



*Woodpecker and Nuthatch
Survey 1994-95*



Roy Atkins and John Callion

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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.)

