

## Berkshire Ornithological Club

### Berkshire Bird Species of Conservation Concern

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This analysis has been put together as an aid to the Berkshire Ornithological Club's conservation work. Species of conservation concern have been selected based on one or more of the following criteria: (a) declining Berkshire abundance, (b) very small Berkshire population size, (c) serious national decline in abundance. Where we have been able to identify potential mitigation measures, these are indicated. This is a work in progress that we hope will be helpful to others with responsibilities for nature conservation and we would welcome discussion and collaboration. For background, a table of population estimates for all bird species known to be breeding in Berkshire is attached.

As well as the species-specific issues and actions considered in the following table of birds of conservation concern, there are some general threads to consider:

#### 1. Farmland

A number of land use changes that are occurring may affect bird populations, *eg*: changing soil management techniques, growth in game shooting estates, extension of gallops *etc*.

With greater focus on environmental land management and the development by the North Wessex Downs AONB, among others, of farmer clusters, there is a growing demand from farmers for bird surveys, hence on the BOC for surveyors.

#### 2. Woodland

Woodland appears to be less well covered by birdwatchers than other habitats, hence our knowledge of our woodland birds is probably poorer. As disease and climate are affecting woodland composition and as there is likely to be a growth in tree planting, there is likely to be a demand for information on bird assemblages and for woodland bird surveys.

The basic tenets of managing woodland for wildlife (heterogenous tree layout, leaving decaying wood, ensuring a mixed understorey and herb layer, deer control) are often not followed by woodland managers. We should seek to engage with woodland owners to encourage management for wildlife (other than deer!).

#### 3. Predation pressures

Some species of conservation concern, especially ground nesting species, are vulnerable to predation from generalist mammalian and bird predators, several of whose populations have increased substantially in recent decades. Measures to protect vulnerable species from such predation may be important in safeguarding their presence in the county.

#### 4. People pressures

We can anticipate continuing development demands for land, including so-called "brownfield" sites that are often valuable biodiversity assets. Disturbance of feeding and nesting areas by people and pets is likely to increase. Landowners/managers should be encouraged to set aside areas for no general access, particularly for ground-nesting birds on heaths and wetlands.

Species	Main breeding habitat area	Cause for concern			Potential BOC conservation action
		UK BCC level.	Berkshire Status.	Comments	
Goosander	River valleys	Green.	Berkshire rare, sporadic breeder.	National range and abundance increasing.	None needed.
Grey Partridge	Downs	Red.	Serious national and local decline. Managed recovery on a few estates.		Farm surveys. Disseminate best practice, eg via farm clusters.
Goshawk	Heath and Woodland	Green.	Rare (Sch.1) but increasing nationally and locally. Disturbance and persecution risk.		Encourage landowners and gamekeepers to leave birds of prey.
Stone Curlew	Downs	Amber.	Scarce, stable as managed locally.		None. RSPB managing conservation.
Little Ringed Plover	River valleys, Heaths	Green.	Scarce (Sch 1), vulnerable to disturbance and damage at nest site.		BOC members can help by reporting sites or liaising with land manager to protect nests.
Ringed Plover	River valleys, Heaths	Red.	Scarce, vulnerable to disturbance and damage at nest site.		As Little Ringed Plover.
Curlew	Downs	Rare (Red, Sch 1).	National rapid decline. A few pairs make breeding attempts annually at downland sites. Sites vary from year to year.		Monitor breeding sites and liaise with land managers to protect nests.
Lapwing	Downs, River valleys	Red.	Declining, rapidly since 1980s nationally, with losses greatest in lowland UK. Almost exclusively arable sites vulnerable to farm working and crop growth.		Farm surveys. Encourage farmers to look for and protect Lapwing nest sites. Encourage creation of lapwing plots.
Redshank	River valleys	Red.	Scarce, steady slow decline nationally since 1970s. A bird primarily of saltmarshes, in Berkshire a few pairs breed at gravel pit and managed river sites.		None identified. Most existing sites are managed nature reserves.
Woodcock	Heaths and Woodland	Red.	75% decline nationally since 1970s. In Berkshire a 50% decline in occupied tetrads between 1987/9 and 2008/11 atlas surveys (confirmed + probable). Cause of decline unknown.		None identified.
Turtle Dove	All areas	Red.	Major national decline, probably mostly due to habitat loss in wintering grounds, but habitat management in UK has led to successful nesting (eg Knepp). A few birds have occurred in Berkshire in recent years, but most fail to establish pairs and nests.		Monitor observations and follow up with landowner and Project Turtle Dove recommendations. Maintain small stock of supplemental feed for immediate use.
Cuckoo	River valleys	Red.	Declining rapidly nationally, especially in south, possibly related to migration/wintering ground losses. In Berkshire the main host, Reed Warbler, is doing well.		None identified.
Long-eared Owl	Downs	Green.	Rare. UK population stable. Berkshire numbers unknown, possibly fewer than ten pairs, but probably much overlooked.		None identified.
Short-eared Owl	Downs	Amber.	Rare, sporadic breeding occurs.		None identified.

