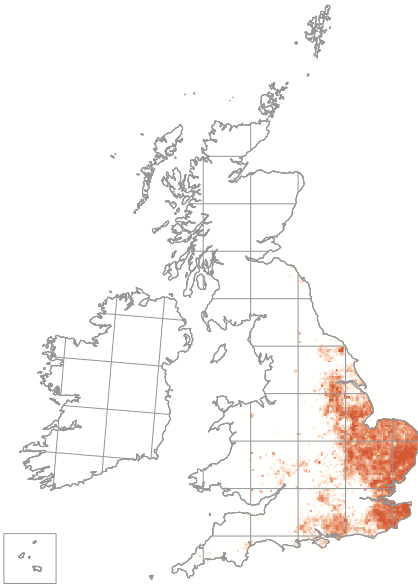




giving nature a home

## LAND MANAGEMENT FOR WILDLIFE

# TURTLE DOVE (*Streptopelia turtur*)



Breeding abundance map reproduced from Balmer et al 2013 Bird Atlas with permission from British Trust for Ornithology.



Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

The turtle dove nests in mature hedgerows, tall scrub and woodland edges, often close to freshwater. They feed in weedy arable fields. Within the UK it is now largely confined to Eastern England, especially the south-east and East Anglia. The UK population of turtle doves fell by 95% between 1967 and 2012. One reason for this decline is lack of seed food on farmland in the summer. The turtle dove is a summer visitor to the UK, arriving in late April and leaving in September, and problems on the migration route and in the African wintering grounds may be exacerbating the decline of the population.

## WHAT DO TURTLE DOVE NEED?

### A continuous supply of weed and crop seed from late April until the end of August

Both adult and chick turtle doves depend on the availability of seeds, especially those of arable plants such as scarlet pimpernel, fat-hen, chickweed, and fumitory; wild and cultivated brassicas and components of seed mixes for game and wild birds, such as millet and borage.

They feed on the ground in weedy areas, especially where the vegetation is short and sparse, and where

there are areas of spilt grain and stubbles after harvest. Lack of seed food is probably the major factor limiting the breeding success of turtle doves.

### Tall mature hedgerows, areas of scrub or woodland edges with a thick shrub layer for nesting

Most turtle doves nest in hedgerows or scrub over four metres tall. They prefer thorny species such as hawthorn, and nests are often associated with climbers such as ivy, wild roses or bramble

## ANNUAL LIFECYCLE

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Arrives in UK to feed and build up reserves				■	■							
Breeding and chick rearing				■	■	■	■					
Builds up reserves for migration								■				
Birds overwinter in sub Saharan Africa	■	■	■						■	■	■	■

## HOW CAN I ENCOURAGE TURTLE DOVE?

### Hedgerow, woodland edge and scrub management

- Maintain hedgerows that are wide and more than four metres tall, and retain climbing plants such as ivy, wild roses and bramble in mature hedgerows.
- Maintain areas of tall scrub around the farm and allow hedges to grow out at hedgerow junctions in field corners to create larger areas of scrub.
- Tall scrub creation on the north side of ponds, lakes, streams and rivers will provide ideal nesting habitat without casting too much shade over the water.
- Maintain shrubby edges to woodland blocks and allow these to encroach outwards into fields where appropriate to provide more tall scrub cover for nesting turtle doves.

### On arable land

- Areas with a good supply of early seed food are best created close to the tall, wide hedges, scrub or woodland edges where they nest.
- Where there are field margins with a variety of broad-leaved arable plants that are not highly competitive with the crop, cultivate the margins each year but leave them undrilled, unfertilised and unsprayed so that they will create a seed source for turtle doves.
- Turtle doves can make use of fallow plots if they are allowed to become weedy and provide seeds in the critical period between late-April and August.
- Establish a mix of early-seeding plants that create an open sward that enables turtle doves to forage

on the ground. There is a special turtle dove seed mixture available consisting of early English common vetch (25% by weight), bird's-foot trefoil (20%), early white clover (20%), black medick (20%), early red clover (10%) and fumitory (5%). This can be sown between August and mid-October and best managed in subsequent years by cutting half in late June or early July, and cut and remove the vegetation on the whole strip in September.

- Adopt conservation headlands. Avoid spraying the outer six metres of cereal fields with herbicides targeted at broad-leaved weeds; this will provide a seed-rich margin. It is best to do this in conjunction with an unfertilised headland to produce a shorter sparse crop.
- Leave stubbles uncultivated until the end of August to provide seed food for turtle doves until they migrate south.

### On grassland

- Areas with a good supply of early seed food are best created close to the tall, wide hedges, scrub or woodland edges where they nest.
- Create small plots of wild bird seed mixture to provide a seed-rich habitat in pastoral areas.
- Wherever there are species-rich meadows that can be restored to hay meadows or clover leys within the rotation, these will boost food availability for turtle doves on mixed farmland.

## KEY POINTS

- **Ensure that there is seed food available throughout the spring and summer by providing weedy field margins, fallow plots or planting a special mix of plants that provide seed between late April and August.**
- **In close proximity, to feeding areas, maintain tall, thick hedgerows and areas of scrub on the farm, e.g. around ponds, and allow the shrub layer to develop along woodland edges for nesting.**

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