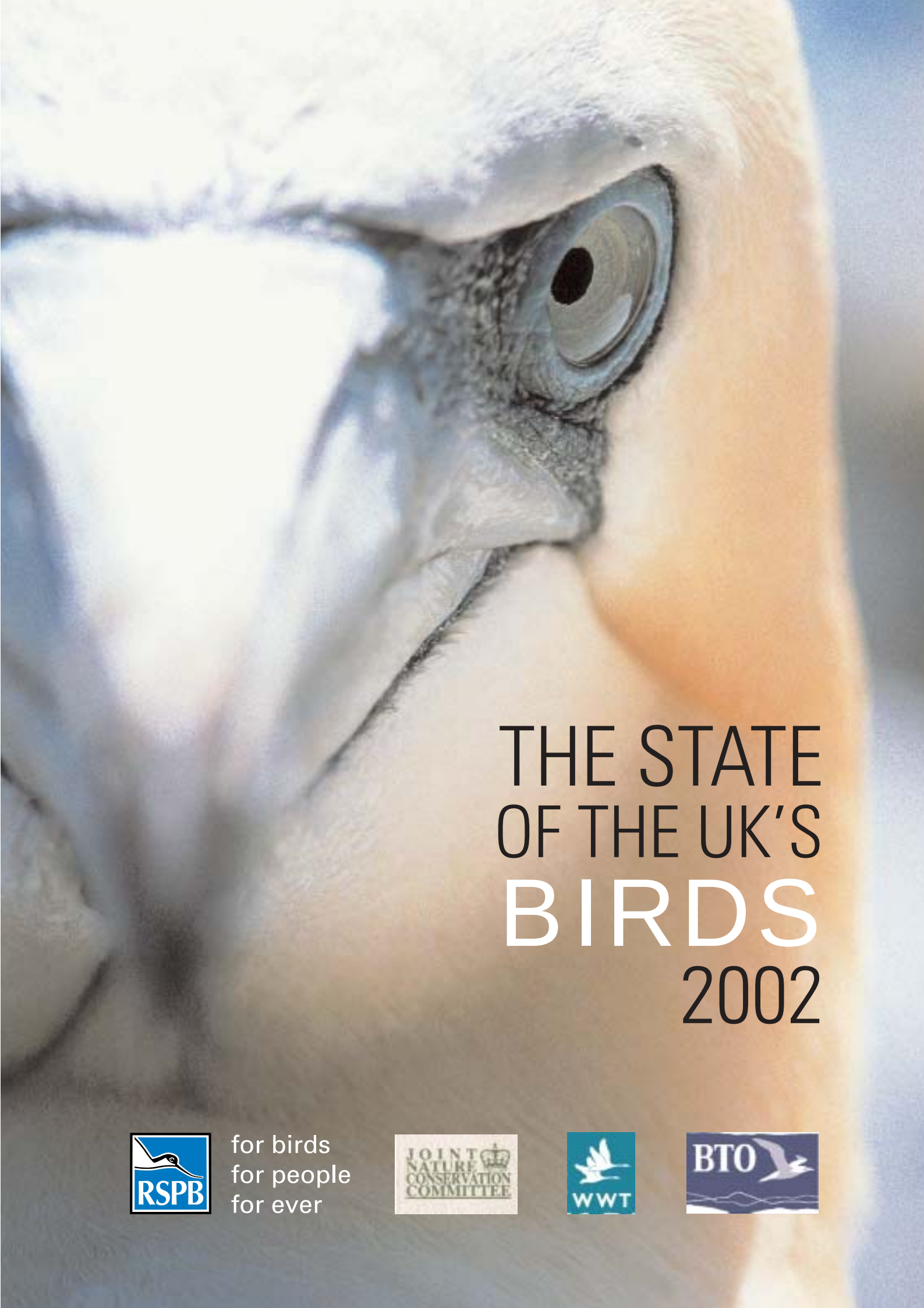

THE STATE OF THE UK'S BIRDS 2002

RSPB

for birds
for people
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JOINT NATURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

WWT

BTO

Mike Lane (rspb-images.com)

Dipper

THE STATE OF THE UK'S BIRDS 2002

- The UK Government uses breeding bird populations as an indicator of sustainability. The indicator for wild birds, which is one of 15 headline indicators of the *Quality of Life* in the UK, shows stability in common birds, although woodland birds have declined moderately, and farmland birds steeply.

- There have been encouraging signs of meeting the targets for some species in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. Positive progress has been made with the stone-curlew, bittern, corncrake and cirl bunting. The successes are balanced by the continuing critical status of the capercaillie, and the virtual regional extinction of the red-backed shrike and wryneck. It has not been possible to assess the status of some of the more common species because of the impact of foot and mouth disease.

- Population recovery of common birds, such as farmland birds, requires solutions at a sufficiently large scale. The last year has seen bold steps by the UK Government towards reversing the downward trend in farmland birds. Acceptance of the recommendations on agricultural reform, for example in the Curry Report, will further help farmland birds.

- Birds of prey in the UK have benefited from conservation action, through a combination of land-use policies, species protection and Government-backed campaigns against illegal killing. We have seen the recovery of species such as the white-tailed eagle and red kite, although persecution and secondary poisoning still occur, limiting populations and species in some areas.

- The trends among seabirds are linked to their food and the way they feed. Monitoring of seabird colonies has shown numbers of some species to have increased or remained stable, but others, such as kittiwakes and shags, have declined at these colonies. A national survey of seabirds will provide more insight into their long-term population trends when the results are published in 2004.

- Over the last 30 years, the numbers of wintering waterbirds in the UK has increased strongly in response to protection, re-creation and management of habitats. A waterbird indicator has shown a short-term decline from around 1996, however, marking a change in the upward trends.

- A major new assessment of the population status of birds in the UK places 40 species on the red list (of highest conservation concern), 121 on amber and 86 on the green list (lowest concern). Five birds have moved from the red to the amber lists as their populations are recovering, largely in response to targeted conservation action. Overall, the red list has grown by four species and the amber list by 11, since the last review in 1996. All of the birds added to the red list qualify because of population decline. This review highlights the continuing plight of farmland birds and raises concern for some woodland, urban and upland species.

- The UK Overseas Territories are host to internationally important bird populations; 34 globally threatened species, 13 near-threatened species and 24 endemic bird species. Increased monitoring activity in recent years has raised concern for some species, particularly regarding the negative impact of long-line fisheries on albatrosses on Gough Island and South Georgia. There is a need both for a strategic approach to bird monitoring and a concerted effort to improve knowledge of critical populations. Recent designation of Ramsar sites on a number of the Overseas Territories is a positive development and will aid the protection of habitats for a number of threatened birds.

Wryneck

Dusan Boucny (rspb-images.com)

Introduction

Michael Gore (rspb-images.com)

The red-backed shrike is on the red list

The State of the UK's Birds 2002 is the fourth in a series of annual reports describing the fortunes of bird populations in the United Kingdom (UK). Wherever possible, population trends are presented for the whole of the UK and cover the period 1970–2002. While trends can be updated and reported for some species, the greatest impact of the foot and mouth disease (FMD) epidemic in 2001 was on the reporting of recent trends for many common breeding birds. This is because data from one field season takes at least a year to become integrated into the trends – the data need to be collated from large networks of volunteer counters, checked and input by the central organisers, and the trends analysed. Since most of the major monitoring programmes were suspended because of FMD for part or all of 2001, we are left with a missing data point for 2001 in our population trends for many birds. Of course, FMD had wide consequences for the countryside, impacting on farmers, landowners, tourism and rural economies.

The short-term consequences for monitoring are serious. We are, for example, unable to update the UK Government's *Quality of Life* headline bird indicator (the version reproduced here is the same as that published last year). Neither are we able to update trends among the more widespread breeding birds that are priorities in the UK Government's Biodiversity Action Plan (UKBAP), nor the trends among other common birds, as we have done in previous reports. There remains a question mark over the recent trends of many species and it will be a year before we know what has happened to their populations. We are, however, able to update trends for many birds and introduce new features.

This report covers both breeding birds and wintering birds. Most breeding birds in the UK are residents, but summer migrants, with wintering grounds far to the south, swell their numbers each spring. Wintering birds in the UK are a mixture of residents and visitors with breeding grounds farther north, west and east. Most notable among winter visitors are the wildfowl and wading birds, which visit the UK in very large numbers. The UK is also host to internationally important numbers of breeding seabirds.

The state of the UK's birds 2002 begins with the UK Government's *Quality of Life* headline bird indicator, published by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). This provides a measure of the health of the environment by summarising trends in the numbers of common breeding birds. The report then considers the species that are priorities in the UKBAP. The UKBAP identifies work necessary to improve the adverse status of these priority species. Progress towards the UKBAP targets is assessed.

The latest population trends are then summarised for three groups of breeding birds: birds of prey, birds of waterways, and, for the first time in this report, seabirds. We also report on recent surveys.

