

# Nightjars in Kent, 1981-2004

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### Introduction

The Nightjar is a nationally local, red listed species, which has been undergoing a significant range contraction in Britain and Ireland over much of the last 100 years. Numbers have also been in continuing decline over much of that period. In Kent the species has been categorised as KRDB2, meaning that the species has a breeding population in excess of 50 pairs but is red listed due to breeding decline.

During 2004 a national survey of Nightjars was carried out by the BTO in partnership with the RSPB, the Forestry Commission and English Nature. This survey followed previous ones organised by the BTO/RSPB in 1992 and the BTO in 1981. Earlier surveys were conducted in 1957-58 (Stafford 1962) and 1952 (Norris 1960) but, unlike the more recent surveys, these did not attempt to determine total numbers of Nightjars. However, they provided valuable information on changes in the species range and levels of abundance. The Breeding Atlas for 1968-1972, however, provided a good assessment of the species status against which the results of the recent surveys could be assessed. Similarly, the 1988-1991 Atlas gives a clear indication of the change in distribution over the time between the two periods of Atlas fieldwork.

This paper discusses the results for Kent of the 2004 survey and compares with those of 1992 and 1981. The trend in the Kent population of Nightjars from 1981 – 2004 is discussed in detail and compared with that of the UK over the same period. The status of the Nightjar in Kent prior to, and including, the 1981 survey is described by Andrew Henderson (KBR 30, July 1983).

### Survey Methods Used (1981, 1992 & 2004)

In 2004, survey sites were chosen to cover all 1-km squares that were occupied in 1992, plus a random sample of areas of potentially suitable habitat close to 'occupied' sites, to detect local range expansion. A selection of 1-km squares that were occupied prior to 1992 was also surveyed along with observer-selected sites. Areas of suitable habitat were identified from information and maps supplied by RSPB, English Nature and the Forestry Commission. Observers were asked to make a minimum of two visits, at least three weeks apart, with one in June. The recommended period for the survey was the last week of May to mid-July, based on the peak period for churring. Observers were supplied with recording forms and maps, upon which were marked the site to be covered and also the likely extent of suitable habitat, if known. Visits were required to be made at either dawn or dusk in dry, mild conditions with light wind. The recommended practice was to walk at a steady pace along rides and paths with the aim of passing within 200m of all likely areas, stopping and listening for birds every few minutes. Observers were asked to record both churring birds and birds giving the "coo-ick" call as evidence of occupied territory. Birds recorded were marked on the maps using an alphabetic code for each visit i.e. A1, A2, A3 etc for the first visit and B1, B2, B3 etc for the second. The recording forms required site details (name and central grid reference usually pre-printed); observer details; date and time of visit; weather

details and an assessment of the number of males at the site. In addition, it was required to record the habitat within a 50m radius of each churring bird. The use of tapes was not permitted.

The same instructions were used in the 1992 survey, although the use of tapes was permitted in areas of low density as a final check if no birds were originally detected. A column was included on the recording form to state if tapes were used or not. Habitat details were required for a 25m radius of each churring bird. Unlike in 2004, observers were only asked to record churring birds with no mention of birds giving the “coo-ick” call. This might have resulted in fewer birds being recorded, particularly in areas of low density where churring might be reduced. In these instances, the use of tapes would have helped if used. The quality and availability of habitat data from organisations such as the RSPB, English Nature and the Forestry Commission would not have matched that of the 2004 survey.

Slightly different procedures were employed in 1981 with a recording period from mid-May to mid-August. Observers were asked to concentrate visits in June and July. Maps were not supplied and the recording forms asked observers to additionally record the area and altitude of sites visited. There was no specified distance around each churring bird in which to record habitat. As in 1992, observers were only asked to record churring birds. Without data from previous (recent) surveys, there was no targeting of known sites and a greater reliance on local knowledge to ensure good coverage.

In all three surveys it was recommended that observers should make daylight visits to sites beforehand in order to check the suitability and extent of habitat and location of paths and rides.