Species	Main breeding habitat area	Cause for concern			Potential BOC conservation action
		UK BCC level.	Berkshire Status.	Comments	
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	River valleys, Woodland	Red.	Rapid decline nationally. Perhaps fewer than ten pairs remain in Berkshire.		General woodland management advice re decaying wood, especially along rivers.
Willow Tit	Woodland, Downs	Red.	Continuous decline since 1970s in UK (95% since 1970). Declining also in W Europe. Declining most rapidly in SE England. Perhaps fewer than ten pairs remain in Berkshire, SW of Kintbury. Cause thought to be habitat degradation.		Liaise with landowners re BTO guidance on habitat management.
Marsh Tit	Woodland, River valleys	Red.	Similar pattern of decline to Willow Tit, but slower (75% since 1970).		Liaise with landowners re BTO guidance on woodland management.
Woodlark	Heaths & woodland	Green.	Increasing in abundance and range in UK, though still scarce. Vulnerable to wood and heath management and human disturbance.		Watching brief.
House Martin	All areas	Amber.	Population nationally halved in 1990s with further halving in since. Losses have been in south and east, with increases in NW and Scotland. Causes unknown, but smaller clutches and fewer second broods may suggest insect shortage.		Offer House Martin boxes for use in or near previously used sites.
Willow Warbler	Heaths & woodland	Amber.	Rapid decline in south and east England since 1980s, continuing. Causes unknown, but thought likely to be related to climate and habitat change in UK. In Berkshire, young forestry plantations have been a significant nesting habitat in recent years.		None identified.
Grasshopper Warbler	River valleys, Woodland	Red.	Moderate decline mostly in south. In Berkshire loss of scrub and tussocky grassland may be a factor, though they also use young forestry plantations.		None identified.
Spotted Flycatcher	Woodland	Red.	Rapid national decline 1960s-1990s, slower decline since, in common with some other species migrating to the W African humid zone. In UK decline mostly in pasture and rural settlements, little decline in deciduous woodland. In Berkshire, breeding (confirmed + probable) halved between the 1987/9 and 2008/11 atlas surveys, and birds were lost completely from most of mid and east Berkshire.		None identified.
Nightingale	River valleys	Red.	Steady, continuing national decline (95% since 1970). In Berkshire it has largely disappeared, an important population remaining along the Kennet in the Theale-Burghfield area, probably at risk due to habitat change and disturbance.		Habitat management following BTO guidance to be encouraged with landowners (RDAA, Pru, RBC etc).
Meadow Pipit	Downs	Amber.	Slow national decline in all areas, causes unknown but losses of suitable marginal land and climate change are likely factors. The population estimate below is almost certainly now too high.		None identified.

Species	Main breeding habitat area	Cause for concern			Potential BOC conservation action
		UK BCC level.	Berkshire Status.	Comments	
Yellow Wagtail	Downs, River valleys	Red.	70% national decline between 1980 and 2010, stable since. In Berkshire it has disappeared from the river valleys and is predominantly a scarce arable farmland, mostly downland bird. Spring sown crops favoured; soil penetrability appears to be an important factor in suitability of land.	Farm surveys.	
Tree Pipit	Heaths & Woodland	Red.	Sudden 80% collapse in national abundance in 1985-95, slower decline since. Tree Pipits winter in the W African humid zone, where habitat change may contribute to losses. Woodland management and disturbance also a factor.	None identified.	
Tree Sparrow	River valleys, Downs	Red.	Lost to Berkshire. Successful colony boosting projects in Oxfordshire and Wiltshire.	Encourage wintering birds to stay by supplemental feeding. Consider a reintroduction programme.	
Yellowhammer	Downs	Red.	Abundance halved nationally in the period of arable intensification (1970s-90s), followed by continuing slower decline. In Berkshire, it has largely disappeared from the east of the county, otherwise widespread though increasingly scarce. Winter survival appears a major factor, hence winter provision of food (stubbles, seed plots, feeding stations etc).	Farm surveys. Farmer advice/engagement.	
Corn Bunting	Downs	Red.	Nationally abundance fell 90% between 1975 and 2000, since when stable. Locally, now retreated to the Berkshire Downs, where a good population exists. Favours spring sown cereals in breeding season. Winter feeding as for Yellowhammer.	Farm surveys. Farmer advice/engagement. Consider supplemental feeding at key sites.	