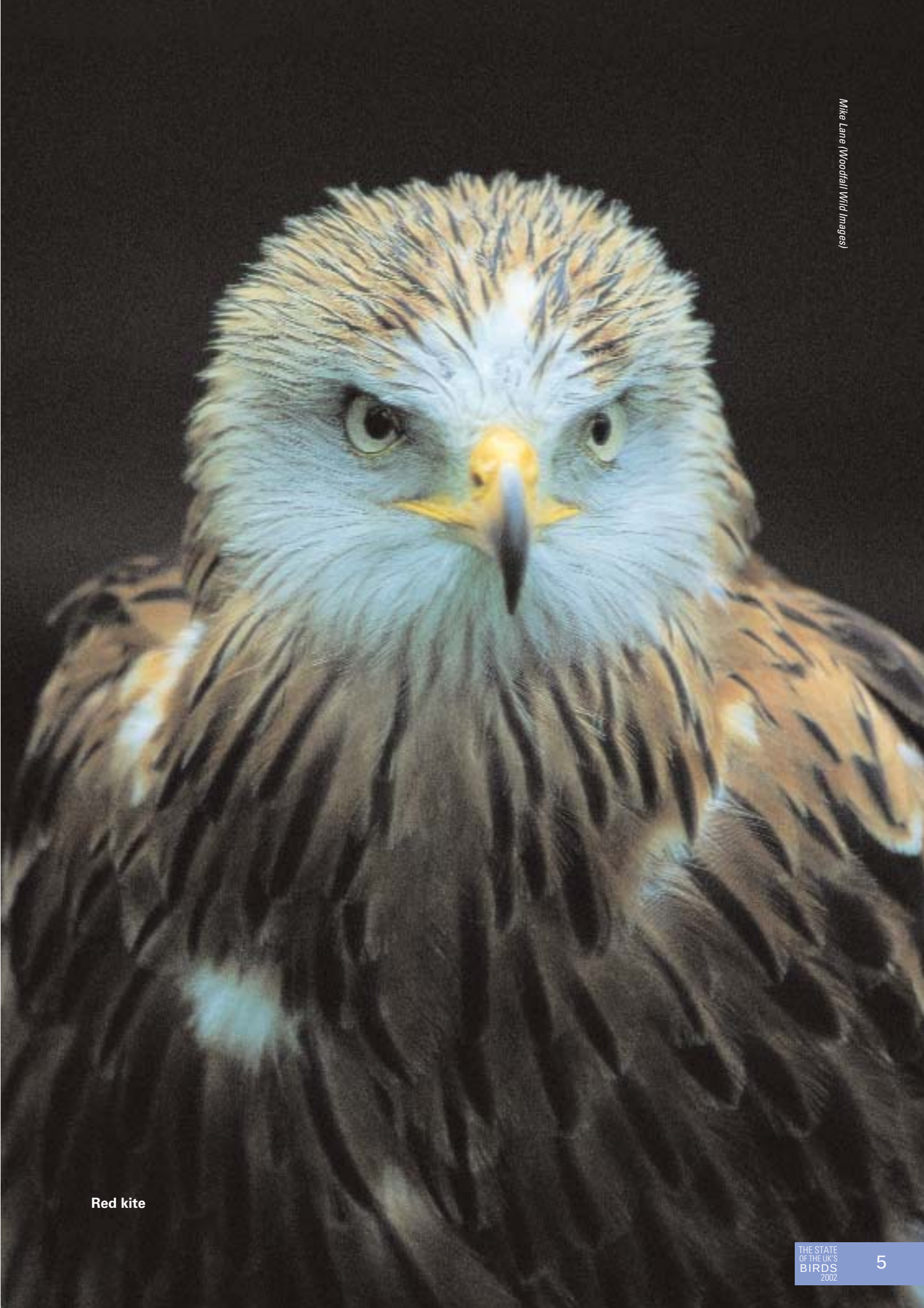
The second section begins with an indicator based on wintering waterbirds, using the same methods used in the UK Government's *Quality of Life* breeding bird indicator. With a few exceptions, the improved fortunes of wintering waterbirds contrast with those of breeding species – but the latest indicator begins to paint a different picture.

The third section reports on the publication of *The population status of birds in the UK*[1]. This document, produced by a group of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the statutory conservation agencies, delivered the new red, amber and green lists of species of conservation concern in the UK. This major review of the population status of birds will help to guide conservation action over the coming years. Throughout this report, the names of **'red-list' species appear in red**, **'amber-list' species in orange**, and **'green-list' species in green.** This is followed by another first for this report, an account of the status of some extremely important bird populations in the UK's Overseas Territories.

The report ends by summarising the main areas of success and failure for bird conservation and calls for more concerted and wide-scale conservation action to help the recovery of common but declining breeding birds.

The report has been produced by a group of NGOs – the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT) – and the Government organisation most closely involved in bird monitoring in the UK, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC). Bird monitoring in the UK is undertaken in collaboration with the Government (principally the JNCC and the statutory nature conservation agencies), NGOs (such as the RSPB, BTO and WWT) and many skilled volunteer ornithologists.

[1]Gregory RD, Wilkinson NI, Noble DG, Brown AF, Robinson JA, Hughes J, Procter DA, Gibbons DW and Galbraith CA (2002). The population status of birds in the United Kingdom, Channel Islands and Isle of Man: an analysis of conservation concern 2002–2007. *British Birds:* 95, 410–448.



Mike Lane (Woodfall Wild Images)

Red kite

Breeding birds

The 'Quality of Life' indicator for breeding birds

The indicator of breeding birds is one of 15 headline indicators used by the UK Government to review progress towards sustainable development. In the four years since its first publication, this indicator has proved a valuable tool in communicating the state of UK bird populations to a wide audience, and as a measure of change in the wider environment. The indicator summarises information on the status of over 100 breeding species since 1970, using data primarily from the Common Birds Census (CBC). Unfortunately, the FMD outbreak in 2001 has meant that it has not been possible to update the indicator by incorporating trends since 2000 (the version reproduced here is the same as that published last year).

The common bird indicator has been relatively stable since 1970, although there has been a marked upturn since 1998, due at least in part to recent mild winters. The indicator for woodland birds also shows this recent upturn, although they have still declined by 22% since the mid-1970s. The farmland bird index shows a grave situation, with a 46% drop over the same period, and no recent increase. The Government has pledged to reverse the long-term trends in woodland and farmland birds. The stability of the overall indicator reflects gains among birds in other habitats, such as those breeding in wetlands.

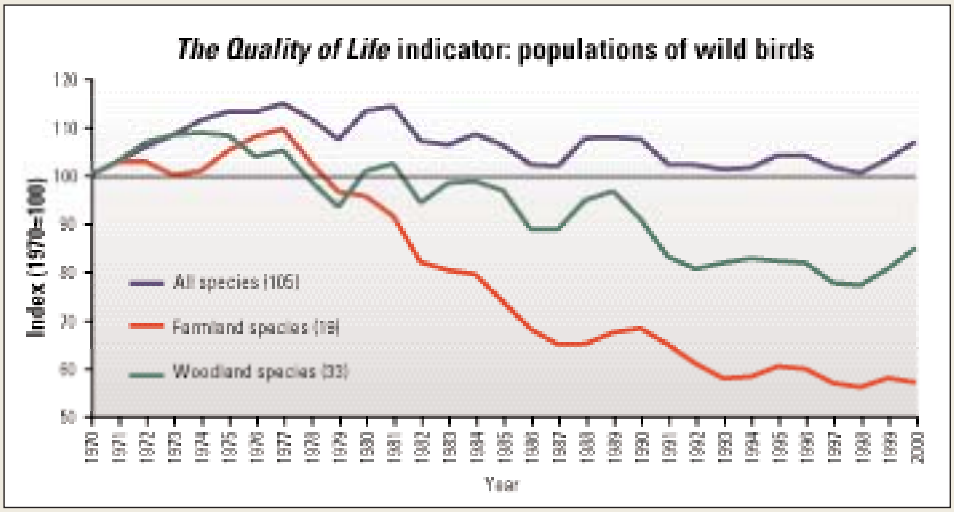
Ongoing work with DEFRA has explored the possibility of producing headline bird indicators for England, English Government Office regions, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are considering these and other indicators using country-specific data. Historical data for some regions are scarce and it is important to try to capture long-term changes as well as recent changes monitored by new surveys.

Chris Gomersall (rspb-images.com)

Skylark

Trends in UK Biodiversity Action Plan species

Twenty-six species of the highest conservation concern are the subject of UK Government Biodiversity Action Plans (UKBAPs). Regular monitoring, through a variety of schemes, allows us to measure progress towards the targets set in UKBAPs. We will need to wait until 2003 (when 2002 data become available) until we can check on the recent health of the populations of UKBAP species such as the **song thrush** and **skylark**. Updated population figures, however, are available for many of the scarce and rare UKBAP species, and are given in the table (right). Updates are not available for the globally threatened **aquatic warbler** that only comes to the UK as a passage visitor each autumn (for which we are unable to assess its conservation status using data from the UK alone) and the **Scottish crossbill** because of uncertainty over its taxonomy and identification. Recent work indicates that **Scottish crossbills** have diagnostic calls, providing a possible method of field identification. This method has allowed the mapping of their breeding distribution and will pave the way for a census in the near future.



