

State of birds **IN WALES 6**



The headlines

1. The **red**, **amber** and **green** lists have been revised. Sixty-three species have moved to a higher list of conservation concern, while nine have moved to a lower list. There has been no change for 133 species.
2. **Merlin** numbers are stable, **twites** have declined, and the **corn bunting** is no longer a regular breeder.
3. **Farmland** bird numbers are at their lowest since 1994. Breeding **seabird** trends since 1986 show signs of decline for **kittiwakes**. Since 1977, more species of wintering **waterbirds** have declined than have remained stable or increased.
4. Breeding Bird Survey results show that 19 native species have increased significantly and 11 have declined significantly between 1995 and 2007.
5. Of the 51 **Principal Biodiversity Species**, 36 are declining, four are stable and 11 have increased. The monitoring of 23 species should be improved to meet Biodiversity Action Plan reporting requirements.
6. Provisional *Atlas* results show how far wintering **little egrets** have spread, and worrying signs that breeding **whinchats** have disappeared from many areas.
7. **Black grouse** are shown to be the only birds to have potentially had all of their needs met by the agri-environment scheme, Tir Gofal. Other birds may have benefited partially. The replacement scheme, Glastir, must take this on board.



Bullfinch

Contents



Yellowhammer

Tom Marshall (rsdb-images.com)

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Centrefold – the population status of birds in Wales

Throughout this report, species are colour-coded according to their population status. The 45 species identified as being of the greatest conservation concern are **red**-listed, the 100 species of moderate concern are **amber**-listed and the 68 species of least concern are **green**-listed. This assessment does not cover non-native species, which are not colour-coded.



Jackdaw

Sue Tranter (rspb-images.com)



Introduction



Song thrush

Sue Tranter (rspb-images.com)

The year 2010 is the target date for The Welsh Assembly Government, along with other Governments around Europe, to halt the loss of biodiversity. Looking at the Welsh Assembly's two-part indicator of wild bird populations on page 9 and the increased number of red-list species in Wales (page 25), it is clear that we are not on course to meet this target from a bird perspective.

We need to find out why some birds are declining and how we can help them. We then need to monitor the effectiveness of new policies we put in place and the practical help we give. The conservation task has never been greater and we must improve the partnership between government, research and voluntary sectors.

This year's *State of birds in Wales* reports on work from across the spectrum of bird conservation. We report on the reassessment of the population status of our birds: better known as the 'red and amber lists'. This has resulted in the number of

red-list species in Wales increasing from 27 to 45. A review of the Welsh Assembly Government's **Principal Biodiversity Species** has prioritised 51 birds for conservation action under the Biodiversity Action Planning (BAP) process that identifies targets and key objectives and guides conservation interventions.

This report also highlights the need for improved monitoring of the **Principal Biodiversity Species**: existing monitoring programmes for 23 of these do not meet BAP reporting requirements. The fieldwork for the *UK and Ireland Bird Atlas* project is underway and will continue until 2011. The *Atlas* will contribute important information on range (geographical distribution) and relative abundance (numbers) of breeding and wintering birds in Wales, thanks to the efforts of a huge number of volunteers, to whom we are greatly indebted. However, to assess progress on our BAP targets, we need an additional rolling programme of monitoring.

The Welsh Assembly Government has contracted the RSPB and other voluntary-sector partners to lead a programme measuring the impact of its agri-environment schemes on species. Whilst the programme largely focuses on the Tir Gofal scheme, it is hoped that the findings will influence the new Glastir scheme, due to begin in 2012.

The state of birds in Wales 6 is produced in partnership by RSPB Cymru, the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT), the Welsh Ornithological Society (WOS), and the Welsh Assembly Government's Statutory Conservation Agency, the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW).

Organisations involved with bird monitoring in Wales include:

The British Trust for Ornithology, County Bird Recorders, Forestry Commission Wales, the Countryside Council for Wales, Ecology Matters, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), Local Biodiversity Officers, the National Park Authorities, the National Trust, RSPB Cymru, Severn Trent Water, Wales Raptor Study Group, Welsh Kite Trust, Welsh Ornithological Society, Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust and the Welsh Wildlife Trusts.

For bibliographic purposes, this report should be referred to as Johnstone IG, Thorpe RI & Noble DG, (2010). *The state of birds in Wales 6*. RSPB Cymru, Cardiff.



Spotted flycatcher

Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

How our birds are faring



Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

Twite

Twite declining

Although the Welsh population of this **Principal Biodiversity Species** appears isolated, there is evidence of movements between the threatened Pennines population of Northern England and Wales, as several birds colour-ringed in the Pennines have been seen here during summer.

A survey in 2002 suggested a population of 26-33 pairs. A repeat survey of the places with previous records along with a random sample of other suitable habitat took place in 2008 to see if its status had changed.

The 2008 survey results suggest a population of 14-17 pairs. This represents a 46-48% decline in numbers since 2002. Supporting evidence for this decline was the result of surveys of post-breeding feeding areas in the Nant Ffrancon valley, Snowdonia. In 2000, there were flocks of up to 200 **twite**, but in 2008, flocks of less than 30 were recorded. A lack of reports of sizable autumn **twite** flocks elsewhere in Wales suggests the decline is genuine.

Twite nest in bracken and mature heather on steep ground. Both chicks and adults eat seeds, especially dandelion, hawkbit, sorrel and meadow grass, which may have become less available in recent years through changes in the timing of grazing and cutting. Putting out seed, and working with land managers can reinstate these relatively easily, and the National Trust and RSPB Cymru are working in partnership to do this.

A CCW Species Challenge Fund supported project



Chris Gomersall (rspb-images.com)

Merlin

Merlins hold their own

Traditionally, **merlins** nest on the ground and in old crow nests in isolated moorland trees such as hawthorns, although they now also nest in conifer plantations. This small bird of prey eats birds, such as meadow pipits, caught on the moor and adjacent farmland.

A sample survey in 2008 estimated 92 pairs. This compares with 84 pairs in 1993. The new results suggest the population remains stable.

A SCARABBS' survey

¹ Scarce and Rare Annual Breeding Birds Survey.

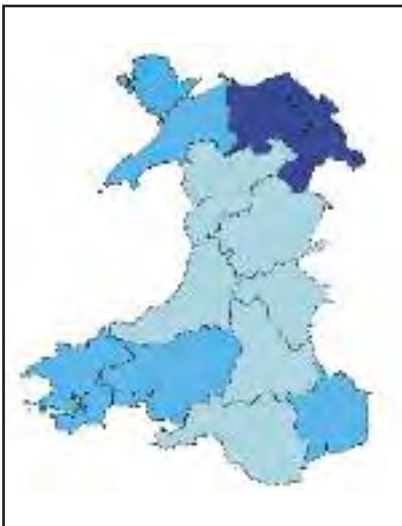
Corn buntings on the brink

The **corn bunting**, a red-listed and **Principal Biodiversity Species**, formerly bred in all counties of Wales. However, the results of a survey in 2008 reveal it is no longer a regular breeder.

