

## A CENSUS OF COMMON SANDPIPERS IN THE SEDBERGH AREA, 1951.

BY

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THE Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*) was chosen as the subject of a census in the Sedbergh area of Yorkshire for two reasons: (i) a distribution count of Common Sandpipers had been completed in 1939, and records existed from that year onwards; (ii) the Common Sandpiper stays near rivers and streams, making it an easy species to observe and a good subject for an accurate distribution count.

### TOPOGRAPHY

The Common Sandpiper in this district breeds along the river Lune and its tributaries, Rawthey, Dee and Clough, and along some of their tributaries. In this area it appeared to shun limestone areas and any stream where the fall was greater than 200 ft. per mile. Few, however, nested out of the valleys and their limit appeared to be 1,750 ft. This area is extremely mountainous and out of some 300 miles of river and beck c. 60 miles held sandpipers. The higher the hills, the fewer the pairs, but in the low river valleys the density was in many places high.

### LOCAL MIGRATION IN THE BREEDING SEASON

At Killington reservoir, 400 ft. above the valley floor and  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles as the crow flies from the Lune, about four or five pairs nested. The numbers were never accurately counted owing to an influx of apparently non-breeding sandpipers. The numbers varied from day to day and possibly adult breeding sandpipers came in to feed. There may, however, have been one or two barren pairs resident there and, later in the season, early flying young. But wherever in the valleys a nest or young was in some way destroyed the adults left the district soon after. Thus the influx may have been due to birds which had had their nests destroyed.

### HABITAT IN THE BREEDING SEASON

The Common Sandpiper nests along the banks of rivers and becks and on the shores of lakes and reservoirs. If there is a suitable island the nest will always be situated on it; otherwise it will be found on the grassy verges of shingle banks or in a clump of reeds. Once the nest was found 8 ft. up on a ledge of a small cliff. Where the river has eroded its bank the nest is often found half way up a sheer sandy bank in a suitable hollow. Usually it is concealed in a clump of vegetation. Nests are found at an altitude of over 1,000 ft. a.s.l., or low down in the valleys. Thickly vegetated banks are shunned, as are bare rocky banks; a mixture of the two seems to be preferred.

### THE NEST

The nest itself is a small hollow lined with dead grasses and leaves. At the back it is completely concealed by thick vegetation, usually a clump of reeds or small shrubs, but once by a log and washed up

debris and twice, when the nest was on a ledge of a small cliff, by sheer rock. The front is also camouflaged by a little vegetation, mostly reeds and grass. We found no exceptions to these rules.

#### TERRITORY

It was noted that sandpipers would always retire up or down stream at the approach of an observer. Then, after having been driven for a certain distance, they would return, either straight back along the stream or by making a detour away from the river. At other places, however, the birds bred so closely that four pairs would often freely intermingle.

#### INCUBATION, HATCHING AND HATCHING SUCCESS

Details are given in Table I of dates of the start of incubation and of hatching in the three years, 1949, 1950 and 1951. The nests in question were visited at least once in three days.

TABLE I

Year	Average start of incubation	Earliest and latest dates of start of incubation	Average hatching date	Earliest and latest dates of hatching	No. of nests
1949	May 25	—*	June 15	—*	2
1950	May 26	May 19–June 1	June 16	June 9–22	4
1951	May 19	May 14–23	June 9	June 4–13	8

All years May 23 May 14–June 1 June 13 June 4–23 14

\* Incubation in both nests started on the same day; both hatched on June 15

In Table II are given the details for hatching success. The data do not cover the period after the young left the nest, so the table does not indicate fledging success. Years for which data are inadequate or unreliable have been omitted.

TABLE II : CAUSES OF DESTRUCTION OF NESTS

Year	Nests destroyed by			Nests hatched	Total
	Floods	Crows	Unknown causes		
1937	—	2	—	3	5
1939	—	—	—	2	2
1943	—	—	1	—	1
1945	—	—	1	2	3
1949	—	—	—	3	3
1950	1	—	—	4	5
1951	—	—	1	10	11
All years	1	2	3	24	30
%	3½	6½	10	80	