The latest news is good for many of these scarce species, although existing UKBAP targets will not be met for the majority. The **bittern**, however, has already met its 2000 target and is well on the way to the target set for 2010. Concerted efforts to help **bitterns** through the management of existing reedbeds, and the creation of new ones, has resulted in a rise in the number of booming males to 31, with an additional site occupied in 2002. Further

Short-term and long-term trends for some of the UK's Biodiversity Action Plan species

Species	Long-term trend %	Short-term trend %	Population	Year
Song thrush	-57[1]	12[1]	1,100,000[1]	1988–91
Skylark	-52[1]	-8[1]	1,000,000[1]	1997
Linnet	-52[1]	-6[1]	540,000[1]	1988–91
Reed bunting	-54[1]	-4[1]	240,000[1]	1988–91
Bullfinch	-53[1]	-25[1]	200,000[1]	1988–91
Grey partridge	-85[1]	-22[1]	150,000[1]	1988–91
Spotted flycatcher	-77[1]	-21[1]	130,000[1]	1988–91
Tree sparrow	-95[1]	25[1]	110,000[1]	1988–91
Turtle dove	-71[1]	-24[1]	75,000[1]	1988–91
Corn bunting	-88[1]	-35[1]	19,800[1]	1993
Black grouse	decline	-74[2]	6,500[2]	1995–96
Nightjar	62[2]	no data	3,400[2]	1992
Woodlark	704[3]	83[3]	1,552[1]	1997
Capercaillie	decline	-51[4]	1,070[3]	1998–99
Corncrake	-77[4]	5[5]	679[2, 4]	2002
Cirl bunting	81[4]	27[6]	576[1]	2002
Stone-curlew	-15[5]	54[7]	254[1]	2000
Common scoter	-29[6]	no data	95[1]	1995
Roseate tern	-93[4]	33[5]	72[1, 4]	2002
Bittern	-57[4]	182[5]	31[2]	2002
Marsh warbler	-60[7]	0[7]	31[1]	2000
Red-necked phalarope	0[4]	-33[5]	28[2]	2002
Wryneck	decline	regionally extinct?	0[1]	2000
Red-backed shrike	decline	regionally extinct?	0[1]	2000

Long-term trends for common birds come from the Common Bird Census, short-term trends from the Breeding Bird Survey. Data for scarce and rare breeding bird surveys come from special surveys and the work of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel.

Long-term trends
1 = 1970–1999
2 = 1981–1992
3 = 1970–1997
4 = 1970–2002
5 = 1970–2000
6 = 1973–1995
7 = 1973–2000

Short-term trends
1 = 1994–2000
2 = 1991/92–1995/96
3 = 1995–1997
4 = 1992/94–1998/99
5 = 1997–2002
6 = 1998–2002
7 = 1995–2000

Breeding units
1 = Breeding pairs
2 = Singing, displaying or breeding males
3 = Individuals
4 = Minimum number

habitat creation, helped by an improved knowledge of what makes reedbeds suitable for **bitterns**, is planned to help achieve the UKBAP target of 50 booming males by 2010.

Another species that is responding well to conservation is the **corncrake**. The number of calling males increased for the fourth year in a row, reaching the highest number recorded in the UK since 1978. **Corncrakes** have been helped by management on reserves and the assistance given to crofters through Special Protection Area (SPA) and Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) management schemes and the Corncrake Initiative, all of which provide funding to support corncrake-friendly land management. However, we need to ensure that the current revisions of agri-environment schemes will enable further increases in the core areas of the **corncrake** range.

Bittern

Chris Gomersall (rspb-images.com)

A complete UK survey of **corncrakes** in 2003 will allow us to assess the fortunes of **corncrakes** away from the main breeding areas, and to judge whether UKBAP targets on range increase are likely to be met. In addition, in northern Scotland, good news came from annual **red-necked phalarope** monitoring, which recorded 28 males (substantially up from 16 in 2001). The relatively high productivity shown by this species on Shetland raises hopes that there may be even more birds next year. However, troughs have followed recent peaks in numbers, and there is no real sign of an ongoing increase that would meet UKBAP targets.

There was also good news on **roseate terns**, with an increase at the main UK colony on Coquet Island, Northumberland, to 57 pairs. This is the highest population since 1990. Although this is heartening, the lack of increases at other UK sites means that the UKBAP target (200 pairs by 2008) is unlikely to be reached. The UK population forms part of a larger population shared with the Irish Republic.

A sample survey of **cirl buntings** in Devon suggested that the population had increased by 27% since 1998 to an estimated 576 pairs, with an increase in range. There were, however, indications that there may have been declines in some parts; a full survey in 2003 will investigate this further.

Further encouraging news came from surveys of **black grouse** in Wales and the North Pennines in 2002. Numbers in Wales have increased strongly in the last few years and are close to the levels of the mid-1980s. There were also signs of a modest recovery in the North Pennines. In both cases, recovery was associated with targeted and intensive management. It is not clear whether the trends are mirrored in other areas, or whether the BAP targets will be met across the whole of the UK.

Not all was good news, however. Both **red-backed shrikes** and **wrynecks** failed to breed successfully in the UK in 2000 (the latest figures available). Both species declined in England from the 19th century onwards, and eventually disappeared as breeding species. Following breeding attempts by both species in Scotland in the 1970s, it was hoped that colonisation by birds from Scandinavia would occur. However, breeding has only ever been sporadic, and it appears that both species may be extinct as breeding birds in the UK. The **marsh warbler**, another declining species that had shown signs of an upturn by occupying a new breeding area, also appears to have declined subsequently and the main breeding site in south-east England was deserted in 2002.

New data are not available for a number of other species that are surveyed only periodically. For some, we believe that progress continues to be made and are optimistic that UKBAP targets will be met: **stone-curlews**, **nightjars** and **woodlarks** have all shown increases in recent years and have already reached some UKBAP targets. There remain concerns, however, for the **common scoter** and **capercaillie**; UKBAP targets are likely to be missed for these species. Concerted efforts are being made to prevent the extinction of the **capercaillie** in the UK for the second time. The next full survey of **capercaillies**, planned for the winter of 2003–2004, will provide the best indication of how the population is faring.

Chris Gomersall (rspb-images.com)

Numbers of black grouse are up in some areas

Surveys of birds along waterways

In 1974, concern about water-borne pollution and deterioration of river habitats was the impetus for initiating the Waterways Bird Survey (WBS). Volunteers map the positions of breeding birds along stretches of linear waterways throughout the breeding season, and these data are analysed to estimate the number of territories on each site each year. Recent analyses have revealed significant declines in a number of waterways species over the past 25 years, including the **little grebe**, **pied wagtail**, **common sandpiper**, **grey wagtail** and **reed bunting** (see table right). Two other river specialists – the **dipper** and **kingfisher** – show non-significant declines. However, many waterbirds species – the **coot**, **mallard** and **mute swan** for example – have increased and **reed warbler** numbers have risen dramatically. In some cases, these trends are different to the population trends revealed by the CBC over the same period, suggesting that changes in conditions along waterways differ from those in other habitats.

Population changes from 1975 to 2000 on Waterways Bird Survey plots

Species	Trend %
Reed bunting	-68*
Little grebe	-57*s
Pied wagtail	-48*
Grey wagtail	-42*
Common sandpiper	-18*s
Dipper	-14
Sedge warbler	-13
Moorhen	-10
Kingfisher	-8
Tufted duck	41
Sand martin	54s
Coot	61*
Whitethroat	69
Curlew	72*s
Mute swan	76*
Reed warbler	79*
Oystercatcher	110*s
Lapwing	165
Mallard	190*

* = statistically significant trend
s = based on small sample size

Roger Wilmshurst (rspb-images.com)

Female hobby

In the same way that the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) took over from the CBC, the new Waterways Breeding Bird Survey (WBBS) was initiated in 1998 as a potential replacement for the WBS. Participants in the WBBS carry out only two counts per season, compared to around 10 for the WBS, on randomly-selected stretches of rivers across the UK. Coverage for this survey has increased annually to more than 200 sites, and it has the potential to monitor about 30 breeding bird species. This survey also covers a greater proportion of rockier upland rivers, the preferred habitat of **dippers** and **common sandpipers**, than the WBS, and with continued growth may be used to monitor scarcer species such as the **goosander**.

Rivers and their floodplains also support large numbers of non-breeding waterbirds. Currently, rivers and canals are covered poorly by existing surveys in winter compared with other wetland habitats, such as reservoirs, gravel pits and estuaries. Estimates of national population size for waterbirds that occur predominantly on rivers and canals, eg **goosanders** and **mallards**, are therefore likely to be less accurate than for species which occur on other wetland habitats. A new riverine survey for non-breeding waterbirds has been designed to fill this gap.

Birds of prey

Monitoring information on birds of prey comes from a variety of sources, for example the Rare Breeding Birds Panel, Raptor Study Groups and from professional or amateur surveys. Information on many species is collected annually.