A full survey of places with records in Wales since 2000 (the border area between Chester and Welshpool), and adjacent areas, took place in 2008. Despite at least 22 breeding territories recorded in just part of this area in 1993, the 2008 survey revealed no birds. However, there were reports of birds in Shropshire.

Corn buntings nest on the ground in crops and eat seeds in winter. Birds could re-colonise from over the border if spring cereals and over winter stubbles can be encouraged.

A CCW Species Challenge Fund supported project



Records from County Bird Reports show that **corn buntings** have declined almost to extinction in Wales over the last 70 years. They were extinct in six counties before 1950 (light blue), and became so in a further five between 1955 and 2000 (mid blue). Only two counties have had breeding pairs since 2000 (dark blue).



Corn bunting

BTO Atlas: provisional maps produced

Distribution maps from bird atlases have been used in conservation over the last 40 years. These maps are now being updated.

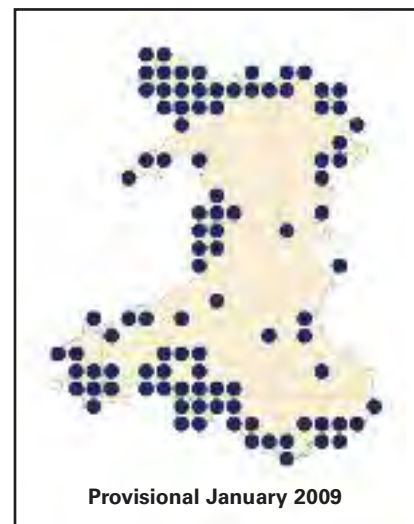
Roving atlas records, together with records from BirdTrack (www.birdtrack.net) and other schemes such as the Nest Records Scheme and the Ringing Scheme, are being used to produce the most comprehensive maps possible of breeding and wintering distributions. Counts from the "timed tetrad visits" will be used to map differences in the abundance of species.

Local atlas projects are taking place at the same time in North Wales (www.northwalesbirdatlas.co.uk), Pembrokeshire, Brecknock, Carmarthenshire and Glamorgan.

With so many atlas records submitted online, it's already possible to produce some provisional maps. For example, with no records of the **little egret** in Wales in the last *Winter Atlas*, the new atlas shows this species has shown a remarkable change in distribution, and is now firmly established around the coast.

Based on the first breeding season, it is too early to say much about the species that may be contracting in range. However, the provisional map for the **whinchat** shows worrying signs of change. Further fieldwork in 2009-2011 will build on these initial findings and establish the current range of wintering and breeding species across the whole of Britain and Ireland (see page 26).

Distribution of little egrets in the first winter of the 2008-11 Atlas. Each dot represents a 10-km square. There were no records during the 81/82 to 83/84 Winter Atlas. The heron-like little egret hunts small fish in still, shallow waters.



Provisional January 2009



Whinchat

Sue Tranter (rspb-images.com)

Widespread breeding birds

The annual BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Birds Survey (BBS) reports on changes in the fortunes of widespread breeding birds since 1994. By 2008, of the 51 native species reported on individually by the BBS², 19 have increased and 11 have declined significantly.

The Welsh Assembly Government measures the health of the

environment annually, and birds are included in this using a **Wild Bird Indicator** based on different groups of widespread breeding birds. Part 1 of this indicator measures the change in abundance (numbers) of native birds reported on by the BBS. The index declined between 2007 and 2008, but shows broad stability since 1994. However, this apparent stability across all species can mask important changes in individual species and species-groups, with increases in

generalists, which do well from current land-uses, offsetting declines in specialists, for which resources have become harder to find.

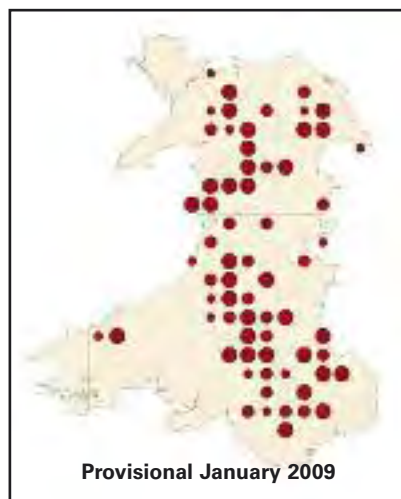
This first part of the indicator must always be viewed within the context of historic change. This is provided by part 2 of the indicator that shows changes in range (geographical distribution) from 1968-1971 to 1988-91. More than half of 119 native species represented show a contraction in range. Contraction in range is also likely to indicate decline in abundance.

Widespread breeding birds of farmed habitats

This index increased slightly on 2007 but remains 7% lower than when the indicator began in 1994. The historic indicator highlights the number of species for which range has declined, many of which are now too scarce for inclusion in the BBS results. For comparison with the UK, the short-term indicator is also shown for lowland farmland birds. In 2008 this reached its lowest point since the indicator began, with the index 11% lower than in 1994.

Five species declined significantly (**curlew**, **starling**, **wheatear**, **whitethroat** and **yellowhammer**). All except wheatear and whitethroat are **Principal Biodiversity Species**. Three species increased significantly (**goldfinch**, **greenfinch** and **woodpigeon**).

Distribution of whinchats in the 1988-91 Atlas (left), and the first breeding season of the 2008-11 Atlas (right). Each dot represents a 10-km square and the three sizes of dot indicate possible (small), probable (medium) and confirmed breeding (large). Whinchats are birds of tussocky grassland, heath and ffridd (see page 22), where they eat small insects. They cross the Sahara to winter in Africa.



² The BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey has reported on changes in the fortunes of widespread breeding birds since 1994. There is now a sufficiently long run of data to calculate smoothed trends, which gives a clearer picture of population trends. Since smoothing involves truncation of the end points, species trends are labelled 1995–2007. The unsmoothed trends (1994–2008) are used in the indicator and individual species graphs.

Widespread woodland breeding birds

Woodland birds were also less abundant in 2008 compared with 2007, but the index remains 4% above the 1994 baseline value. The historic indicator shows that the ranges of most woodland birds were stable.

Twelve species increased significantly (blackbird, blackcap, blue tit, chiffchaff, dunnock, great spotted woodpecker, great tit, jay, nuthatch, robin, song thrush and wren), of which just song thrush is a **Principal Biodiversity Species**. Three species declined significantly (coal tit, garden warbler and willow warbler).

Other widespread breeding birds

Some birds in other groups also show noticeable changes over the short-term. Three species declined significantly (cuckoo, magpie and swift). Four species increased significantly (stonechat, swallow, collared dove and house sparrow). Cuckoo and house sparrow are **Principal Biodiversity Species**.