#### CENSUS FIGURES

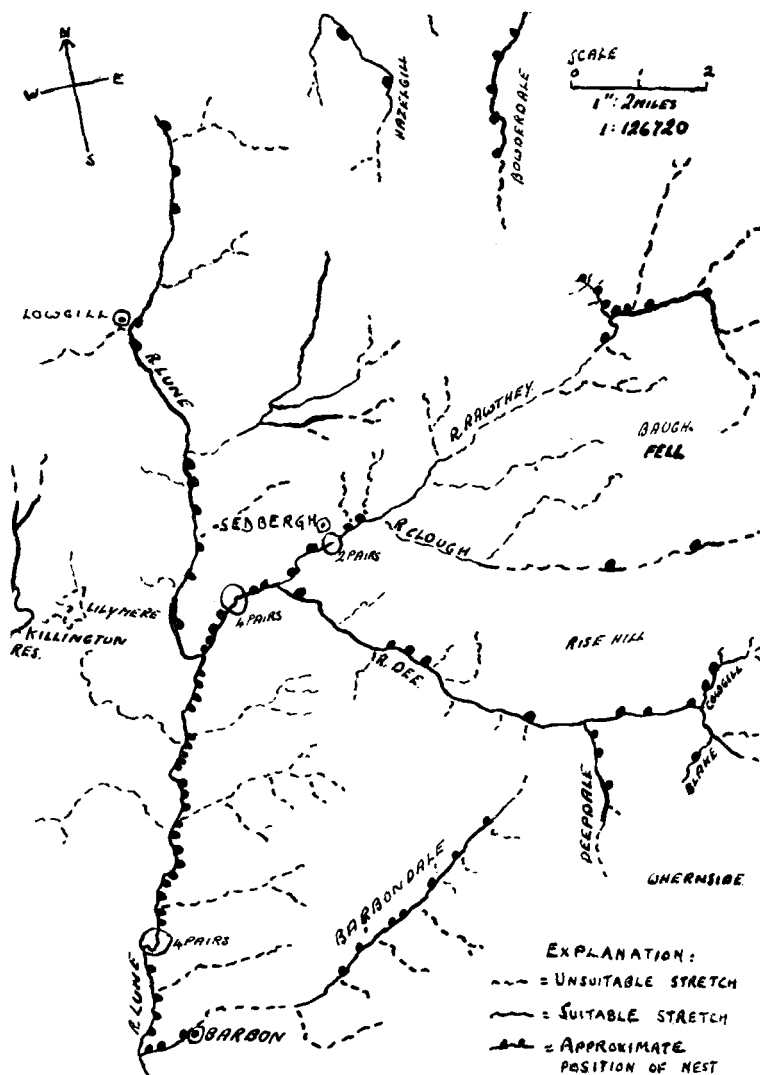
In Table III the results of the 1951 census are compared with the figures for the same stretches of river in 1939.

TABLE III

River	Pairs in 1939	Pairs in 1951	Increase/Decrease	Length of river surveyed
Rawthey...	10	16	+6	4½ miles

Lune	...	...	7	6	—1	3 $\frac{3}{4}$	„
Dee	...	...	4	4	—	3 $\frac{1}{2}$	„
Clough	...	...	2	—	—2	2	„
Total	...	...	23	26	+3	14 miles	

In Table IV the results of the census made in 1951 are given in full. The position of each pair recorded is plotted on the accompanying map.



The census was carried out by a team of three members of the Sedbergh School Ornithological Society. The information compiled by the same team in 1949 and 1950 was also included as part of the census. The areas marked on the map as "unsuitable" are so marked either because the vegetation on either bank is so dense as to be unsuitable or because the fall of water is greater than 200 ft. per mile; areas are also marked thus because the banks are too steep or occasionally too bare and rocky. The counts were made between May 1st and July 15th. Many stretches of river were covered three or more times, others further away were covered only twice and those furthest away only once. The latter are, however, few. The river levels were normal throughout the seasons. A heavy flood could have done great damage.

TABLE IV

River				No. of pairs	Mileage of river surveyed
Rawthey	...	...	...	22	13
Lune	...	...	...	40	13
Dee	...	...	...	11	10½
Clough	...	...	...	2	6
Barbondale	...	...	...	10	5½
Cautley Beck	...	...	...	3	1
Deepdale	...	...	...	3	1½
Cowgill Beck	...	...	...	2	2½
Blake Beck	...	...	...	1	2
Bowderdale	...	...	...	5	2½
Hazelgill	...	...	...	2	2
Total	...	...	...	101	60