The number of **hobbies** nesting in the UK continues to increase; the most recent figure of 381 confirmed pairs is over 100 more than ever recorded before, but is a considerable underestimate. A recent study put the UK population as high as 2,200 pairs. Another species with a generally southern distribution in the UK that is continuing to increase and expand its range northwards is the **marsh harrier**, with birds now breeding as far north as Fife and north-east Scotland. **Honey buzzards** are also being recorded breeding in increasing numbers, with the first ever UK survey in 2000 finding at least 33, and possibly as many as 69, pairs. The increase and range expansion of these three species, for which the UK lies at the northern edge of their range, may be an indication of the effects of climate change. Equally, it seems likely that this and other birds of prey go under-recorded, either because their secretive behaviour means they avoid detection or they are not reported due to fears of increased persecution.

Paul Doherty (rspb-images.com)

Honey buzzard

Another species that is continuing to recover is the **red kite**. Numbers in 2002 in England and Scotland were higher than any year since the start of the re-establishment scheme, with 227 pairs rearing at least 392 young. The Welsh population has continued to recover and was estimated at more than 300 pairs, an increase of over 250% since 1990. Moving it from the red to the amber list of birds of conservation concern recognised the recent recovery of its population. However, despite excellent breeding success, the Scottish population is increasing at a very slow rate. Few young birds are surviving long enough to breed, and there are concerns over deliberate poisoning of birds and the effects of second-generation rodenticides in the food chain. Since birds of prey are high in the food chain, they will always be susceptible to these effects.

The slow but steady upward trend in numbers of **white-tailed eagles** continued in 2002, with 26 territorial pairs found in the highlands and islands of Scotland. Unfortunately, illegal persecution remains a problem, and a real threat to the future of the population. Two birds were found poisoned in 2002 – the loss of a breeding male was particularly significant. Productivity was lower than hoped for, and below that required for a self-sustaining population. The prospects for a continued recovery look quite good, however, as long as persecution can be checked. The low productivity and slow maturity of these large birds means that future increase is likely to be a slow process; they remain vulnerable.

Recent surveys

A UK and Isle of Man survey of **choughs** in 2002 found evidence of strong population gains and range expansion over the last 20 years. The UK and Isle of Man breeding population was estimated at well over 400 pairs, up by over 60% from the survey carried out in 1982. **Choughs** bred for the first time in Northern Ireland since the mid-1990s, and in England for the first time since the 1950s. The breeding population of **Slavonian grebes**, which dipped to a low of 31 pairs in 2000, recovered to 46 pairs in 2002.

Seabirds

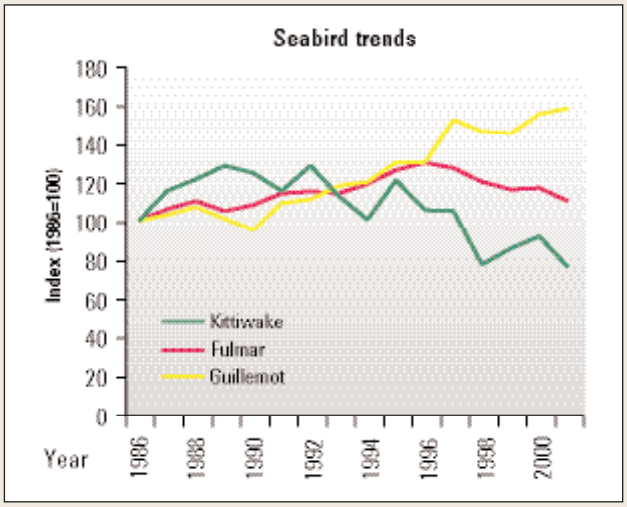
Seabirds are an important part of the UK's biodiversity, with eight breeding species occurring in internationally important numbers around our coastline. As top predators, their numbers and distribution can tell us a great deal about the state of the wider marine environment. Their populations are intimately linked to changes in fish numbers and availability and, in turn, to the organisms upon which fish feed. They are vulnerable to changes in commercial fishing practices, to pollution from oil spills, chemicals discharged from industry and to marine litter. Twenty-two of the 26 breeding seabirds in the UK are amber-listed and one, the **roseate tern**, is red-listed.

The data presented here derive from the Seabird Monitoring Programme, which has co-ordinated counts of colonies around the UK (and Ireland) since 1986. The sampled colonies are widely spread throughout the UK, giving an indication of how seabird populations are faring. The much more extensive Seabird 2000 project will soon provide a more complete picture (see right).

Trends at breeding colonies

Below are graphs of the breeding population index against year (1986–2001) of five species of seabird, chosen to represent different foraging strategies. The lines plotted start with a value of 100 in 1986. The population indices show the mixed fortunes of different seabird species.

While **guillemots** have steadily increased over the period (on average by 3.6% per annum), species such as the **kittiwake** have declined markedly since about the mid-1990s. It is thought that this difference is related to the different feeding habits and prey of the two species. **Guillemots** dive from the sea surface to feed on medium-sized sand eels and sprats and have access to a wider range of prey species and sizes than **kittiwakes**, which take smaller fish from or near the surface, usually smaller-sized sand eels. It is possible that the commercial sand eel fishery in the North Sea has had a detrimental effect upon the breeding success of **kittiwakes** (and other species which rely heavily



upon sand eels, such as the **shag**). Closure of the fishery has coincided with a recovery in breeding success of **kittiwakes** and **shags**, although a causal link has yet to be shown. The fact that **guillemots** are less reliant on sand eels may help to explain why this species has not declined like the **kittiwake**. Between 2000 and 2001, the **kittiwake** population index fell by nearly 18%, to the lowest level recorded since monitoring began in 1986.

A different trend is shown by the **fulmar** population, which showed steady increases up to about 1996, but since then has declined annually. The **fulmar** also feeds at or just below the sea surface, taking zooplankton and small fish, but it also readily takes discarded fish waste from fishing boats. The increase in numbers has been attributed to high levels of fishing activity – and hence the amount of discards – during this period. Recent declines are perhaps a reflection of decreasing fishing effort, although this remains to be confirmed.

The population trend of the **shag** is characterised by occasional episodes of steep decline and recovery, and this is reflected in the population indices from 1986 to the present, although recent recoveries have so far been partial. Between 1989 and 1994, the breeding population on average fell by 54%, but increased thereafter, albeit slowly and erratically. **Shags**, probably more than other seabirds, are thought to react to periods of low food availability by ceasing to breed, and some of the declines shown may reflect this rather than an increase in mortality. Like other seabirds, they are liable to suffer increased rates of mortality in winter when prolonged periods of onshore winds make feeding conditions difficult, and so-called 'wrecks' of seabirds washed up on the shore are sometimes seen. Such a wreck occurred in 1994 along the east coast of the UK, and may have contributed to the marked decline in the population in the mid-1990s. Since the low in 1994, the general trend for the **shag** is an increasing population. However, it may be several years until the population recovers to the levels of the early 1990s.

Another key factor contributing to changes in seabird numbers is predation. Tern colonies in particular are vulnerable to predators, since they nest densely in relatively accessible

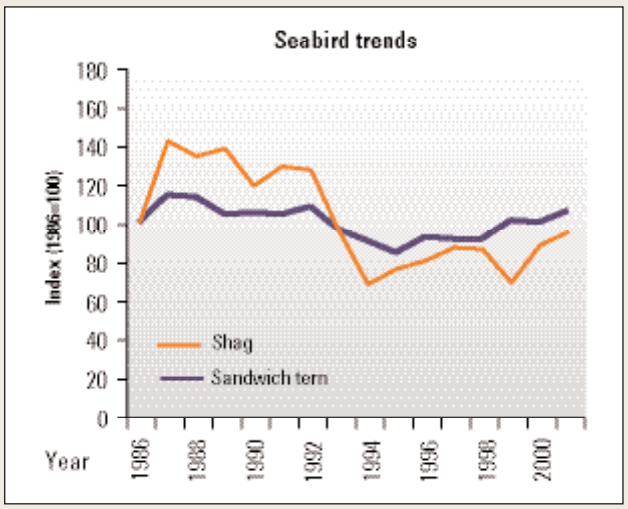
Chris Gomersall (rspb-images.com)

Sandwich terns

places. The mixed fortunes of **Sandwich terns** can in part be explained by heavy predation at some larger colonies. In particular, the 20% decline between 1992 and 1995 has been attributed mainly to predation by foxes at a handful of colonies during this period. Since 1995, the population has recovered, with 2001 seeing a near 6% increase over 2000. Conservation measures, such as fencing against ground predators, have contributed to this recovery.

Seabird reporting in future years

The indices presented in this section of the report were derived from a number of sample colonies from around the UK. It is difficult to know how representative the findings are of national populations. They give an indication of the overall direction and magnitude of change, but only, of course, for those colonies that are counted. The year 2002 saw the completion of *Seabird 2000*, an ambitious census of all the seabird populations in the UK (and Ireland), started in 1999. This is the third such complete census (following ones in 1969–70 and 1985–87) and will enable a comparison of the absolute populations of seabirds over this period. From these results, we can investigate if the trends we derive from the sample colonies are representative of the whole population.



Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

Shag

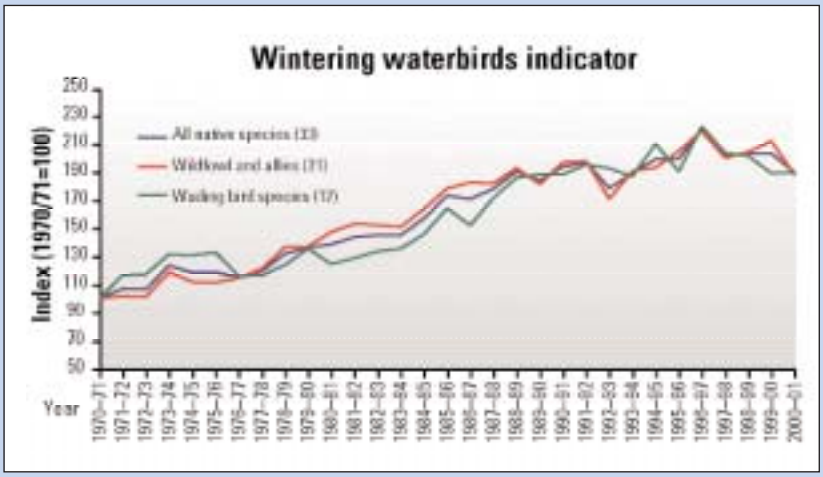
Wintering waterbirds

An indicator for wintering waterbirds

The extensive network of wetland habitats in the UK supports large numbers of wintering waterbirds, most migrating from breeding grounds outside of the UK. Wintering birds arrive from as far away as arctic Canada and northern Siberia to join others from western and eastern Europe on the UK's estuaries and inland waters. The approach used to produce the Government's *Quality of Life* indicator has been applied to these wintering waterbirds to produce a waterbird indicator for 33 species. The graphs plotted below are indices starting with a value of 100 in the winter of 1970–71. If an index rises to a value of 200, then on average the populations will have doubled since 1970–71.

The indicator shows that both wildfowl and wading bird species have shown a steady increase since 1970, with the indicator nearly doubling over 30 years. The protection afforded to waterbirds has increased over recent decades, particularly through policies and legislation designed to protect the wetlands on which they depend. There are, however, signs of a decline in the indicator since the peak in 1996–97. Since that date, there have been short-term declines in numerous species, resulting in a downward trend in the indicator itself. The reasons for these species' declines are many and varied, and in some cases unknown. Some declines may be driven by impacts outside of the UK, for instance, high levels of hunting in Iceland has been suggested as a cause of decline of the Icelandic **greylag goose** population. For other species, the cause may be closer to home as, for example, wintering **shelduck** numbers have declined; most of our wintering **shelducks** are of UK origin.

Another likely driver of short-term declines could be climate change. Recent mild winters, both in the UK and elsewhere in Europe, may have led to birds spending the winter (or at least part of it) further east and north than in the past. Within the UK, populations of wading birds show this pattern and there is growing evidence to suggest that some waterbirds are wintering further east in central and northern Europe. Species that appear to be demonstrating this phenomenon of 'short-stopping' include the **mallard** and the European **white-fronted goose**. We can expect such movements to become more pronounced under most climate change scenarios. This will pose difficult questions for conservation in terms of how to respond to apparent 'local declines' in Europe that might be driven by short-stopping or other movements.



Wading birds

In winter, the UK supports over 25% of the East Atlantic flyway populations of 10 species of wading bird. With the exception of the **purple sandpiper**, which is found mainly along the open coast, population indices of these species are produced annually from data collected as part of the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS). The UK populations of **sanderlings**, **oystercatchers**, **knots** and **redshanks** have remained relatively stable over the past decade (see table right). Although numbers of **avocets**, **curlews** and **black-tailed godwits** were no higher during the winter of 2000–01 than previously, the population trends for these species are still upward. There is, however, an indication from recent winters that the trend in **black-tailed godwit** numbers may be levelling off. Until recently, the UK population of the **grey plover** was also increasing. Since a peak in numbers during the mid-1990s, however, a pattern of decline has become established and numbers are now back to their late 1980s/early 1990s level. This is still considerably higher than levels prior to the mid-1980s. **Dunlin** numbers were particularly low during the two most recent winters considered, though the population has recovered from similar troughs in 1970–71 and 1985–86.

The continued declines in the numbers of **turnstones**, **ringed plovers** and **bar-tailed godwits** are of concern. **Turnstones** and **ringed plovers** are known to be declining on the non-estuarine coast too, which holds a substantial proportion of both populations. These populations are not included in the trends table because this habitat is monitored less well than the estuarine habitat. The decline of two other species on their favoured non-estuarine coastal habitats, **sanderlings** and **purple sandpipers**, was reported here last year. The decline in **bar-tailed godwits** has been evident since the mid-1980s and the exceptionally high numbers during the winter of 1996–97 were not sustained. In fact, the numbers recorded by WeBS during 2000–01 were at an all-time low, following four winters of marked decline.

Long- and short-term changes of some of the UK's waterbirds

Species/population	Long-term trend %	Short-term trend %
European white-fronted goose	-79	-47
Bar-tailed godwit	-31	-39
Mallard	-29	-26
Knot	-15	4
Pochard	-4	-7
Dunlin	-1	-31
Shelduck	0	-18
Ringed plover	3	-26
Turnstone	14	-25
Sanderling	28	2
Icelandic greylag goose	29	-21
Red-breasted merganser	29	2
Tufted duck	30	8
Goldeneye	35	9
Oystercatcher	45	-15
Wigeon	53	40
Goosander	59	-11
Redshank	62	8
Shoveler	65	2
Curlew	69	22
Pintail	72	-21
Mute swan	86	35
Greenland barnacle goose	130	69
Teal	184	7
Whooper swan	201	23
Bewick's swan	205	-18
Svalbard light-bellied brent goose	214	121
Pink-footed goose	224	24
Dark-bellied brent goose	228	-16
Black-tailed godwit	455	64
Grey plover	504	3
Svalbard barnacle goose	564	111
Canada goose	572	24
Gadwall	>1000	76
Re-established greylag goose	>1000	118
Avocet	>1000	207
Ruddy duck	>1000	80
Coot	N/A	16
Canadian light-bellied brent goose	N/A	15
Great crested grebe	N/A	17
Greenland white-fronted goose	N/A	51
Cormorant	N/A	16
Little grebe	N/A	57


Dunlin

Chris Gomersall (rspb-images.com)


Oystercatcher

Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)


Black-tailed godwit

Chris Gomersall (rspb-images.com)


Little grebe

Geoff Dore (rspb-images.com)

Trend figures are derived from the Wetland Bird Survey and National Goose Counts. Long-term trends are the percentage changes between the winters 1970–71 and 2000–01. Short-term trends are the percentage changes between the winters 1990–91 and 2000–01. National monitoring of coots, great crested grebes, little grebes, cormorants, Canadian light-bellied brent geese and Greenland white-fronted geese started later than for the other species, so only short-term trends are shown.

Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

White-fronted geese

Wildfowl and allies

Among our native wildfowl, it has generally been the arctic-nesting goose populations that spend the winter here that have shown the largest long-term increases. After the Second World War, there were far fewer wild geese in the UK and the rest of north-west Europe than at present, and consequently there were great concerns about the survival of goose populations, most of which are restricted to north-west Europe. Today, there are over 3.8 million geese of nine species wintering in the Western Palearctic, of which around 400,000 winter in the UK. Several populations, such as the Svalbard **barnacle goose** and Icelandic **pink-footed goose**, winter solely in Britain and Ireland. The UK therefore has a special responsibility to conserve these birds and their habitats; an obligation recognised under international treaties.

Many goose populations have increased in number because, in contrast to many other birds, they have benefited from intensive agricultural practices that have provided an abundance of their favoured foods, such as grasses and seeds, in the winter.

Not all goose populations are increasing however. The population of **greylag geese** that breed in Iceland and spend the winter primarily in the UK has declined by 21% over the last 10 years. This decline is probably the result of high levels of hunting in Iceland, where up to a third of the entire population is shot each year in late summer. The cause of this worrying trend demands further attention. Another species of wildfowl demonstrating a considerable downward trend is the familiar **mallard**. We cannot be sure why numbers are falling, but there is some evidence to suggest that 'short-stopping' of birds in central Europe may drive this trend, or possibly other factors in the UK.

European white-fronted goose

Census results indicate that the numbers of European **white-fronted geese** visiting the UK remained relatively stable through the 1950s and early 1960s and then increased to more than 10,000 between 1967 and 1971. Since then, numbers have declined dramatically; only 3,862 birds were recorded in winter 2000–01, with 2,244 of these at the New Grounds, Slimbridge. In contrast, the north-west European population as a whole has increased ten-fold over the same period. The decline in the number of birds wintering in the UK is thought to be due to birds wintering further east, especially in the Netherlands, where feeding conditions may have improved, winters are becoming milder and hunting pressure has been reduced. The 'decline' in the UK may, therefore, be a classic case of 'short-stopping', where birds benefit from wintering closer to their breeding grounds.

The population status of birds in the UK

The third review of the population status of birds in the UK was published in September 2002 [1]. The review was led by a group of NGOs, with contributions from the statutory conservation agencies, and has been endorsed by a wide range of environmental organisations. An evidence-based approach was used to assess the population status of 247 birds in the UK and place each species in one of three lists, according to the level of concern. Birds in the red list are of highest conservation concern, those in the green list the lowest. The new lists represent an important milestone in bird conservation in the UK and will help guide conservation action over the coming years.