Skylark

Ben Hall (rspb-images.com)

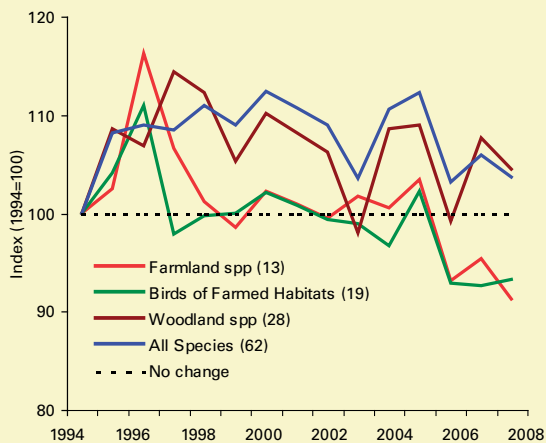
Improving the Wild Bird Indicator

Two new woodland species (sparrowhawk and siskin) and one new species of wet habitats (moorhen) met the threshold sample size for inclusion in the Indicator for the first time in 2008, increasing the total number of species to 62.

However, it should be remembered that other, more scarce species

cannot be included in the short-term indicator because of statistical limitations. Therefore, the **Wild Bird Indicator** does not represent a complete picture of bird population trends in Wales. Plans are being developed to increase the range of species that can be included in the indicator through combining BBS indices with data from other schemes, and improving coverage. We will report on developments in future years.

Part one of the widespread Breeding Bird Indicator for Wales is a measure of how bird numbers have changed since 1994 (left). Part two of the indicator shows historical changes in the geographical distribution of birds between 1968–72 and 1988–91 (right).





Chaffinch

Ben Hall (rspb-images.com)

The BBS results for Wales show trends in widespread breeding bird abundance. Species are included if they occur in a mean of 30 or more 1-kilometre squares for the period 1994 and 2008.



Raven

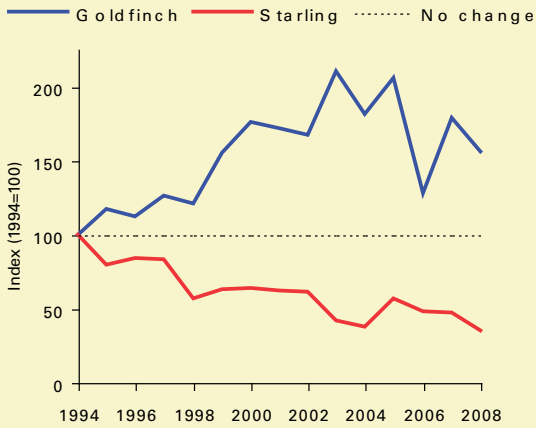
Sue Tranter (rspb-images.com)



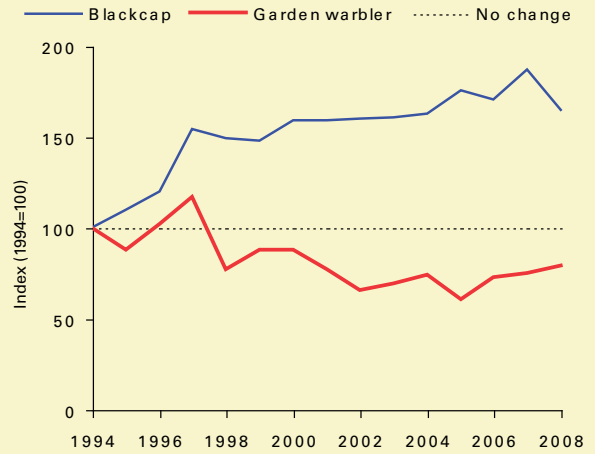
Swallow

Jodie Randall (rspb-images.com)

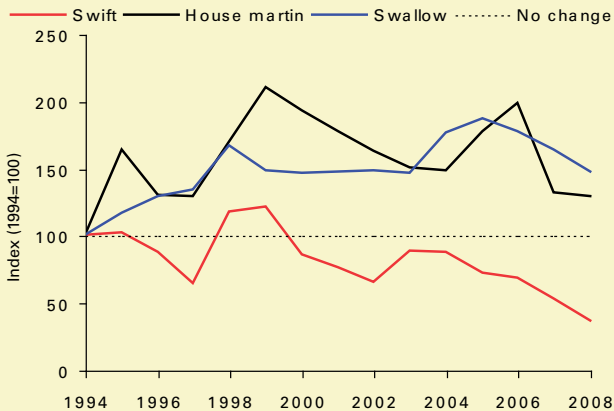
Species	Smoothed change 1995-2007	Direction of significant trends
Blackbird	44	up
Blackcap	54	up
Blue tit	15	up
Bullfinch	-13	
Buzzard	5	
Carriion crow	12	
Chaffinch	-6	
Chiffchaff	17	up
Coal tit	-25	down
Collared dove	51	up
Cuckoo	-32	down
Curlew	-39	down
Dunnoek	36	up
Garden warbler	-26	down
Goldcrest	-30	
Goldfinch	48	up
Great spotted woodpecker	128	up
Great tit	46	up
Green woodpecker	-2	
Greenfinch	23	up
Grey heron	-2	
House martin	16	
House sparrow	71	up
Jackdaw	25	
Jay	27	up
Linnet	-25	
Long-tailed tit	7	
Magpie	-13	down
Mallard	-17	
Meadow pipit	-4	
Mistle thrush	6	
Nuthatch	24	up
Pied wagtail	10	
Raven	39	
Redstart	-4	
Robin	14	up
Rook	-12	
Skylark	-13	
Song thrush	38	up
Starling	-51	down
Stonechat	201	up
Swallow	41	up
Swift	-43	down
Tree pipit	-11	
Treecreeper	7	
Wheatear	-24	down
Whitethroat	-19	down
Willow warbler	-21	down
Woodpigeon	35	up
Wren	16	up
Yellowhammer	-39	down



Unsmoothed BBS results for birds of farmed habitats show that breeding **starlings**, which feed on farmland invertebrates, continue to decline, but the huge increase in numbers of seed-eating **goldfinches** may have stopped.



Unsmoothed BBS results for woodland birds show that **blackcaps**, which winter in Europe and increasingly in the UK, have increased, while **garden warblers**, which migrate to sub-Saharan Africa, have declined. **Blackcaps** prefer mature woods with well-developed understorey, shrub and ground vegetation, while **garden warblers** prefer scrub with open canopy.



Unsmoothed BBS results show that **swifts** have declined, but the two other sub-Saharan migrants with similar aerial, insect-eating lifestyles have increased (**house martins** not significantly). **House martins** stick their mud nests under cliff ledges or the eaves of buildings, **swallows** build mud nests on ledges, often in open-fronted buildings, while **swifts** almost always nest in small cavities inside buildings.



