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# Black Redstarts breeding in Britain in 1964-68

March 1971

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This is the first of what is intended to be a series of quinquennial reports, following the previous summary covering the years 1950-65 (Fitter 1965). During 1964-68 the observed breeding and territoryholding population of Black Redstarts *Phoenicurus ochruros* in Britain (actually all in England) continued to fluctuate, as it has done ever since the first big influx in 1942 and 1945 (see fig. 1 and table 1). There have altogether been four peaks, in 1942 (49 territories held), 1948 (63), 1958 (49) and now 1964 with a record 69. The corresponding lows have been in 1946 (24), 1955 (23), 1962 (17) and now 1968 with 24. The problem is whether these fluctuations are real or merely the result of defective observation. Even now, with a vastly increased network of active observers compared with a generation ago, it is clear that a proportion, and probably a large proportion, of nesting pairs go unrecorded. This is due mainly to their preferred nesting habitaturban and industrial areas

not greatly frequented by birdwatchers. Meadows (1965) demonstrated this nicely when in 1964 he surveyed the industrial lower reaches of the River Lea, on the borders of Essex and Middlesex, and found no fewer than four unsuspected breeding pairs and six other males holding territories. The sudden appearance of Staffordshire in the record in 1964 was also due to the fact that nobody had hitherto bothered to watch birds in the environs of the power station at Bilston. It is significant that during this fiveyear period



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1971 Vol.64: Pages –124

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