Drawing on a wide range of national monitoring data, the status of each species was assessed against seven criteria. They were: global conservation status (according to The World Conservation Union IUCN criteria), population change over the last 25 years (size and range), historical population change (for the period 1800–1995), European conservation status (Species of European Conservation Concern: [SPECs]), rarity, number of localities where the species occurs, and international importance of the UK population. On application of these criteria, each species was added to one of three lists – red, amber or green. Those in the red list are of high conservation concern due to global status, severe historical decline, or rapid recent declines in population size or range. Species in the amber list are of medium conservation concern due to moderate declines in population size or range, or following severe historical decline they have shown recent improvement, or they have an unfavourable conservation status in Europe (SPEC 2 or 3). They may also be rare, localised or the UK may host a large proportion of the international population. Species in the green list are currently of favourable status in the UK and meet none of the above criteria.

Gerald Downey (rspb-images.com)

Marsh tit

Forty species appear in the red list, 121 in the amber list and the remaining 86 in the green list. Nine new species have been added to the red list and five formerly red-listed species have moved to the amber list.

All additions to the red list have undergone population declines of over 50% in the last 25 years. They include woodland species such as the **lesser spotted woodpecker**, **marsh tit** and **willow tit** and more ubiquitous species such as the **starling** and **house sparrow**. The **yellowhammer** joins the red list, alongside a number of other common farmland species. The **ring ouzel** is a notable addition to the red list, a bird of the uplands that has declined in numbers and range.

The five species that have moved from red to amber all illustrate conservation success stories brought about by habitat protection and management, species protection and, in the case of the **red kite**, a combination of species protection and a highly successful re-establishment scheme. Twenty-three species have moved from green to amber, many due to moderate declines in breeding populations over the past 25 years. A number of these are woodland species, such as the **tree pipit**, **wood warbler** and **willow warbler**. Four rare breeding species in the UK (which were previously excluded) have been added to the amber list because they have become regular breeding species. This includes the recent colonist the **little egret**, which has an increasing population. Ten species have moved from the amber to the green list. Three of these have shown recent population increases, including the **blackbird** and **goldfinch**. Four now no longer breed in the UK, such as the **little gull**.

Ernie Janes (rspb-images.com)

Goldfinch

Changes to the red and amber lists

New to red list	Reason for change
Lesser spotted woodpecker	Strong decline
Ring ouzel	Strong decline
Grasshopper warbler	Strong decline
Savi's warbler	Strong decline
Marsh tit	Strong decline
Willow tit	Strong decline
Starling	Strong decline
House sparrow	Strong decline
Yellowhammer	Strong decline

New to amber list	Reason for change
Fulmar	Localised
Cormorant	International numbers
Little egret	Rare breeder
Spoonbill	Rare breeder
Mute swan	International numbers
Red grouse	Moderate decline
Long-tailed duck	Localised
Spotted redshank	Localised
Green sandpiper	Rare breeder
Black-headed gull	Moderate decline
Kittiwake	Localised
Cuckoo	Moderate decline
House martin	Moderate decline
Tree pipit	Moderate decline
Meadow pipit	Moderate decline
Yellow wagtail	Moderate decline
Grey wagtail	Moderate decline
Bluethroat	Rare breeder
Mistle thrush	Moderate decline
Wood warbler	Moderate decline
Willow warbler	Moderate decline
Goldcrest	Moderate decline
Lesser redpoll	Moderate decline

From red to amber list	Reason for change
Red kite	Strong recovery
Marsh harrier	Strong recovery
Osprey	Strong recovery
Merlin	Strong recovery
Dartford warbler	Strong recovery

Steve Knell (rspb-images.com)

The lesser spotted woodpecker is now on the red list

The new population assessment, when taken together with more practical and logistical considerations, will help to determine priorities for bird conservation action. Along with other information, reviews like this are an invaluable tool for informing discussions on conservation needs. This review will, for example, help inform revision of the species priorities to be addressed by the UKBAP. The review also serves to focus attention on some important issues in UK bird conservation, such as continuing declines in farmland birds, the emergence of similar trends in woodland birds and rapid declines in some urban species, as well as the continuing struggle of rare breeding species.

With devolution, there is also a potential demand for information on population status for individual countries to inform policies made at that level. Such lists might be hierarchical in nature so that global, European and UK status are overlaid upon the species' status within individual countries.

Chris Gomersall (rspb-images.com)

Merlin

Richard Brooks (rspb-images.com)

House sparrow

The British **house sparrow** population is estimated to be somewhere between six and seven million, down from 12 million pairs in the early 1970s – warranting its new red listing. This decline has become noticeable in many areas, both urban and rural, with a virtually complete disappearance of sparrows from some city centres. Surveys in the last decade have revealed regional differences in the status of populations, with the steepest declines in the east and south-east, and more stable populations in the north, Scotland and Wales (see table below). It seems likely that these declines are driven by a combination of factors, with many theories being proposed and none yet proved. In rural areas, it may be that a decline in over-winter survival has been a major factor, whereas in urban centres recent indications are that productivity may be too low to sustain populations. Continuing work, including new surveys and research programmes, are intended to identify and then address the causes of the decline.

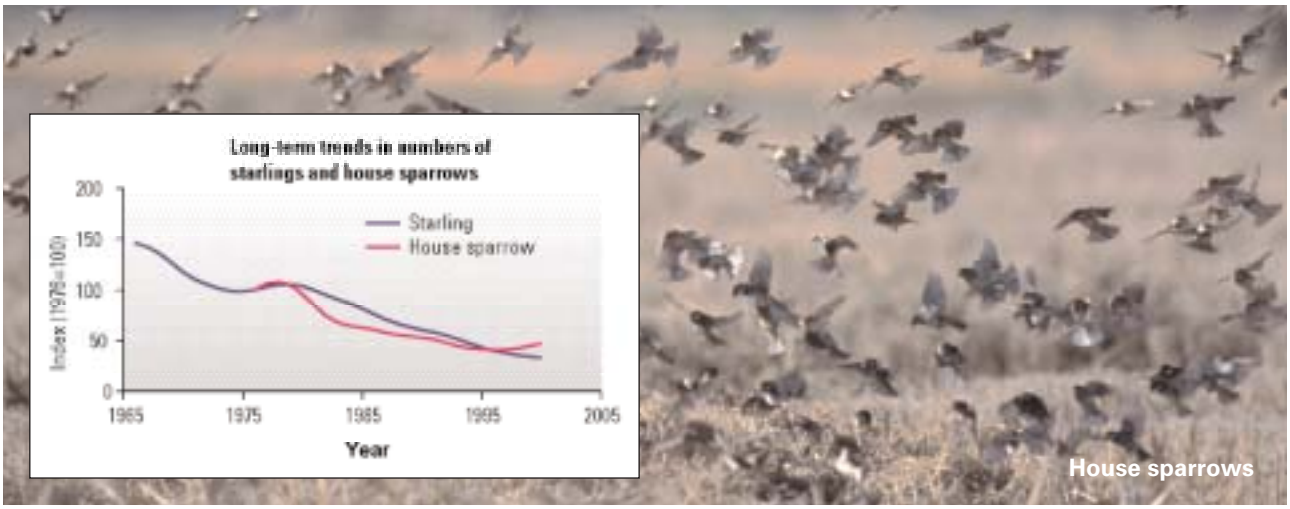
Chris Gomersall (rspb-images.com)

Starling

With approximately 8.5 million breeding in the UK, the **starling** is still a common and familiar bird. However, a decline of 66% since 1974 has resulted in this species moving from the amber to the red list. Research indicates that the breeding performance of **starlings** has not declined (in fact it has increased) but that increased mortality, particularly of young birds, is likely to be the cause of the decline. The reason for this mortality has not been established, but may well be related to changes in the farming landscape, particularly in pastoral areas. Current work is focusing on habitat changes, achieved through agri-environment schemes, which will provide grassland more suitable for foraging starlings. Provision of nest sites in farmland areas may also be beneficial. Like the **house sparrow**, the **starling** shows variation in recent population trends across the UK (see table below).

Recent trends (1994–2000) in the numbers of house sparrow and starlings

	UK	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland
House sparrow	-5	-12	27	64	-20
Starling	-5	-21	23	-38	182



House sparrows

Chris Gomersall (rspb-images.com)

Bird monitoring in the UK Overseas Territories

The *state of the UK's birds* report has until now focused solely on the metropolitan UK, but the UK also has 14 Overseas Territories (OTs) scattered across the globe where we have responsibility for some important bird species and populations (see map right). Although small in area, the territories hold 34 globally threatened and 13 near-threatened bird species; 24 bird species are endemic. This number greatly exceeds that for the UK itself, and gives the UK (as well as the territories themselves) a considerable global responsibility. An Important Bird Areas directory for the OTs is being produced, and this will give important impetus and focus to site-based monitoring.