Jodie Randall (rspb-images.com)

Starling



Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

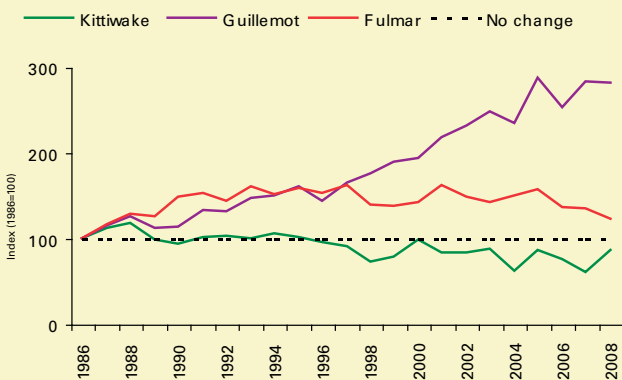
Fulmar

Seabirds

Wales supports internationally important seabird colonies. In previous editions of *The state of birds in Wales*, we have provided updates on the status of three seabirds whose different feeding behaviours represent the range of seabird lifestyles in Wales. The **kittiwake** takes small fish from just below the surface. The **fulmar** can catch prey by swimming further under the water, and will also take discarded fish from boats. The **guillemot** is a specialist deep diver, which takes larger fish.

Here we update the status of these birds using an improved Seabird Monitoring Program Index³ method, which makes use of more data in cases where some colonies are not counted in some years. They show that whilst **fulmar** and **guillemot** numbers are stable and increasing respectively, **kittiwakes** seem to be faring less well. We must watch our **kittiwake** populations closely for signs that they may be facing the same problems as birds elsewhere in the UK, of finding food for chicks.

³ The Seabird Monitoring Programme, co-ordinated by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee on behalf of a range of organisations.



Guillemots have increased, but kittiwakes show signs of decline.



Kittiwake

Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)



Sue Tranter (rspb-images.com)

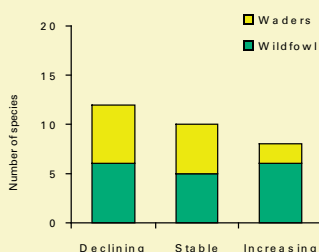
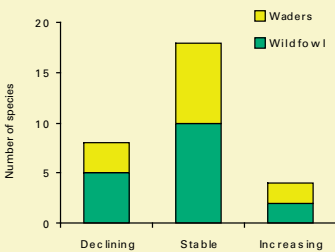
Bar-tailed godwits

Wintering waterbirds

WeBS⁴ counts have detected changes in the populations of waterbirds such as the **sanderling** and **bar-tailed godwit**, which migrate from the Arctic tundra to spend the winter on European estuaries. There is evidence that winters have warmed, allowing them to winter on muddy food-rich estuaries further east and north than usual: a phenomenon known as

“short-stopping”. However the effects of climate change are far from certain. A series of colder winters coupled with the effects of sea-level rise, which is expected to be greatest along North Sea coasts, means that the estuaries of Wales are still likely to play an important role for these species as they adapt to climate change.

WeBS Alerts, calculated every three years, are used to produce a waterbird indicator, updated below to the last Alerts report for winter 2003/04. Long-term high Alerts have been triggered for nine species (**eider**, **pochard**, **European white-fronted goose**, whooper swan, **Bewick’s swan**, **ringed plover**, **sanderling**, **bar-tailed godwit** and **turnstone**). **Ringed plover** and **bar-tailed godwit** are **Principal Biodiversity Species**.



How wintering waterbirds are faring in Wales. The graphs show changes in the abundance of 17 wildfowl and 13 wading birds over the short term (1997/98–2003/04: left) and long term (1977/78–2003/04: right). The number declining represents the number of national WeBS Alerts triggered.

⁴ The BTO/RSPB/JNCC Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) has monitored these annually since the late 1960s. The counts are used to calculate WeBS Alerts that highlight population declines among widespread waterbirds. Most wintering waterbirds counted by the WeBS breed to the north of Wales, while some waterbirds that breed in Wales migrate further south to winter. WeBS Alerts report on the whole sites, although some species on the Severn and Dee estuaries are concentrated on the English sides.

Principal Biodiversity Species

The status of the Principal Biodiversity Species and races.

Fifty-one species, including two races, require priority conservation action in Wales⁵. Thirty-six are declining, 11 have increased and four are stable (<5% change), of which one is an occasional breeder. Monitoring meets BAP reporting requirements (surveys of adequate precision repeated on a six-year cycle) for 28 of these.

Name	Trend (%)	Years	Source	Comments
Aquatic warbler	Stable	1981-08	INF	County Bird Reports
Balearic shearwater	Increase	1992-00	INF	Sea watching from headlands
Bar-tailed godwit	-76	78/79-04/05	WeBS	
Bewick's (Tundra) swan	Stable	78/79-04/05	INF	County Bird Reports
Bittern (breeding)	Qualifies as extinct	1981-08	INF	County Bird Reports
Black grouse	-19	1986-05	WS & UKS	
Black-headed gull	-75	1976-2000	WS & UKS	
Brent goose (dark-bellied)	+306	78/79-04/05	WeBS	
Bullfinch	-13	1995-07	BBS	
Chough	+48	1992-02	UKS	
Common scoter	+80	78/79-04/05	WeBS	
Corn bunting	-100	1981-08	INF & WS	County Bird Reports
Corncrake	-100	1981-08	INF	County Bird Reports
Cuckoo	-32	1995-07	BBS	
Curlew	-81	1993-06	WS	
Dunnock	+36	1995-07	BBS	
Golden plover	-83	1982-07	WS	
Grasshopper warbler	-80	1981-06	UK data	Precautionary principal
Grey partridge	-78	1981-06	UK data	Informal evidence of same trend in Wales
Hawfinch	<-25	1985/89-1995/99	INF	County Bird Reports
Hen harrier	+59	1998-04	UKS	
Herring gull	+33	1986-00	UKS	
House sparrow	+106	1994-08	BBS	
Kestrel	<-50	1994-06	INF	Decline in Breconshire
Lapwing	-77	1987-98	UKS	
Lesser redpoll	-88	1969-06	UK data	Precautionary principal
Lesser-spotted woodpecker	-71	1969-06	UK data	Similar trend to UK based on expert opinion
Linnet	-25	1995-07	BBS	
Marsh tit	-39	1981/88-03/04	UKS	
Nightjar	328	1981-04	UKS	
Pied flycatcher	-16	1981/88-02/04	UKS	
Red grouse	Decline	1950-08	INF	Expert opinion
Red-backed shrike	Occasional	1981-08	INF	County Bird Reports
Reed bunting	-30	1969-06	UK data	Precautionary principal
Ring ouzel	-69	1999-06	WS	

