

6 Bird Populations



F

EN

The National Forest is significantly improving and extending habitats for woodland and farmland birds (see Biodiversity Conservation indicator). Across the UK, bird populations are used as an indicator of the health of our environment. Monitoring key species that are attracted to the main habitats in The National Forest provides a useful indication of the status of bird populations across the Forest as a whole.

National and regional bird indicators 1994-2008¹

- Woodland bird species in the East and West Midlands have shown increases since 1994, compared to a decrease across England; but farmland birds have decreased at a faster rate in the Midlands than national trends.

	All bird species	Woodland birds	Farmland birds
England	3% increase	6% decrease	11% decrease
East Midlands	7% increase	15% increase	17% decrease
West Midlands	2% decrease	1% increase	16% decrease

National Forest Breeding Bird Survey 2008²

- A Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) of The National Forest was conducted by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) in 2008. Covering 42 one kilometre squares (approximately 10% of the Forest area), it provided baseline data against which future trends and population change can be measured.
- Key findings were:
 - 107 different bird species were recorded.
 - The most abundant species were woodpigeon, blackbird, wren, chaffinch, robin and starling.
 - The Charnwood landscape area (which was particularly good for woodland and scrub species) recorded the most birds per survey sample.
 - The Mease Lowlands landscape area had the highest mean counts for farmland species.
 - 52 of the species recorded were listed as being of conservation concern (16 red list species and 36 amber list).
 - Red list species such as tree sparrow (which favours farmland and scrub habitats), willow tit (scrub/woodland edge), marsh tit (mature woodland) and grasshopper warbler (wetland and young plantation) were all recorded more abundantly in The National Forest than in the wider Midlands region.



Skylark: a National Forest farmland species.



Song thrush: a National Forest woodland species.

Photos: John Harding

NRP

National Forest Breeding Bird Survey 2010³

- The first follow-up survey was carried out in 2010 on a 25% sample of the original survey squares (ten 1km squares).
- Preliminary results show that, in the survey squares used in both the 2008 and 2010 surveys, 96 species were observed in both surveys. Of these, 38 species (40%) showed an increase in numbers recorded since 2008 and six species saw an increase of more than 100%.
- Six of the red-listed and seven of the amber-listed species observed in 2008 were recorded in greater numbers in 2010. This includes birds of farmland (skylark, starling, house sparrow, linnet and yellowhammer), young plantations (linnet and yellowhammer) and mature woodland (song thrush).
- Recorded populations of skylark showed an increase of 14% since 2008. This red-list farmland species has yet to show substantial recovery elsewhere in England⁴.
- The BTO's full report is awaiting information from volunteer surveyors and is due for completion in 2011. This indicator will be updated to reflect new data and also provide a comparison with national and regional trends.

* ACTION:

- 1) Continue to undertake habitat and species improvement works to meet National Forest BAP targets.
- 2) Commission a full re-survey of BBS every five years, plus periodic sample surveys.

DATA SOURCES:

- 1) Wild bird population indicators for the English Regions 1994-2008:
www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/environment/wildlife/research/download/wdbrds201004.pdf
- 2) A breeding bird survey of The National Forest (English Midlands) - British Trust for Ornithology [2008].
- 3) Repeat Breeding Bird Survey: Interim report - British Trust for Ornithology [September 2010].
- 4) BTO statistics for birds of conservation concern – changes in criteria since last review:
www.bto.org/psob/#change_in_criteria