Despite their great international importance, our understanding of bird populations in the OTs is patchy, with some significant gaps. For example, the Pitcairn Islands hold eight globally threatened bird species, of which six are endemic. No monitoring scheme is in place for any of these species, and the last attempt to assess their status was in 1992. This lack of knowledge reflects relatively low capacity and the logistical difficulty of monitoring in many of the territories. In addition, because there is no overall co-ordination of biodiversity monitoring in the OTs, species can go under-recorded. The frameworks used to help guide bird monitoring efforts in the metropolitan UK could usefully be mimicked in the OTs. There was an increase in ornithological studies of the OTs during the late 1990s, although there are signs that this increase has not been sustained. This account summarises some of the main monitoring highlights. Lack of space prevents us from mentioning some of the important monitoring efforts in other territories.

Gough Island

Gough is part of the Tristan da Cunha group, which is a dependency of St Helena. It is one of the world's most important seabird islands. In 2000–01 bird populations on Gough were assessed and monitoring protocols were established for key species, setting a baseline for future research. Although we cannot estimate past changes with great confidence, it appears that all three albatross species present there – Tristan, Atlantic yellow-nosed and sooty – are in decline, probably because of mortality due to long-line fishing. The former two species are endemic to Tristan da Cunha. On a more optimistic note, rockhopper penguin numbers are apparently stable, despite declines elsewhere in the range. The Atlantic petrel was found to be more abundant than previously thought, though appears to have worryingly low reproductive success.

South Georgia

Research on Bird Island examines the breeding, foraging and population ecology of key seabird species, particularly albatrosses and penguins. Detailed studies of wandering, black-browed and grey-headed albatrosses initiated in the 1970s have revealed dramatic population declines, mainly because of mortality due to long-line fisheries. In 2002–03, just over 1,000 pairs of wandering albatrosses bred on the island, compared with over 1,600 pairs in 1972–73. Similarly, a survey of grey-headed albatrosses in October 2002 recorded 4,700 breeding pairs, compared with 9,100 pairs in 1976–78. Remote tracking of albatrosses has highlighted areas in the Indian and Pacific Oceans where South Georgia birds come into conflict with fisheries.

Falkland Islands

Since 1986–87, diet, breeding success and numbers of the black-browed albatross, gentoo, Magellanic, rockhopper and

Black-browed albatross

Nic Huin (Falklands Conservation)

king penguins have been monitored. This long run of data is a powerful tool for assessing population trends and interactions with fisheries. In addition to the annual monitoring of colonies, complete censuses of penguin and albatross populations are carried out at intervals. A penguin census during 2000–01 showed that rockhoppers had remained stable since the mid-1990s (about 270,000 pairs), while gentoos had increased dramatically from 64,000 to 113,000 pairs. Black-browed albatrosses had decreased from 468,000 pairs in 1995–96 to 382,000 pairs in 2000–01. This downturn is reflected in a recent change in their global conservation status, from 'near-threatened' to 'vulnerable'.

During the late stages of moult (April/May 2002) reports were received of dead adult rockhopper and Magellanic penguins along the north coast of the Falklands. It was not possible to get accurate counts, but several thousand rockhoppers may have died. The cause was not known. Monitoring during the 2002–03 austral spring will show whether there has been a major impact on breeding numbers.

The designation of two Ramsar sites in the Falklands in 2001 was good news. Sea Lion Island and Bertha's Beach have been designated, among other reasons, for their populations of landbirds, waterbirds and seabirds, including gentoo, rockhopper, and Magellanic penguins, and southern giant-petrels. Designation of further Ramsar sites in the Falklands is expected.

Anguilla

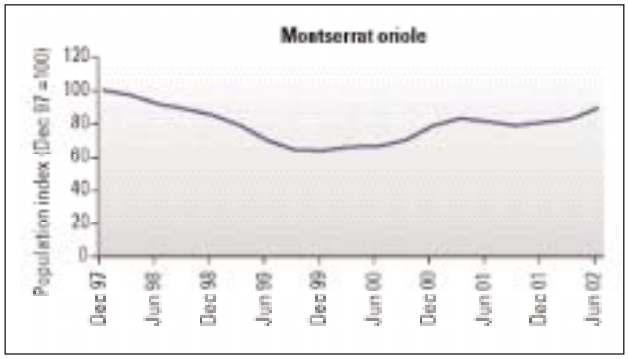
A locally managed bird-monitoring programme was established in 2002. There is a count of wetland birds in December undertaken by local volunteers, and an annual programme of counts at seabird colonies (primarily on offshore islets). This is a very welcome development in a territory with no history of bird conservation, and can hopefully serve as a template for schemes in other territories.

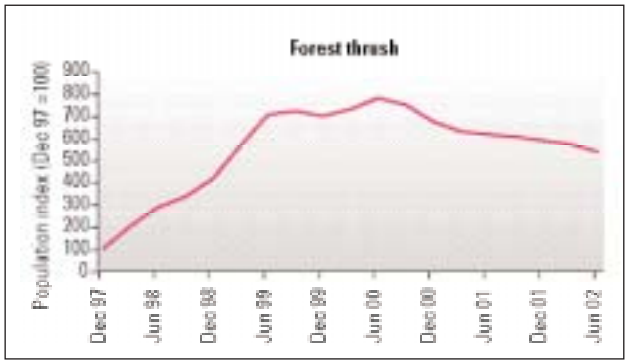
Bermuda

The Bermuda petrel, or cahow, was thought extinct for 300 years, until its rediscovery in Bermuda's Castle Harbour in 1951. Annual monitoring of breeding pairs and fledglings has taken place ever since, and conservation management has been rewarded by a slow increase from just 18 nesting pairs producing eight fledglings in 1960, to 65 pairs producing 36 fledglings in 2002.

Montserrat

Concern about bird populations on Montserrat was raised during the height of the volcanic eruption in 1997. A monitoring scheme started in the main surviving forest tract that year. The graphs above right show population trends since 1997 for the two globally threatened species on the island – the endemic Montserrat oriole and the forest thrush. The oriole showed a rapid decline until late 2000, prompting serious concern for its future. Its conservation status has changed from 'non-threatened' to 'critical'. Subsequent monitoring suggests a limited recovery, although research suggests that major problems remain. By contrast, the forest thrush has shown a general increase over five years. This research continues.





Ascension Island

Ascension is the most important seabird-breeding site in the tropical Atlantic, but introduced cats and rats have reduced populations to remnants, mostly confined to offshore stacks. A cat removal programme is currently underway and baseline monitoring of seabirds was conducted during 2001–02. These counts will be repeated in the years following cat removal to evaluate the impact of the restoration programme. Initial indications from Ascension suggest a brown booby population of 1,000 territories, 36–50 red-footed boobies, and 180,000 pairs of sooty terns. Numbers of the endemic vulnerable Ascension frigatebird are more difficult to assess because they breed year round: year-round counts will be used to estimate the breeding population.

British Indian Ocean Territory

In 2001, a major part of the island of Diego Garcia in the British Indian Ocean Territory was designated as a Ramsar site. Among other reasons, it holds internationally important numbers of red-footed boobies and greater frigatebirds. It is hoped that the designation can soon be extended to the other atolls of this territory, as announced by the Government at the eighth Ramsar Conference in 1999.

Chris Gomersall (rspb-images.com)

Yellowhammer

Conclusions

- The UK Government is committed to using breeding bird populations as an indicator of sustainability. The indicator for wild birds, which is one of 15 headline indicators of the *Quality of Life*, shows stability in common birds, although woodland birds have declined moderately and farmland birds steeply. The latest edition of the indicator, which is updated only to 2000 because of the impact of foot and mouth disease (FMD) in 2001, shows modest short-term recovery of common birds since 1998, including woodland birds, but a continuing downward trend in farmland birds. There is a considerable way to go to reverse the long-term declines.

- Achieving population recovery for common birds, such as farmland birds, requires solutions at a sufficiently large scale. Increasing investment in agri-environment schemes, such as the Countryside Stewardship Scheme in England, is likely to benefit birds and other farmland wildlife. Attention is being directed towards finding ways of supporting bird populations through management options that the majority of farmers would be able to undertake. The Curry Report on the Future of Farming and Food identified a need for a broad and shallow scheme. In response, an entry-level agri-environment scheme, which rewards all farmers who adopt green farming practices is being piloted in England. If the trials are successful, the scheme will become available country-wide in 2005. Similar schemes are being developed for Wales and Northern Ireland. Such policies show a commitment from the Government to tackle these issues in a positive manner and at a sufficiently large scale.

- While Scotland's Rural Stewardship Scheme includes prescriptions with the potential to benefit farmland birds, under-funding limits its capacity to support farmers on the ground. It is hoped that Land Management Contracts – a new system of combining agricultural subsidies and payments, planned for introduction in 2006 – will address this shortfall.

- There is good news for some of the scarcer UKBAP species, with increases in numbers for the **cirl bunting**, **corncrake**, **stone-curlew** and **bittern**. These successes demonstrate how, with detailed knowledge of species ecology, it is possible to deliver targeted conservation action and bring about population increases. The first three species have been aided by Government-funded schemes encouraging farmers to manage agricultural land sympathetically, while the **bittern** has benefited from an ambitious programme of habitat management and creation, and better understanding of its needs. Other UKBAP species continue to struggle and in some cases, such as the **red-backed shrike**, **wryneck** and **marsh warbler**, the challenge for conservation is considerable. The situation for the **capercaillie**, which faces the threat of extinction in the UK for the second time, remains critical. A considerable amount of work is now going into targeted conservation action.

