesting to compare the booming and nesting figures for 37 sites where there has been regular monitoring for nesting activity since 2011 (Fig. 3). In 2011, 66 booming males and 52 confirmed or probable nests were recorded on these 37 sites, but numbers have increased to 98 boomers and 62 nests this year. Although the number of recorded nests dropped in 2012 and 2013, the large increase in nesting activity at these well-monitored sites this year is encouraging.

**Figure 3.** A comparison of the number of booming male Bitterns and confirmed nesting attempts from the 37 sites where there has been regular monitoring for booming and nesting activity in each year since the dedicated monitoring programme ceased in 2011.



## Bittern monitoring in 2015

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 2015, 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. Given the increasing number of successful nests reported across the country, it is increasingly likely that new and formerly-occupied sites will become occupied by booming Bitterns in the near future. 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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