Linnet

Name	Trend	Years	Source	Comments
Ringed plover (winter)	-62	78/79-04/05	WeBS	
Roseate tern	-100	1986-07	SMP	
Skylark	-13	1995-07	BBS	
Song thrush	+38	1995-07	BBS	
Spotted flycatcher	-58	1981/88-03/04	UKS	
Starling	-51	1995-07	BBS	
Tree pipit	-11	1995-07	BBS	
Tree sparrow	-93	1969-06	UK data	Similar trend to UK based on expert opinion
Turtle dove	-100	1981-08	WS & INF	County Bird Reports
Twite	-46	2002-2008	WS	
White-fronted goose (Greenland)	+1	88/89-06/07	WeBS	
Willow tit	-88	1969-06	UK data	Precautionary principal
Wood warbler	-25	1981/88-03/04	UKS	
Woodlark	Increase	1980s-2008	WS & INF	County Bird Reports
Yellow wagtail	-71	1969-06	UK data	Similar trend to UK based on expert opinion
Yellowhammer	-39	1995-07	BBS	

Monitoring methods

AER = Aerial survey of important areas

INF = Informal records, eg County Bird Reports

UKS = UK-wide survey, including SCARABBS

WS = Wales survey

BBS = BBS abundance index

SMP = Seabird monitoring programme

WeBS = WeBS Alerts

⁵ Species were selected based on concern about their international, UK and Welsh population status, along with the threats their populations are thought to face. The actions to support delivery of BAP targets for those species are available through the Biodiversity Action Reporting System (BARS) www.ukbap-reporting.org.uk

Bird news

The symbols show examples of bird monitoring and research, Principal Biodiversity Species and where volunteers have helped achieve the results.



Bird monitoring and research



Principal Biodiversity Species



Volunteer action

Honey buzzards tracked to Africa and back

Honey buzzards were first proved to breed in Wales in 1992 and have since increased in number. These birds feed on bee and wasp larvae whilst in Wales, but migrate to the tropical forests of sub-Saharan Africa for the winter.

However, apart from one bird ringed in Wales reported from Ghana, there is little information about their wintering range. To investigate this, in 2008 two honey buzzards, caught at different nests, were fitted with satellite tracking devices. The aim was to find out more about their wintering areas, migration route and movements when they returned to breed. This information will help us understand what threats might be present that could affect the numbers of these birds breeding in Wales in the future. This project is being carried out and funded by Ecology Matters Ltd as part of wider studies into honey buzzards and wind farms, and is part-funded by Nuon Ltd.

Details of the project, and updates on the birds, can be found at: www.ecologymatters.co.uk/honey_buzzard.shtml



Migration routes of Welsh honey buzzards

Blue = Male – Autumn migration 2008

Green = Female – Autumn migration 2008

Pink = Female – Spring return migration 2009



Jodie Randall (rspb-images.com)

Lapwings

Lapwing management under trial

Once very common in all parts of Wales, lapwings declined by 77% to 1,698 pairs between 1987 and 1998. The population in Wales is now probably around 600 pairs. Without successful conservation, lapwings look set to become rare breeding birds in the wider countryside in the next 10 years. They could even be confined to nature reserves.

An approach to habitat management for lapwings in upland Wales is being trialled near Hiraethog, Conwy, as part of a UK-wide RSPB project, supported in Wales by CCW, the Environment Agency Wales, Conwy County Borough Council, Snowdonia National Park Authority and the National Trust.

Following baseline monitoring of numbers of pairs, breeding success and site condition, some sites have now received additional management. This includes rush-cutting, changing grazing patterns and creating damp hollows to improve feeding conditions. Continued monitoring, when combined with that from sites elsewhere in the UK, will test whether the management advocated by the RSPB delivers sufficiently improved breeding success to halt the decline in upland areas. The project runs until 2011 and relies on the support of many landowners within the Hiraethog area.

Low breeding success has been identified as one reason for the decline. Although improvements in habitat condition can help reduce losses to predators, in some cases

other measures are needed. Electric fencing has been suggested as a way of helping to reduce the loss of lapwing eggs and chicks to mammalian predators. Work is underway at RSPB Ynys-hir nature reserve and other reserves in the UK to test how effective such fences are at increasing lapwing breeding success. Early results suggest success is better inside fences compared with outside, and further work took place in 2009.





Curlew

Tom Marshall (rspb-images.com)

RSPB nature reserve a test-bed for curlew management

In Wales, **curlews** declined by 81% between 1993 and 2006. At the RSPB Lake Vyrnwy nature reserve, numbers declined in a similar way. In response, a project to assess ideas to restore the suitability of the **curlew's** preferred habitat started in winter 2006/07.

Potential agri-environment scheme prescriptions were used to provide resources for upland **curlews**. To create nest sites and chick feeding areas on the moor area, patches in dense rush and grass were mowed, followed by cattle grazing, and numerous small damp areas were made. On the improved grass on the moor edge, additional manure was added and, where the soil pH was of concern, lime was added with the aim of increasing the density of invertebrates (mainly earthworms) available to **curlews**.

Curlew numbers increased from two pairs, before the trial started, to five pairs, bucking the long-term trend, with at least one pair fledging young in 2008. Invertebrate and bird use data collected in 2009 will help link this response to the habitat management. The scale of the project has required the co-operation and support of Tŷ'n y Garreg and Nant y Coedwr farms at Lake Vyrnwy.



Why are we losing our breeding golden plovers?

The Elenydd Site of Special Scientific Interest supports the largest breeding population in Wales of **golden plovers**. Improving the habitat's condition may not meet the requirements of priority birds such as **golden plovers**. Indeed, numbers declined between 1982 and 2007: from a high of over 100 in the 1970s, there are now only 11 pairs left.

As elsewhere, **golden plovers** on the Elenydd prefer blanket bog. Numerous other studies show the numbers of nesting **golden plovers** are lower where vegetation is denser

(vegetation density tends to increase with its height).

On the Elenydd, vegetation density in current and former **golden plover** territories (measured in 2000, as part of a Department of the Environment Farming and Rural Affairs project), was compared with a published **golden plover**/vegetation density relationship. Results showed the vegetation is now too dense to expect the numbers of **golden plovers** recorded in 1982. Numbers in 1982 were consistent with low vegetation densities, and this is supported by habitat observations at the time. A reduction in sheep numbers in recent decades is likely

to have brought about increases in vegetation density: sheep densities have declined since the 1970s and are now half the 1893-1983 average.

As a matter of urgency, trial management must be undertaken, using mowing and grazing to recreate **golden plover** nesting habitat, without impacting on the internationally important vegetation communities.