### **Results of 2004 Survey**

Nationally, a good level of coverage was achieved in 2004 and a total of 4,132 males were located from which an estimate was made of 4,500 males for the UK. This estimate represents an increase of 32% since 1992. In particular, there was a 47% increase in southeast England. However, the Nightjar’s breeding range did not increase between 1992 and 2004 and for Scotland and areas of northern or northwest England, there are suggestions of further range contraction and population decline.

In Kent, 119 1-km squares were selected for coverage of which 91 were surveyed (76%). Of these, 31 (representing 17 sites) were found to contain Nightjars and a total of 45 males were recorded. A further seven males were located outside of the survey, producing a combined total of 52 males. In contrast to the national increase, this represents a 39% decrease since 1992. Kent was not alone in experiencing a decrease in Nightjars within southeast England, however, with Suffolk reporting a decline of 11%.

The results for Kent are summarised below in Table 1. The table describes the level of coverage and numbers of birds recorded. Habitat details are summarised in Table 2.

**Table 1 - 2004 Survey Results for Kent**

10-km square reference	Number of 1-km squares			Number of birds recorded
	Allocated	Surveyed	Occupied	
TQ45	3	2	0	0
TQ55	6	4	4	7
TQ56	2	0	0	0
TQ57	1	0	0	0
TQ63	1	0	0	0
TQ64	8	6	1	1
TQ65	10	10	3	4
TQ66	8	5	1	1
TQ73	5	4	4	4
TQ75	1	1	0	0
TQ76	1	1	0	0
TQ83	2	1	1	2
TQ84	1	0	0	0
TQ85	1	1	0	0
TQ93	1	0	0	0
TQ94	1	0	0	0
TQ95	3	1	0	0
TR03	1	0	0	0
TR04	1	1	0	0
TR05	31	29	7	9
TR06	2	1	0	0
TR14	8	7	6	7
TR15	13	10	2	5
TR16	7	6	2	5
TR25	1	1	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>45</b>

It is apparent from Table 1 that a much higher number of 1-km squares were allocated for TR05 than any other 10-km square. This reflects the concentration of large woodland blocks around Canterbury. In most areas reasonable coverage was achieved. The most notable areas where coverage was poor or not achieved at all were Longbeech Wood west of Challock (four males recorded in 1992); the southern part of Bedgebury Forest (14 males recorded in the whole forest in 1992); Kings Wood (Ulcombe) and the Orlestone forest complex. In many cases 1-km squares were not even allocated for these areas. However, it is considered that not many birds would have been located in these areas due to habitat deterioration.

**Table 2 – 2004 Habitat Details for Kent<sup>(1)</sup>**

10km square	Forestry Plantation									Woodland			Vegetation				Dry	Ride	Edge
	unpl	bdlf <sup>(2)</sup>	con	mix	<1m	1-2m	2-4m	>4m	std	bdlf	con	mix	P/b	Bracken	Grass	Heather			
TQ55			2	4		2	1	3	6			2	2			2	2	6	4
TQ64			1					1					1	1		1	1	1	1
TQ65		5	1			4		1			1	2					1	4	1
TQ66										1				1					
TQ73			4			2	4	1											1
TQ83			1	1	1	1												2	
TR05	1	1		2			3	2	1	2	1				1		2	2	3
TR14		1	2	2			1	3										3	1
TR15		1	1				1	1		1								1	1
TR16		3	2			3	2		3	2				1		1	2	5	5
<b>Totals</b>	1	11	14	9	1	12	12	12	10	6	2	4	3	3	1	4	8	24	17
<b>%</b>	2.9	31.4	40.0	25.7	2.9	34.3	34.3	34.3	28.6	17.1	5.7	11.4	8.6	8.6	2.9	11.4	22.9	68.6	48.6

**Notes:**

- Habitat details were only submitted for 35 birds out of 45 recorded in the survey. It should also be noted that in some cases more than one habitat type or tree height category may have been present in the 50m recording radius.
- Coppice is included under this category.

**Key:**

**unpl** – cleared but no trees planted.

**bdlf** – broadleaf trees.

**con** – coniferous trees.

**mix** – mixed broadleaf and coniferous.

Height of tree growth was estimated in metres.

