



Spring cereals, followed by stubbles give cirl buntings an ideal source of seeds.

## Want to know more?

[rspb.org.uk/our-work/conservation/projects/cirl-bunting-project/](https://rspb.org.uk/our-work/conservation/projects/cirl-bunting-project/)



Supplementary seed is spread by volunteers at key sites, such as at Labrador Bay,

The RSPB is the country's largest nature conservation charity, inspiring everyone to give nature a home.

[www.rspb.org.uk](https://www.rspb.org.uk)

Cover photo: Cirl bunting by Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

The RSPB is a registered charity in England & Wales 207076, in Scotland SC037654.



# Cirl buntings

## the recovery of a farmland bird



## Who was involved?

The RSPB is the lead partner in the cirl bunting recovery work with Natural England. Cirl bunting recovery work was only made possible with the support of farmers, local people involved in monitoring, government departments, local authorities and funding from Natural England and other sources.

## What you can do

**RSPB food and farming:**  
[rspb.org.uk/get-involved/campaigning/campaign-with-us/food-and-farming.aspx](https://rspb.org.uk/get-involved/campaigning/campaign-with-us/food-and-farming.aspx)

**Help wildlife on your land:**  
[farmwildlife.info](https://farmwildlife.info)

**Support the Nature Friendly Farming Network as a farmer or member of the public:** [nffn.org.uk/](https://nffn.org.uk/)

South West England

Cirl buntings were once widespread and locally common across much of southern England. However, they were nearly lost to the UK after undergoing a dramatic decline and becoming almost completely restricted to coastal farmland in south Devon.



Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

**A male cirl bunting, feeding on seeds.**

## The problem:

Cirl buntings rely on mixed farming that includes seeds in winter, insects for chicks in summer and hedges and bushes to nest in. Research identified that having spring cereals, followed by stubbles gives an ideal source of seeds, while low-intensity grazing provides ideal chick food foraging.

Many factors were linked to the decline of these birds: the switch from spring to autumn cropping, increased fertilizer and pesticide use and changes in field sizes. Cirl buntings are also very sedentary, only moving around 2 km between their breeding and wintering areas, so need these habitats to be close to each other.

*“Knowing that my farm has played its part in the success of the cirl buntings’ recovery gives me great satisfaction and just shows what a change farmers can make to the wildlife that relies on them.”*

Jon Andrews (South Devon Farmer and English chair of the Nature Friendly Farming Network).

## The work involved:

The mixed farms of ‘Cirl Country’ produce a variety of food and the network of hedges creates a tapestry that is rich in wildlife. This landscape wasn’t unusual across the country 100 years ago, but now most areas are either predominately arable or grass, making the south Devon landscape a very special place.

Working with south Devon farmers who still had cirl buntings and helping them to access government support to deliver the habitat needed, meant cirl buntings were saved from being lost from the UK. Extending this work, has allowed the birds to spread and become less fragmented across their south Devon stronghold.

Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)



**Female cirl bunting.**

Rob Scott (rspb-images.com)



**Farmer and RSPB Project Manager discussing cirl bunting protection.**

## The future:

The vision for the future is to have more farmland flourishing with wildlife, including cirl buntings.

The next decade will be critical in what happens next. Future farming support and guidance will determine if these diverse, wildlife-friendly farming systems continue and expand or decline.

There are plans to create 10 havens for cirl buntings, that include the RSPB nature reserves of Labrador Bay and Ashill. Labrador Bay, managed by a tenant farmer, has around 30 pairs of cirl buntings and can be used to demonstrate habitat management.