A CCW species Challenge-fund project



Golden plover



Michael Morris (RSPB)

Bog pools at Vyrnwy

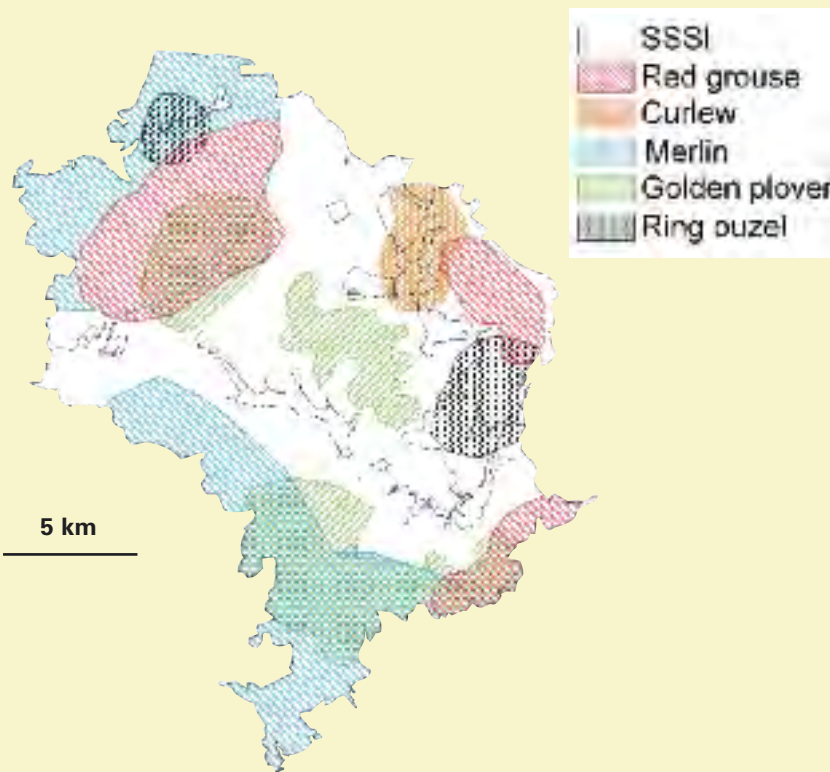
Integrating priority bird management with important upland habitats

Much of the uplands of Wales support important biodiversity, with the best areas designated as Special Protection Areas (SPA), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and/or Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). To maintain this diversity, management decisions need to be made. Without management, habitats will change to the extent that the wildlife we value may no longer survive. CCW funded the RSPB to produce map-based overviews of management priorities for birds for two upland SSSI/SPAs: the Berwyn and the Elenydd.

To do this, the important bird species were scored first according to their conservation priority, and secondly according to their need for species-specific management (eg creation/maintenance of short swards or habitat patchiness). All data for these species were then mapped and used to identify current and past preferred areas. Next, each site was divided into separate management zones, based on these areas and the ranked scorings for conservation priority and management requirements.

Whilst simple and pragmatic, the maps provide a plan of where and how to manage zones within these sites to maintain the bird diversity for which they were originally designated. The next stage is to integrate this management with that to restore habitat to good condition, and to extend the approach to other large upland sites.

A CCW contract to the RSPB



Management for priority birds and important upland habitats can be integrated on the Elenydd SSSI using these proposed management zones.

Wind farms could bring habitat improvements

The Welsh Assembly Government's advice on renewable energy development (TAN8) addresses onshore wind farms. It sets out seven Strategic Search Areas (SSAs) within which there is a general presumption in favour of their development.

The TAN8 also sets out advice on the need to manage wildlife relating to

wind farm development in SSAs. To provide a best practice example of putting this into practice, and in partnership with CCW, Conwy & Denbighshire Local Planning Authorities and the North Wales Wildlife Trust, the RSPB has carried out a case study for one SSA: Clocaenog Forest in Conwy and Denbighshire. The aim was to produce a Masterplan, which set out which broad habitat types should be conserved, restored or created,

based on habitat and species data for the area.

It is hoped that this will be incorporated into the local supplementary planning guidance, for use in negotiations with onshore wind farm developers, and that this example will be followed by the other SSAs.



Black grouse



Tree pipit

Sue Tranter (rspb-images.com)

Resurvey to help manage ffridd

Ffridd is the marginal upland zone lying between the open, unenclosed moorland and the valley bottom. This zone is probably better developed in Wales than elsewhere in Britain. Ffridd vegetation is highly variable, ranging from uniform grass or bracken to complex mosaics of grass, bracken, heather, gorse, other scrub and trees. Increasingly, ffridd is recognised as an important component of landscapes for biodiversity, especially for invertebrates and for birds such as **tree pipits** and **whinchats**. It has always been a dynamic zone, with economic pressures influencing agriculture, which in turn influences the character of the ffridd.

A study of 120 ffridd sites in the 1980s highlighted the importance of vegetation composition in determining the abundance and diversity of breeding birds. For example, the presence of even a few trees has a large effect. However, we need to know which types of ffridd have the highest value for nature, and develop guidance on management to create and maintain them.

To do this, a new BTO/CCW project is examining how breeding bird species are distributed in relation to vegetation structure and composition on ffridd. Twenty-five study sites are being looked at in Snowdonia and on the Berwyn. Each site has a gradient of vegetation and land-uses, including areas of relatively intensively farmed land, ffridd and moor. This data will allow bird communities to be linked to habitat characteristics and provide a baseline against which to assess how future environmental changes, especially ones linked with land use, affect vegetation composition and bird communities.