**std** – mature trees left in younger plantations.

**P/b** – Pine or Birch present.

**Bracken, grass & heather** recorded if > 50% of site.

**Ride** – bird churring within 50m of ride.

**Edge** – bird churring within 50m of boundary of two or more habitat types.

It is unfortunate that complete details are not available for all the male Nightjars recorded in Kent during 2004. It is possible that not all observers recorded habitat data or that the details were not fully transferred into the BTO database. It is also apparent that there was some inconsistency in the way surveyors recorded habitat information. The most important of these inconsistencies was the recording of coppice. The recording forms were designed for national use and as such they did not adequately cover habitat such as Sweet Chestnut coppice. A category of “other (please specify)” was given for recording any habitat other than forestry plantation, heath and woodland categories - “e.g. coppice, sand dunes etc”. This meant that observers either had to detail coppice in this way (in which case tree height might not be recorded) or use the broadleaf plantation category or a combination of both. I have had to apply some interpretation to the BTO habitat details as received post survey and as such it can be assumed that the plantation, bdlf category refers to (Sweet Chestnut) coppice. As the “other (please specify)” category was not included in the habitat summary table received from the BTO post survey, it is possible that this accounted for the missing 10 birds. Thus coppice could have been present in a significantly higher percentage of territories than is indicated.

Some interesting observations can be made from Table 2. The most important habitat is plantation woodland with broadleaf (coppice) and conifer trees holding over 70% of birds. The relative importance of these two types of managed woodland has changed since 1981, however. Broadleaf coppice accounted for 31.4% of surveyed males in 2004 (but see note above) – a decline from 38.6% in 1981 (Henderson, 1983), whilst conifer plantations accounted for 40.0% of birds in 2004 – an increase from 29.5% in 1981. It is also evident from Table 2 that coppice/plantation areas occupied in 2004 were beginning to mature with 34.3% of birds using areas with a tree height > 4m and 68.6% > 2m. Rides were an important feature of territories with 68.6% of sites recording them, whilst 48.6% of territories included or were close to the boundary of two or more habitat types.

In Kent there are some key aspects to Nightjar habitat that warrant discussion. Whereas heathland is a major habitat for the species in Britain and receives much attention in terms of losses and management to restore/improve quality for wildlife (including Nightjars), this habitat is virtually absent in Kent and is not significant for the species. A small area of lowland heath and bog exists at Hothfield Common and habitat management at Tudeley Woods RSPB and Blean Woods NNR in recent years has resulted in some restoration or creation of lowland heath. The areas of these heath habitats are small, however.

One of the unusual features of Nightjars in the county is the extent to which birds utilise Sweet Chestnut coppice. Kent, together with Sussex, holds the vast majority of Sweet Chestnut coppice in Britain (about 70% in Kent) and this is a very significant habitat for Nightjars in the county. As this tree species yields quick growth after cutting (roughly 1m per year), the coppice rotation is typically 15 – 20 years. This is about half that of conifer plantations which means that potential habitat is available more frequently. However, the rapid growth also means that areas of cut coppice (called cants) are only suitable for Nightjars for about 5 years. Thus populations using this habitat are very mobile and liable to frequent change with sudden appearances and increases in some areas usually balanced by decreases elsewhere and sometimes local extinctions that can last for many years. These changes are discussed in the next section. Whilst providing an interesting aspect to Nightjar distribution in Kent, this also makes for difficulties in surveying the species!

Together with managed conifer forests, these two habitats account for the vast majority of Nightjars in Kent. Thus the species is almost totally reliant on commercially driven human influence on woodland habitats in the county. As markets for different kinds of timber change, so does the extent to which Kent forests and woodlands are managed and this has a direct bearing on the fortunes of Nightjars in the county.

