



Berkshire Species of Conservation Concern

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An analysis of bird species breeding in Berkshire that are of local or national conservation concern.

Berkshire Ornithological Club

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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.

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

1. Farmland

- a. With greater focus on environmental land management and the development by the North Wessex Downs AONB of farmer clusters, there is a growing demand from farmers for bird surveys, hence on the BOC for surveyors.
- b. A number of land use changes may affect bird populations, *eg*: changing soil management techniques, growth in game shooting estates, extension of gallops....

2. Woodland

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

3. Predation pressures

- a. Many predators of birds also thrive on food items we provide in our waste, on the large numbers of pheasant released annually and on feed offered in parks and gardens, as well as a variety of wild prey species. The combination of abundant food and decreased persecution has resulted in many predators (*eg* foxes, badgers, corvids, large gulls) becoming increasingly abundant in recent decades. These generalist predators are happy to include species of conservation concern in their diet and can be a major cause of breeding failure, particularly of ground-nesting species. Mitigation would require urban and rural management measures.

4. People pressures

- a. We can anticipate continuing development demands for land, including so-called "brownfield" sites that are often valuable biodiversity assets.
- b. 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 and the decline has continued, so that numbers are about 25% of the 1980 level. 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.

Berkshire Breeding Bird Population Estimates

Species likely to have bred in 2021 ¹	Population (pairs or territories)	Source ²
Mute Swan	200 - 300	Atlas 2008-11
Greylag Goose	340 (L)	APEP
Canada Goose	1,900 (L)	APEP
Egyptian Goose	150 (L)	APEP
Shelduck	24 (M)	APEP
Mandarin Duck	190 (L)	APEP
Gadwall	24 - 68	Atlas 2008-11
Mallard	1,200 (L)	APEP
Shoveler	0 - 5	Expert review
Red-crested Pochard	5 - 10	Expert review
Pochard	10 - 20	Expert review
Tufted Duck	250 (L)	APEP
Goosander	1 - 10	Expert review
Red-legged Partridge	850 (M)	APEP
Grey Partridge	50 - 150	Expert review
Quail	0 - 20	Expert review
Pheasant	20,000 (M)	APEP
Little Grebe	40 - 60	Atlas 2008-11
Great Crested Grebe	200 - 300	Atlas 2008-11
Cormorant	110 (M)	APEP
Little Egret	10 - 100	Expert review
Grey Heron	110 (H)	APEP
Red Kite	200 - 560	Atlas 2008-11
Goshawk	2 - 5	Expert review
Sparrowhawk	140 - 320	APEP

Species likely to have bred in 2021 ¹	Population (pairs or territories)	Source ²
Buzzard	600 - 900	Atlas 2008-11
Kestrel	450 (M)	APEP
Hobby	20 - 50	Expert review
Peregrine	5 - 10	Expert review
Water Rail	30 - 50	Survey 2016-8
Moorhen	3,500 (M)	APEP
Coot	690 (L)	APEP
Oystercatcher	5 - 10	Expert review
Stone-curlew	1 - 5	Expert review
Little Ringed Plover	10 - 20	Expert review
Ringed Plover	0 - 5	Expert review
Lapwing	500 - 1,000	Atlas 2008-11
Woodcock	400 (M)	APEP
Curlew	2 - 5	Expert review
Redshank	1 - 5	Expert review
Black-headed Gull	450 (H)	APEP
Mediterranean Gull	2	Expert review
Lesser Black-backed Gull	10 - 50	Expert review
Herring Gull	10 - 100	Expert review
Common Tern	170 (M)	APEP
Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	4,700 (M)	APEP
Stock Dove	3,000 (M)	APEP
Woodpigeon	76,000 (M)	APEP
Collared Dove	8,200 (M)	APEP
Ring-necked Parakeet	1,100	Atlas 2008-11