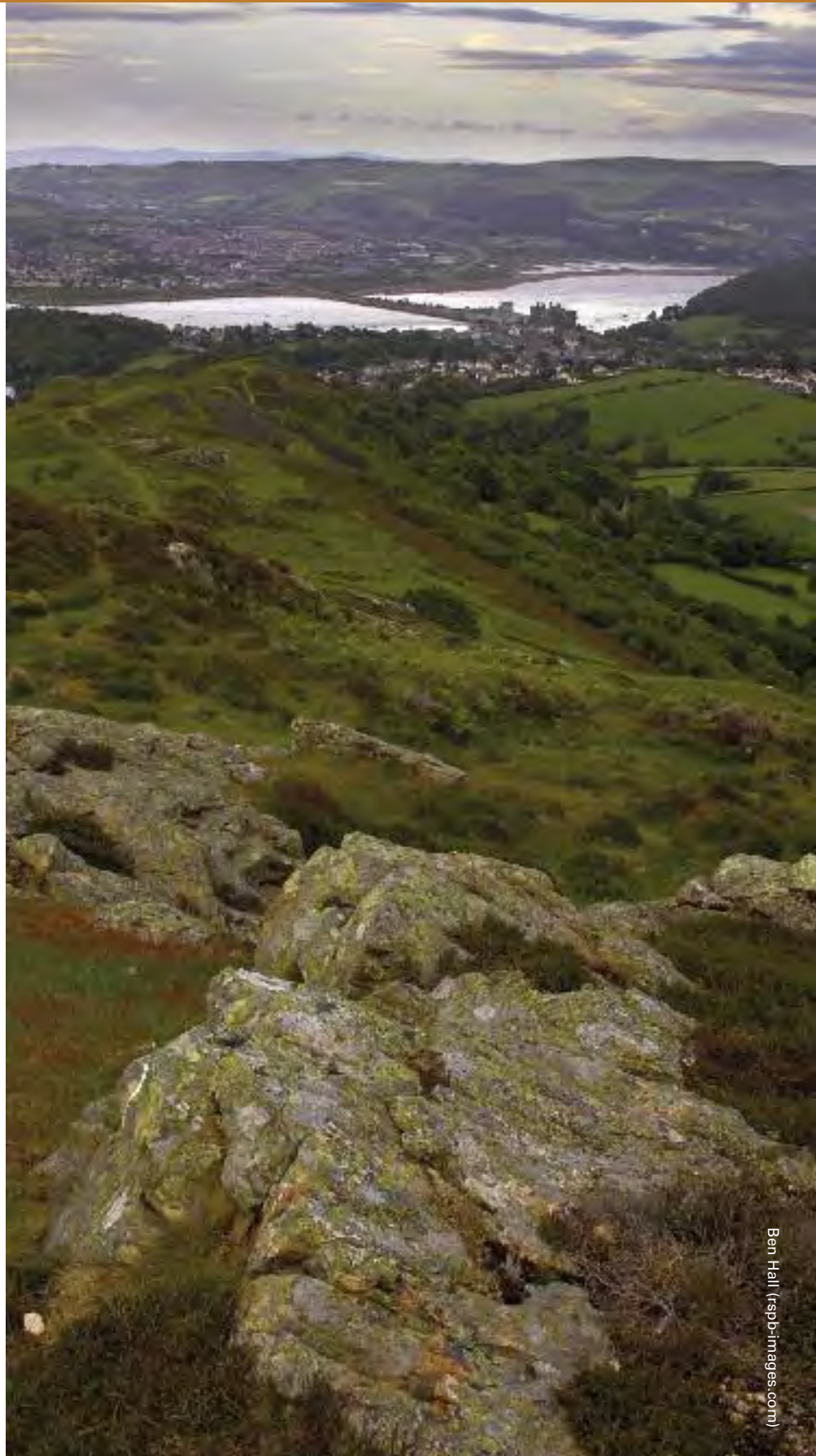


Are Wales' bird surveys good enough?

Over 400 bird species occur in Wales. They live in different habitats, differ in the times of year they spend here (resident, breeding or wintering migrant), and range from widespread to scarce. A range of bird survey schemes currently run in Wales. However, there is no overview of how well the status of bird species in different groups can be reported on.

To review this, a scoping study was funded by CCW. The first part of this covered existing levels of surveillance by different schemes, and the themes on which these schemes need collectively to report – for example, **Principal Biodiversity Species**, non-native species, climate-sensitive species and birds on designated sites.

The second part of the scoping study outlined what additional surveys – for example increased BBS coverage and more repeat single species surveys – are required to enable one theme, the status of all 51 **Principal Biodiversity Species**, to be assessed often enough in the future.



Did Tir Gofal have the potential to benefit priority birds?

Three conditions need to be met before agri-environment schemes (AES) provide population benefits for species. First, the right prescriptions have to be available (those with a high likelihood of delivering critical resources such as food and nest sites). Second, the scheme has to be taken up where the species is likely to occur (on farms inside the Welsh Assembly Government's key-areas). Third, uptake must be of sufficient quantity and quality to improve demographic rates such as breeding success and survival. However, it

was not clear whether Tir Gofal achieved any of these.

In 2008, the Welsh Assembly Government contracted Butterfly Conservation, Bat Conservation Trust, Plantlife, the Wildlife Trusts and the RSPB to do the first European multi-taxa (animal and plant) assessment of the potential for AES to deliver improvements in biodiversity.

The study had three key findings. First, Tir Gofal had the potential to provide the right prescriptions in the right places and at the right density to help **black grouse**. Secondly, for seed-eating birds such as the **tree**

sparrow and **yellowhammer**, the scheme contained the right prescriptions, but their uptake was too low and often in the wrong places. Thirdly, for three species, **lapwing**, **curlew** and **chough**, the scheme did not have all the right prescriptions, so could not be expected to benefit these birds.

The Welsh Assembly Government has funded an experimental evaluation of Tir Gofal to test these findings (see page 26). Nevertheless, the recently announced Glastir must take the information on board from the outset if it is to meet its biodiversity commitments.



Red kite

Red-amber-green lists revised

Assessing population status (a simple summary of data on numbers and trends in Wales and internationally) is key to selecting good conservation priorities. The revision of the list published in 2002 uses data collected from 1969-2006 to reassess individual species, and if their status has changed, assign them to a new colour reflecting this.

The review covered all species in Wales, excluding those that occur solely as vagrants, and rare and scarce migrants, but including globally threatened species that have occurred in Wales in each of the past 25 years. Some species native to Europe have colonised in recent decades and are included, but non-native species are not. You can find the report at www.rspb.org.uk/wales

The red list is for those that are globally threatened, and have historically or recently shown severe decline. The amber list is for those showing recovery from historic decline, moderate decline, or are localised, rare or internationally important. The green list is for other birds, including those showing further recovery. Of the criteria under which each species qualifies, the highest among red, amber and green determines the colour it is assigned to.

Two hundred and thirteen species were assessed, of which 45 (21%) qualified for the red-list, 100 (47%) for the amber-list and 68 (32%) for the green list. Seven species were assessed for the first time. The assessment resulted in 21 species being added to the red list, reflecting a combination of increased knowledge and the worsening of their status. Three species were moved from red to amber, and just



Hen harrier

six from amber to green. This shows that despite conservation success for some species in Wales (eg **red kite**, **black grouse** and **little tern**), this has only affected some aspects of their population status.

The revised lists are presented in the centrefold of this report. They are to be used in conjunction with other information, such as threats faced, to select conservation priorities for Wales for the next five years.

Looking forward



Chough

Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

New experimental evaluation of Welsh AES begins

The Welsh Assembly Government has funded a three-year, formal evaluation of the impact of AES on species in Wales. It will be carried out by a consortium of conservation organisations, led by the RSPB. The Government has posed two key questions. First, do AES contribute to maintaining and enhancing species abundance? Second, do AES contribute to species resilience: that is its capacity to tolerate change in the

critical resources it needs? The consortium will be answering these questions by collecting and analysing data on a suite of focal species from five taxa. The focal bird species are **curlew**, **lapwing**, **yellowhammer**, **chough** and **black grouse**, although data are collected on all species encountered.

Fundamental to evaluation of the schemes' effect on abundance is the comparison of AES farms with "control" farms outside both AES and the species' key areas. Prior

identification of "key-area" for focal species ensures that potentially beneficial effects are looked for on farms in areas where the birds are present. Long-term datasets for choughs and black grouse will also allow an evaluation of whether AES also improve species' resilience.



Redstart

Sue Tranter (rspb-images.com)

Atlantic oak wood study repeated

Four long-distance migrants characteristic of western Atlantic oak woods – **pie flycatcher**, **redstart**, **wood warbler** and **tree pipit** – have declined in Wales in recent decades. However, the cause of these declines is unclear and a new project aims to test a range of ideas about this. For example, are the problems on their African wintering grounds, or here in Wales? If aspects of their breeding habitat are implicated, we will need a better understanding of how we should manage Wales' globally significant oak woods.