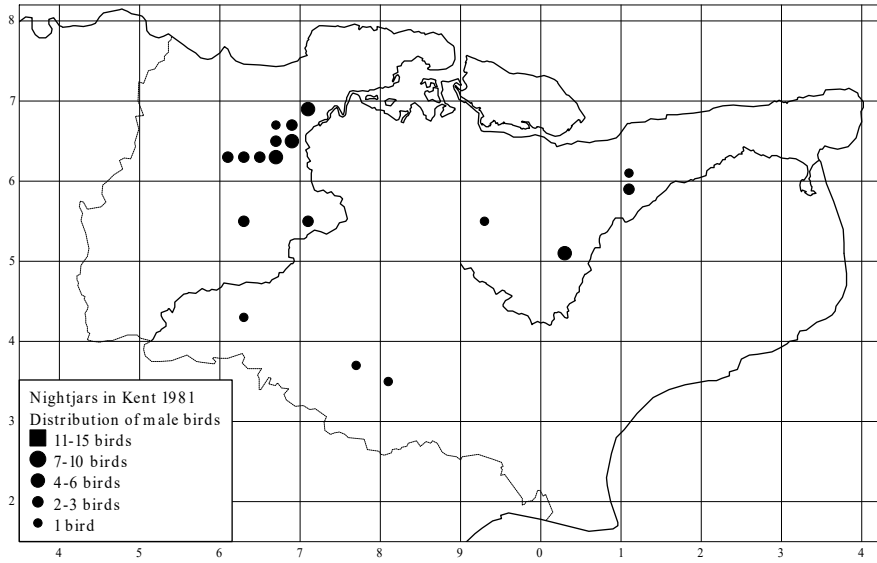
### Changes in the Kent and UK Population from 1981 – 2004

**Table 3 - Summary of Survey Results 1981 – 2004**

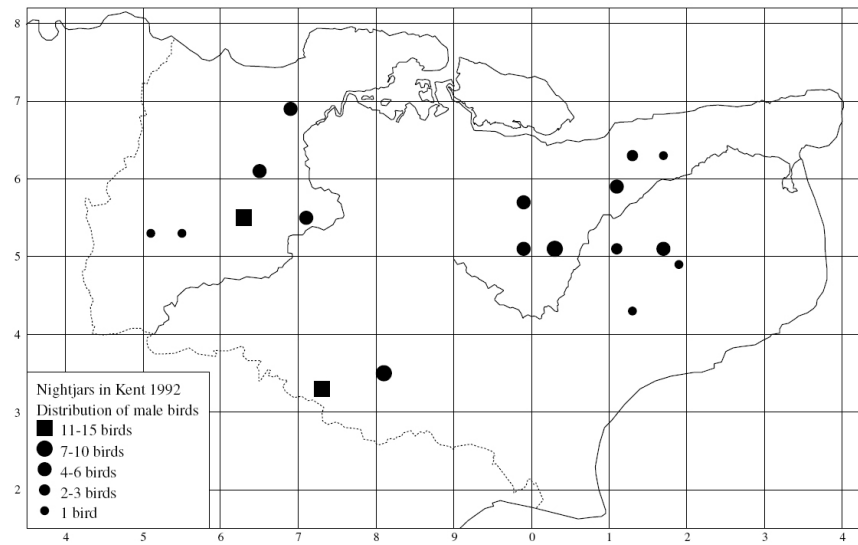
Survey Year	UK Population <sup>(1)</sup>	Kent Population	% of UK
1981	2100	44	2.1
1992	3400	85 <sup>(2)</sup>	2.5
2004	4500	52 <sup>(2)</sup>	1.2