- Conservation action, through a combination of land-use policies, species protection and Government-backed campaigns against illegal killing, has benefited birds of prey in the UK, with recovery of species such as the **red kite** and **white-tailed eagle**, although, sadly, persecution and secondary poisoning still occurs and limits populations and species in some areas. Other raptors, including **hobbies** and **marsh harriers** are prospering, although the status of the **honey buzzard** is obscured by under-reporting.

Chris Gomersall (rspb-images.com)

Marsh harrier

- Data from seabird monitoring for a group of species reveals the differing fortunes of species such as **kittiwakes** (decreasing), **shags** (recovering) and **guillemots** (increasing), which are linked to variation in the abundance of their food, to the way they feed and to other factors operating in the marine environment. Most seabirds are reliant on fish for food and their numbers may be influenced by fishery practices, such as the exploitation of sand eels in the North Sea or changes in the abundance of discarded fish waste. Colonial breeding seabirds, such as the terns, are also vulnerable to predation by birds and mammals and to human disturbance, and this can have serious impacts in particular years. While information from the Seabird Monitoring Programme gives a good indication of trends, the more extensive Seabird 2000 census will soon provide a complete picture of seabird population trends in the UK, since the previous censuses in 1969–70 and 1985–87.

Pete Cairns (rspb-images.com)

Mallard

- Although the long-term trend of the wintering waterbird indicator is upward, with, for example, massive increases in most goose populations over the last three decades, there has been a short-term decline from around 1996. This may be partly caused by climate change, as wintering birds may have redistributed further east and north in Europe in response to recent milder conditions. Hence, species such as the European **white-fronted goose** and **mallard** are able to winter closer to their breeding grounds – in this case, these populations have shifted range rather than declined. For **greylag geese**, the downturn may be linked to over-hunting on the breeding grounds in Iceland, and for other birds the causes are less clear.

- A major review of the population status of birds produced new red, amber and green lists of birds of conservation concern in the UK. The new assessment places 40 species on the red list, 121 on amber and 86 on the green list. Overall, the red list has grown by four species and the amber list by 11 species since the last review in 1996. Nine species have been added to the red list since the last review in 1996 – all of these on the strength of population decline. Five birds have moved from the red to the amber lists as their populations are recovering; four of these are raptors responding to conservation measures – a notable success story for conservation. The review, however, highlighted the continuing poor fortunes of farmland birds (such as **yellowhammers** moving from the green to the red list and several farmland birds remaining red-listed), woodland birds (**willow tits**, **marsh tits** and **lesser spotted woodpeckers** being newly red-listed) and urban birds (**house sparrows** and **starlings** becoming red-listed). The emergence of sizeable population declines in some woodland, urban and upland birds reinforces the need for comprehensive monitoring. Research projects have been initiated to learn more about these trends.

- The UK Overseas Territories (OTs) are host to internationally important bird populations, with spectacular seabird colonies and several endemic landbirds. The territories hold 34 globally threatened and 13 near-threatened species; 24 bird species are endemic. Our knowledge of the conservation status of some of these birds is poor, reflecting a low capacity for monitoring, as well as considerable logistical difficulties in the more remote sites. Monitoring data raise serious concerns for some landbirds and seabirds; particularly regarding the negative impact of long-line fisheries on breeding albatrosses on Gough Island and South Georgia. There is a need for a more integrated approach to bird monitoring of the OTs and a concerted effort to improve monitoring of these critical populations. Recent designation of Ramsar sites on a number of the OTs is a positive development and will aid the protection of habitats for a number of threatened birds.

Kevin Schafer (kevinschafer.com)

Rockhopper penguins

Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

Puffins

Further reading

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State of the UK's birds series is available on the RSPB's website **www.rspb.org.uk**

Current and planned surveys

The information summarised in this report is drawn from the annual and periodic monitoring programmes briefly described below and from the work of individual ornithologists. Anyone interested or wishing to participate in these surveys should contact the relevant organisations at the addresses shown on the back cover.

The **Breeding Bird Survey** (BBS) is the monitoring scheme for common and widespread breeding landbirds throughout the UK and aims to provide data on population trends to inform and direct conservation action. It is a partnership between the BTO, JNCC (on behalf of EN, SNH, CCW and EHS) and the RSPB. The BBS has replaced the long-running CBC. (Contact BTO).

The **Wetland Bird Survey** (WeBS) is the monitoring scheme for non-breeding waterbirds in the UK, which aims to provide the principal data for the conservation of their populations and wetland habitats. It is a partnership between BTO, WWT, the RSPB and JNCC (on behalf of EN, SNH, CCW and EHS). Goose data are collected by the WWT **Goose Monitoring Programme**, funded under the WWT/JNCC partnership. (Contact WWT for both surveys).

The **Woodland Bird Survey** is a national re-survey of broadleaved woodland birds in the UK, funded by Forestry Commission/DEFRA/EN/RSPB/BTO/Woodland Trust. Around 350 woods in England, Scotland and Wales, which were originally surveyed between the 1960s and 1980s either as part of the CBC or by the RSPB, will be resurveyed in 2003 and 2004. The purpose of the re-survey is to learn more about woodland bird declines, particularly in the light of the trends shown by the UK Government's headline indicator of woodland birds, and especially at a regional level. It will also test a number of hypotheses proposed to explain the declines in woodland species. (Contact the RSPB/BTO).

Big Garden Birdwatch is the largest wildlife survey in the world – a simple design (one hour watching birds in the garden each January) allows over a quarter of a million people to take part each year. The data provide an excellent snapshot of garden bird numbers across the UK. **Sparrowatch** is an associated survey of **house sparrows** in 2003, which aims to build up a more complete picture of this declining species by encouraging large numbers of observers to count their local sparrows across the UK. (Contact the RSPB for both surveys).

Garden Bird Watch is a year-round scheme recording the weekly occurrence and numbers of birds in participants' gardens. The data collected provides valuable information on changes in bird use of rural and urban habitats that can be related to population trends in the wider countryside. A new detailed **house sparrow** survey will be an important part of Garden Bird Watch in 2003. (Contact BTO).

A full survey of heronries across the UK, incorporating the annual **Heronries Census**, is planned for 2003 – with additional survey squares recording **little egrets**. (Contact BTO).

A national **Riverine Survey** will be organised in winter 2003–04. Following this survey, it is hoped that a number of river sections can be covered on an annual basis so that the numbers and distribution of non-breeding waterbirds on rivers can be monitored. A pilot survey of riverine birds was undertaken in 2000 and 2001 to develop the methods. In total, over 1,130 km of 30 different rivers and canals was covered during the pilot survey and more than 27,400 birds were counted. Given that there are at least 85,000 km of river in the UK, this result demonstrates the importance of this habitat for waterbirds during the winter months. (Contact WWT).

An advance programme of UK-wide surveys of other priority breeding species has been established under the Statutory Conservation Agencies and RSPB Annual Breeding Bird Scheme (SCARABBS) Agreement. **Golden eagles**, **corncrakes**, **capercaillies** and **cirl buntings** are being surveyed in 2003 (contact the RSPB). For details of surveys planned in future years, contact the RSPB or JNCC. In addition to SCARABBS species, a **woodcock** survey is planned to tell us more about this poorly known species. (BTO/Game Conservancy Trust).

Special thanks to volunteer birdwatchers

Our detailed knowledge of the state of UK bird populations results from the tremendous efforts of many thousands of volunteer birdwatchers, working in collaboration through the BTO, WWT, the RSPB, bird clubs and other bird-related networks. The RSPB, BTO, WWT, JNCC and the statutory conservation agencies congratulate them on the key contributions they make to bird conservation. If you are one of these volunteers, we offer a big thank you for all your hard work. If you are thinking of ways to help the cause of bird conservation, more volunteers are always needed. Please contact the appropriate organisation on the back page if you would like to participate in any of these surveys.

Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

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Monitoring of birds in the UK involves a broad partnership of Government agencies, NGOs, sponsors and independent ornithologists, including:

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Mark Hamblin (rspb-images.com)

The RSPB works for a healthy environment rich in birds and wildlife. It depends on the support and generosity of others to make a difference. It works with bird and habitat conservation organisations in a global partnership called BirdLife International.

The BTO is a charity dedicated to research on wild birds in the UK. Through its volunteer network, it monitors populations by organising long-term surveys such as the Breeding Bird Survey, the ringing scheme and the nest records scheme, and carries out research related to bird conservation.

The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT) is a charity dedicated to conserving wetlands and their biodiversity worldwide. WWT's research department has organised national waterbird monitoring schemes for over 50 years.

JNCC is responsible to the UK Government for research and advice on nature conservation nationally and internationally, acting on behalf of the Countryside Council for Wales, English Nature and Scottish Natural Heritage, together with independent members and representatives from the Countryside Agency and Northern Ireland.

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