This RSPB Cymru and CCW-funded project will focus on the **wood warbler**, which was surveyed in Powys oak woods in the 1980s and in 2003/04, and where it has suffered greater declines and even extinction in certain woods. New bird surveys, which started in 2009, along with detailed data on breeding success, habitat, and caterpillar numbers from woods with different population trends, will determine whether the causes of decline are here in the Welsh oak woods.



Corncrake

Bird surveys

Corncrake

The UK **corncrake** census took place in 2009. Whilst the **corncrake** last bred in Wales in 1992, calling birds have been reported more recently, and breeding is always possible. Please send reports of rasping males to the RSPB.

Bird Atlas

Volunteers are still needed to visit all parts of Wales for *Bird Atlas 2007-2011*, so that maps of distribution and abundance can be updated: an activity that has become known as "Atlasing".

Two complementary fieldwork methods are used to gather data. "Roving records" help make distribution maps as comprehensive possible, while counts from "timed tetrad visits" are used to map the relative abundance of species in each of the 278 10x10-km map squares in Wales. If you would like to submit roving records or request a tetrad (2x2-km map square) that still needs visiting, please contact the Atlas (www.birdatlas.net).

Our knowledge of the state of birds in Wales results from the tremendous efforts of volunteers working in collaboration with the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), the county bird recording network, RSPB Cymru, the Wales Raptor Study Group, the Welsh Ornithological Society and the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT). If you are one of these volunteers, we offer a big thank you. If you are thinking of helping birds in Wales, more volunteers are always needed. Please contact the appropriate organisation (their details are on the inside back cover of this report) if you would like to participate in any surveys or contribute any records. We also thank the landowners and their agents, tenants and employees who have allowed surveyors to visit their land to count birds.



The pied flycatcher has dropped from the green to the red list

The Population Status of Birds in Wales 2

- 1 The leading bird conservation organisations in Wales have revised the population status of 213 birds in Wales, updating the 2002 review.
- 2 Those on the red list are globally threatened, or have historically or recently shown severe decline. Those on the amber list show recovery from historic decline, moderate decline, or are localised, rare or internationally important. Other birds were placed on the green list, including those showing further recovery.
- 3 Forty-five birds (21%) were placed on the red list, an increase of 18. One hundred birds (47%) were on the amber list – an increase of 31, and 68 (32%) have been placed on the green list – a fall of 57. Nine have been moved to lower lists, while 63 have been moved to higher lists – with seven moving straight from green to red.
- 4 The most frequent reason for moving to a higher list was evidence of recent population decline. Reasons for moving to a lower list include improved status in Europe and no longer being rare.
- 5 These revised lists, along with information on other factors (eg threats faced now and in the future, feasibility of action and likelihood of success) should be used in the identification of priority species for conservation effort.

Full details of how species were assessed can be found at www.rspb.org.uk/wales

2009 Red List

Species	2002 listing
White-fronted goose	R
Pochard	G
Red grouse	R
Black grouse	R
Grey partridge	R
Balearic shearwater	NA
Hen harrier	R
Common kestrel	A
Spotted crake	A
Corncrake	R
European golden plover	R
Grey plover	A
Northern lapwing	R
Dunlin	A
Bar-tailed godwit	R
Eurasian curlew	R
Black-headed gull	A
Common gull	G
Herring gull	A
Great black-backed gull	A
Roseate tern	R
Common tern	A
Arctic tern	A
Little tern	R
Puffin	R
Turtle dove	R
Common cuckoo	G
Short-eared owl	A
Lesser spotted woodpecker	R
Yellow wagtail	A
Ring ouzel	R
Grasshopper warbler	R
Wood warbler	G
Willow warbler	G
Spotted flycatcher	A
Pied flycatcher	G
Bearded tit	NA
Marsh tit	R
Willow tit	R
Common starling	R
Tree sparrow	R
Linnet	A
Twite	A
Lesser redpoll	G
Bullfinch	R
Yellowhammer	R
Corn bunting	R

(R=Red, A=Amber, G=Green, NA=Not assessed)



Ben Hall (rspb-images.com)

Pochard



Welsh Ornithological Society
Cymdeithas Adaregol Cymru



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government



Cyngor Cefn Gwlad Cymru
Countryside Council for Wales



2009 Amber List

Species	2002 listing	Species	2002 listing
Mute swan	G	Woodcock	A
Bewick's swan	A	Black-tailed godwit	A
Barnacle goose	A	Whimbrel	A
Brent goose	A	Spotted redshank	G
Shelduck	A	Common redshank	A
Eurasian wigeon	A	Common sandpiper	G
Gadwall	A	Turnstone	A
Eurasian teal	A	Arctic skua	G
Mallard	A	Long-tailed skua	G
Pintail	A	Mediterranean gull	G
Garganey	A	Little gull	NA
Shoveler	A	Lesser black-backed gull	A
Tufted duck	G	Sandwich tern	A
Greater scaup	A	Black tern	G
Common eider	A	Common guillemot	G
Long-tailed duck	G	Black guillemot	A
Common scoter	A	Barn owl	A
Velvet scoter	G	Long-eared owl	A
Smew	G	European nightjar	A
Red-breasted merganser	G	Common swift	G
Common quail	A	Common kingfisher	A
Red-throated diver	A	Green woodpecker	A
Black-throated diver	G	Skylark	A
Great northern diver	G	Sand martin	A
Red-necked grebe	G	Swallow	A
Slavonian grebe	G	House martin	G
Black-necked grebe	G	Tree pipit	G
Sooty shearwater	G	Meadow pipit	G
Manx shearwater	A	Dipper	G
European storm-petrel	A	Black redstart	G
Leach's petrel	G	Common redstart	A
Northern gannet	A	Northern wheatear	G
Great cormorant	A	Fieldfare	G
Eurasian bittern	R	Song thrush	A
Eurasian spoonbill	NA	Redwing	G
Honey buzzard	A	Garden warbler	G
Red kite	A	Common whitethroat	G
Marsh harrier	G	Dartford warbler	A
Osprey	G	Goldcrest	G
Merlin	A	Firecrest	A
Hobby	A	Long-tailed tit	G
Oystercatcher	A	Coal tit	G
Avocet	G	Red-billed chough	A
Ringed plover	R	Hooded crow	NA
Red knot	R	House sparrow	A
Sanderling	G	Hawfinch	G
Ruff	G	Lapland bunting	G
Jack snipe	G	Snow bunting	G
Common snipe	A	Reed bunting	A

(R=Red, A=Amber, G=Green, NA=Not assessed)

(R=Red, A=Amber, G=Green, NA=Not assessed)



House sparrow

Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)



Oystercatcher

Tom Marshall (rspb-images.com)

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Front cover: **wood warbler** by Steve Round (rspb-images.com)

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