**Notes:**

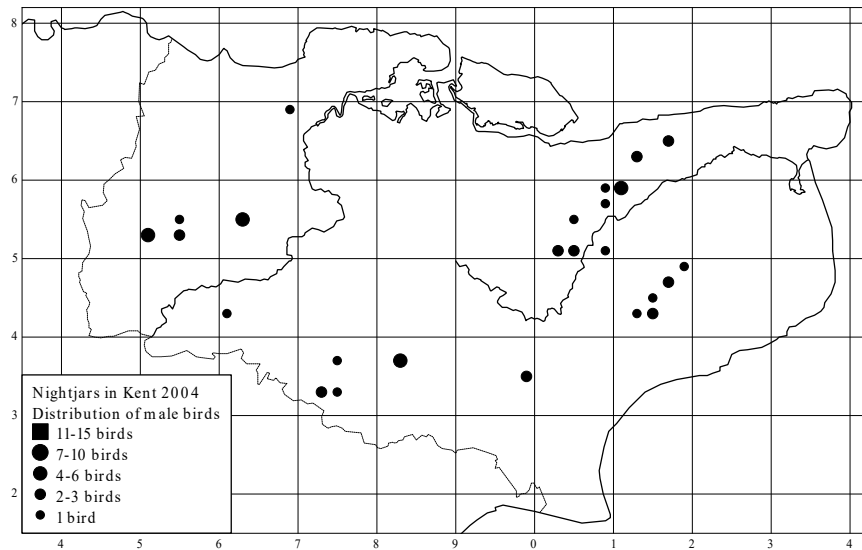
- 1) Populations estimated from actual totals of males recorded.
- 2) Totals include some birds not recorded within the survey



**Figure 1 – Distribution Map for 1981 Survey**



**Figure 2 – Distribution Map for 1992 Survey**



**Figure 3 – Distribution Map for 2004 Survey**

It should be noted that the 1992 map shows the distribution of birds by site rather than tetrad as original tetrad data was not available. Although some of the higher concentrations may have been split over two or more tetrads, the distribution of birds is clearly indicated and for this purpose the map is comparable with those from the 1981 and 2004 surveys.

A feature of all the maps is the absence of birds along the North Downs between Maidstone and Ashford. Prior to 1981 there were several reports of birds along the Downs in this part of the county (Henderson 1983). It may be that the gradual cessation of coppicing of the smaller woodlands in this part of the county has resulted in the disappearance of Nightjars. However, suitable habitat was present on the dip slope of the Downs south of Sittingbourne during the time of the 1992 survey but was unoccupied. Further details of the changes in distribution are discussed below.

#### **Changes in UK Population 1981 - 2004**

The 1968-72 Atlas produced records from 562 10-km squares in Britain and 93 squares in Ireland, from which a population of 3,000 – 6,000 males was estimated. By the time of the 1981 survey, however, the Nightjar had all but disappeared from Ireland and western and northern Scotland and birds were only recorded from 241 10-km squares in Britain. In contrast, significant population increases were recorded in the 1992 survey (+62%) and 2004 survey (+32%), although the numbers of 10-km squares occupied were only 268 and 283 respectively. Although there would have been a cumulative effect over the five years of the Atlas fieldwork, the much higher number of 10-km squares with reported Nightjars during 1968-72, compared to the later surveys, clearly indicates a contraction of the range of the species.

Principal reasons given for the species decline prior to 1981, leading to the unexpectedly low numbers recorded in the survey that year, were climate change (colder and wetter springs), loss of habitat (ploughing of heathland and conversion to conifer forest, road building and urban development) and increased disturbance.

The significant increase in numbers found in the 1992 survey was largely attributed to favourable changes in forest structure, and to some extent improved coverage. Many large conifer forests planted during the expansion of commercial forestry after 1945 were in the process of being harvested. The large areas of clear fells and restocks provided much suitable habitat for Nightjars. Additionally, the storms of 1987 and 1990 resulted in the destruction and subsequent clearance of many areas of mature woodland in southern Britain, thus creating further habitat.

The further increase in numbers recorded in the 2004 survey has been attributed to improvements in habitat management such as heathland restoration and more sympathetic forestry practice.

#### **Changes in Kent Population 1981 - 1992**

About the time of the 1981 survey, extensive areas of Sweet Chestnut coppice were being cut regularly in Kent but other types of deciduous coppice such as Hornbeam, Oak and Hazel were no longer being cut. The slower growth of these species presumably meant that such areas of coppice were no longer commercially viable. Thus some former Nightjar sites, such as Chattenden Woods in north Kent, became neglected and unsuitable for the species. Most conifer woodlands were still in a state of high forest and awaiting first harvest.