Species likely to have bred in 2021 ¹	Population (pairs or territories)	Source ²
Cuckoo	75 (L)	APEP
Barn Owl	60 - 100	Atlas 2008-11
Little Owl	50 - 80	Atlas 2008-11
Tawny Owl	400 (M)	APEP
Long-eared Owl	2 - 10	Expert review
Nightjar	50 - 100	Annual reports
Swift	750 (M)	APEP
Kingfisher	44 - 69	Atlas 2008-11
Green Woodpecker	1,100 (M)	APEP
Great Spotted Woodpecker	2,500 (M)	APEP
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	1 - 10	Expert review
Woodlark	160 (H)	APEP
Skylark	9,800 (M)	APEP
Sand Martin	150 (M)	APEP
Swallow	2,700 (M)	APEP
House Martin	3,500 (M)	APEP
Tree Pipit	10 - 50	Expert review
Meadow Pipit	20 - 100	Expert review
Yellow Wagtail	10 - 20	Expert review
Grey Wagtail	260 (L)	APEP
Pied Wagtail	2,500 (M)	APEP
Wren	76,000 (M)	APEP
Dunnock	20,000 (M)	APEP
Robin	70,000 (M)	APEP
Nightingale	50 - 100	Surveys 2010, 2021
Black Redstart	2 - 5	Expert review
Redstart	10 - 50	Expert review

Species likely to have bred in 2021 ¹	Population (pairs or territories)	Source ²
Stonechat	77 (M)	APEP
Blackbird	48,000 (M)	APEP
Song Thrush	11,000 (M)	APEP
Mistle Thrush	1,300 (M)	APEP
Cetti's Warbler	50 - 80	Atlas 2008-11
Grasshopper Warbler	1 - 10	Expert review
Sedge Warbler	2,100 (M)	APEP
Reed Warbler	1,400 (M)	APEP
Blackcap	15,000 (M)	APEP
Garden Warbler	1,600 (M)	APEP
Lesser Whitethroat	250 (M)	APEP
Whitethroat	11,000 (M)	APEP
Dartford Warbler	20 - 50	Expert review
Chiffchaff	11,000 (M)	APEP
Willow Warbler	3,500 (M)	APEP
Goldcrest	5,100 (M)	APEP
Firecrest	100 - 200	Expert review
Spotted Flycatcher	50 - 100	Expert review
Long-tailed Tit	5,400 (M)	APEP
Blue Tit	44,000 (M)	APEP
Great Tit	35,000 (M)	APEP
Coal Tit	5,000 (M)	APEP
Willow Tit	3 - 10	Expert review
Marsh Tit	610 (M)	APEP
Nuthatch	4,200 (M)	APEP
Treecreeper	2,600 (M)	APEP
Jay	3,200 (M)	APEP

Species likely to have bred in 2021 ¹	Population (pairs or territories)	Source ²
Magpie	8,000 (M)	APEP
Jackdaw	14,000 (M)	APEP
Rook	12,000 (M)	APEP
Carrion Crow	8,600 (M)	APEP
Raven	10 - 20	Expert review
Starling	12,000 (M)	APEP
House Sparrow	23,000 (M)	APEP
Chaffinch	48,000 (M)	APEP
Greenfinch	19,000 (M)	APEP

Species likely to have bred in 2021 ¹	Population (pairs or territories)	Source ²
Goldfinch	9,300 (M)	APEP
Siskin	230 (L)	APEP
Linnet	2,300 (M)	APEP
Lesser Redpoll	0 - 20	Expert review
Common Crossbill	10 - 100	Expert review
Bullfinch	960 (M)	APEP
Yellowhammer	5,000 (M)	APEP
Reed Bunting	1,200 (M)	APEP
Corn Bunting	100 - 300	Expert review

Note 1 Species included are birds thought to have bred in the last five years.

Note 2 **Atlas 2008-11:** data are based on Berkshire 2008-11 atlas survey counts given in Appendix IV of *The Birds of Berkshire 2013*.

Avian Population Estimates Panel (APEP): For commoner species, Berkshire population estimates in Appendix IV of *The Birds of Berkshire 2013* have been used. These were derived from APEP national population estimates (Musgrove *et al* 2013, *British Birds* **106**, 64-100) x Berkshire fraction of national abundance from BTO atlas surveys 2008-11. Fidelity in the estimate is given as H (high), M (medium) and L (low).

Expert review: for scarcer species, a consensus of experts has been sought. The experts include the County Recorder (Marek Walford), the authors (Neil Bucknell and Renton Righelato) and members of the BOC's Conservation Subcommittee.