A consequence was that there was a concentration of Nightjars within major areas of managed Sweet Chestnut coppice. The results of the 1981 survey show a distinct bias towards NW Kent and the coppiced woodlands on the North Downs around

Cobham and Luddesdown. It may well be that this region of Kent was a principal focus of coppicing about that time and indeed the population at Cobham Woods rose from just two pairs in 1979, at the start of a major campaign of coppicing, to a peak of eight males in 1982, followed by a steady decline to four pairs by 1985 as the coppiced areas matured. Extensive coppicing also occurred in areas surrounding Cobham Woods about the time of the 1981 survey including Shorne Woods, where birds were subsequently located in 1982. This was one of the areas quoted by Henderson (1983) as having been lost to Nightjars since the 1950/60's. However, there would have been no suitable habitat at this site during the growing years of the coppice between the early 1960's and 1979 when a new cycle of coppicing commenced.

In the years following the 1981 survey, the author and JC Martin spent several seasons surveying woodlands in NW Kent for Nightjars. It was considered that several important sites for the species had probably not been located in the rest of the county during the 1981 survey resulting in an underestimate of the Kent population. Wider searches were made across the county to locate suitable areas of habitat, especially Sweet Chestnut coppice. This survey work led to the discovery of some significant populations of Nightjars during the late 1980's including 14 males at Oaken Woods, near Barming, and five males at Gorsley Wood, near Bridge, in 1987. Both areas comprised extensive Sweet Chestnut coppice with the latter not known previously as a Nightjar site.

A dramatic natural event occurred in 1987 which was to have a significant effect on the numbers and distribution of Nightjars in Kent: the October hurricane. A consequence was the widespread destruction of large areas of mature deciduous woodland and extensive wind-blow damage to major conifer plantations. This led to the clearance of fallen timber from areas of damaged deciduous woodland and the clearance and re-stocking of significant areas of conifer forest, much of which was due to be harvested having reached maturity. As would be expected, the areas of mature deciduous woodland most damaged by the storm of October 1987 were along the exposed escarpments of the Greensand Ridge and North Downs. Places like Toys and Ide Hills, Knole Park and Cobham Park were particularly affected. However, the opening up of mature woodland in these areas resulted in the appearance of Nightjars. At Cobham Park, in 1988, three out of five males occupied areas of devastated mature trees. A further damaging storm occurred in January 1990 which had some similar effects to that in 1987.

In 1988, as a result of increased survey work, a total of 56 males were recorded in Kent. In subsequent years leading up to the 1992 survey, totals of 39, 45 and 51 males were recorded with varying degrees of coverage. In 1989, it was noted that Sweet Chestnut coppice accounted for 88% of birds in the West recording area of the county, 33% in Central and 44% in East. The gradual clearance of wind-blown conifers was starting to take effect, however, and in 1990 males were recorded on the Greensand west of Sevenoaks and in the Orlestone forest complex, in the south of the county, for the first time since the mid 1970's. On the negative side, however, Sittingbourne Mill as an outlet for processing hardwood timber closed in 1991. The mill was the last in the county to take Sweet Chestnut for pulping/paper manufacture, meaning that coppiced timber would have to be transported to south Wales for this purpose. There was an obvious potential for the commercial viability of Sweet Chestnut coppice to be affected with a subsequent reduction in areas cut. Almost half the territories in the county in 1990 were in this habitat.

As a result of the storm clearances and harvesting of mature conifer plantations, there was a huge increase in suitable habitat in the years following 1987 and prior to the next Nightjar survey in 1992. As part of the survey work carried out during the late 1980's, all significant areas of woodland in the county were visited and areas of likely habitat were mapped. Pilot work for the BTO/RSPB survey was also conducted in 1991. Hence there was an extensive knowledge of Nightjar sites and potential habitat in Kent prior to the 1992 survey.

#### Changes in Kent Population 1992 - 2004

The 1992 survey recorded a total of 85 males in Kent, an increase of 93% since 1981. The magnitude of this increase was probably exacerbated by an underestimate of the population in 1981. The reason for this significant increase, as was the case nationally, was the huge increase in suitable habitat resulting from the factors discussed above. A typical example of this was the increase from 1-2 males at Bedgebury Forest in 1990 to 14 males in 1992 as a result of large-scale forest clearances. Other notable concentrations were 13 males in Mereworth Woods and 10 males at Kings Wood (Challock). A comparison of the distribution maps for the two surveys shows that the concentration of birds in the NW of the county in 1981 had decreased significantly, with a much greater proportion of birds in central and eastern parts of Kent in 1992.

Predictably, after the survey, the reporting level of Nightjars dropped back, and over the years 1993 - 2003, the annual number of males reported in Kent varied from 18 to 39 as shown in Table 4, which also includes the 1992 and 2004 survey totals for comparison.

**Table 4 – Annual Totals of Male Nightjars Reported in Kent from 1992 – 2004**

Year	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Males	85	30	32	39	30	37	20	30	18	35	28	36	52

It can be seen that approximately 30 – 70% of the Kent population was reported each year between the two most recent surveys.

It would appear that the area of suitable habitat in Kent reached a peak about the time of the 1992 survey. Once the major conifer forests were cleared of windblown timber and/or harvested and re-stocked, and the clearance of fallen trees had been



completed in the damaged areas of mature deciduous woodland, then it was just a matter of time before maturing growth would render those areas unsuitable once more for Nightjars. With reduced levels of coppicing, it would be expected that the population of Nightjars in Kent would gradually decline to former levels. Bedgebury Forest provides an example of this decline, just as it had provided an example of the rapid rise in numbers to exploit the appearance of suitable conditions. Whilst there were still 10 males present in 1995, only three pairs could be located in 2004 as result of the increased tree growth.

During 1992 – 2004, however, there were some interesting developments in terms of Nightjar distribution in the county. On the Greensand, birds continued to be reported at sites west of Sevenoaks, following their reappearance in this part of Kent in 1990, and in 1996, the species reappeared east of Maidstone in the Kings Wood (near Ulcombe) after an absence of some 20 years or so. This reappearance was due to a new cycle of Sweet Chestnut coppicing, which resulted in most of the woodland being cut over a short period of time. Further reappearances also occurred at Angley Wood (near Cranbrook) and Trenleypark Wood (near Canterbury) in 2003 whilst a new site was recorded near Selling. Some of these reappearances or new locations proved to be short lived, however.

At Blean Woods NNR (near Canterbury) and Tudeley Woods (near Pembury), habitat improvement work has resulted in some local increases and these reserves are likely to assume greater importance in the future.

At Tudeley Woods, 14.2 ha of conifer plantation have been restored to lowland heath and a further 9.5 ha is undergoing conversion. Since 1996, up to three pairs of Nightjar have been present, although numbers have been erratic. A total of three pairs and 1-2 further males were present in 2003, currently the best year on record. It is planned for an eventual total of 35 ha of heathland (Martin Allison pers com).

At Blean Woods NNR, two techniques are being employed to attract Nightjars: heathland creation and short-rotation coppicing, as a result of which Nightjars have bred annually since 1988. A small area of heath (2.3 ha) was initially created from poor quality Sweet Chestnut coppice prior to 1991. Since 1998, however, a further 12.5 ha of heathland has been created. The short-rotation coppice is primarily focussed on a 20 ha block with cutting occurring at intervals of less than 15 years. The open character is enhanced by the creation of a 15-25 m wide ride running through it, which is mown every 3-5 years. Numbers of Nightjars have steadily increased with five territories in 2004 (Michael Walter pers com).

At the former strongholds of Cobham and Oaken Woods, despite new cycles of coppicing occurring at both sites, few Nightjars were recorded. At Cobham in particular, the species failed to re-occupy areas of cut coppice to the extent that it did during the early 1980's with a maximum of only two males in any one season. A possible reason might be that during the early 1980's, there was still an established population of Nightjars nearby in the planted conifer plantations between Luddesdown and Halling. As the maturing conifers were becoming less suitable, the appearance of large areas of cut coppice extending north towards Cobham Woods enabled expansion and occupation of these areas. By the time of the more recent coppicing campaign, however, there were very few birds in this region. Unfortunately, in more recent years, the High Speed Rail Link has resulted in extensive losses of coppice woodland in the east of the area with associated increased disturbance.

### **The Future of the Nightjar in Kent**

The decline in Nightjars in Kent from 1992 to 2004 was not unexpected given the reduction in area of suitable habitat from the peak about the time of the 1992 survey. With the continued maturing of restocked conifers and a suppressed market for Sweet Chestnut coppice, it is likely that the population may well decline further. The fact that the UK population has increased significantly during the same period simply reflects the fact that habitat has continued to become available elsewhere in the country, unlike in Kent. Conservation work to improve more stable, long-term habitats such as heathland has also benefited Nightjars in a way that has only been possible to a limited extent in Kent.

Although further blocks of conifers may be cut in Kent forests over coming years, it will be another 30 years or so before the next major harvesting of timber produces the extent of habitat present during the early 1990's. In some cases, cleared conifers have been replanted with broadleaved species for high forest, thus preventing their suitability for Nightjars in future years. Until the next major harvesting of Kent's conifer forests, it will be the cutting of Sweet Chestnut coppice which will primarily determine the number of Nightjars in the county. Although several woodland reserves, such as those owned by the Kent Wildlife Trust and the Woodland Trust, are re-introducing the cutting of coppice to improve wildlife habitat, it is unlikely that these areas will be sufficiently large to attract Nightjars. It is only the major areas of commercially managed coppice that can provide sufficient areas of suitably aged growth on a frequent basis arising from a regular rotation of cutting. Some success has been achieved, however, by the use of short-rotation coppicing at the large managed reserve at Blean Woods NNR. It is perhaps worth discussing Sweet Chestnut coppice in more detail in view of the future importance of this habitat for maintaining Nightjar populations in Kent. The following information is taken from the *Compilation of Existing Information on Kent's Woodlands*, which was coordinated by Kent County Council: -

The current management system for Sweet Chestnut coppice was developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when much of the coppice was planted to provide hop poles and mining timbers. It has continued with Chestnut fencing markets emerging in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with the out-grade sold as paper pulp. The industry was of considerable significance to the rural economy, but this has now been disrupted by several factors including:

- Work force - coppice cutting has long been a family business with extended groups and father/son combinations working together in a particular area of woodland. Expectations changed in the 1980s with higher wages and better working conditions offered by alternative work, attracting many younger workers. This trend was exacerbated by the 1987 storm, which offered 'quick bucks' to chain saw owners, and further by the decline in seasonal agricultural work that many depended on for summer work.
- Closure of the local pulp-processing mill in 1991 means that the nearest bulk outlet is in Wales.
- Cost of compliance with current Health and Safety legislation particularly the need for certification of competence to use a chainsaw, adequate personal protective equipment, insurance cover (including Public Liability) and safe working practices, especially lone working.

The total area of coppiced woodlands fell in Kent from 27,213 ha in 1947 to 17,914 ha in 1980 and 9,437 ha in 1997. Similarly, the market for Sweet Chestnut coppice has fallen over the years as indicated in Table 5.

**Table 5 – Summary of Chestnut Auction Prices 1987 – 1999 (every third year)**

Year	Acres sold	Price/ Acre £s	Revenue
1987	191.39	511.85	97,963.44
1990	159.80	325.78	52,058.41
1993	80.97	227.35	18,408.49
1996	67.13	238.12	19,005.73
1999	17.60	221	3,889.60

Price and area sold has fallen dramatically, attributed to a loss of traditional markets. Most Chestnut is used for fencing, either wired palings or post and rail.

Considerable effort has been concentrated on securing new markets and it is to be hoped that these are successful in order to ensure the future cutting of coppice.

On a more positive note, however, Nightjar survey work conducted from 1981 to 2004 has shown that the species will readily re-occupy suitable areas of habitat once they become available, even after many years of absence. In this respect Kent benefits from being in the SE of Britain, on a major migration route, with a steady flow of migrant Nightjars across the county each Spring.

It is likely that a population of Nightjars will be maintained in Kent although at a reduced level to that currently present. Actual numbers will rely greatly on future markets for timber and woodland management practices employed in the county.

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