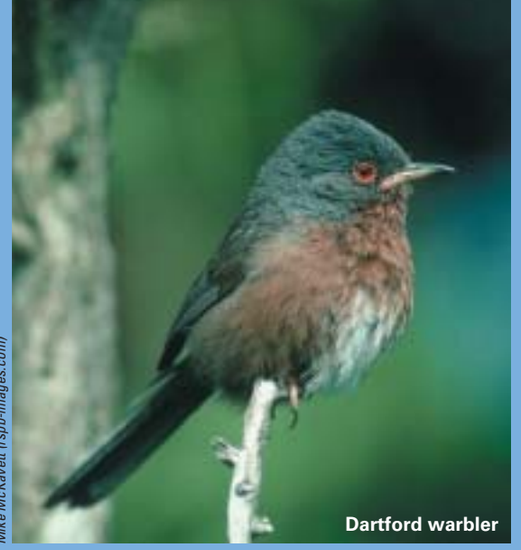

Mike McKavett (rspb-images.com)

Dartford warbler

The RSPB is the UK charity working to secure a healthy environment for birds and wildlife, helping to create a better world for us all. We belong to BirdLife International, the global partnership of bird conservation organisations.

The BTO is 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 conserve wetlands and their biodiversity worldwide. WWT's research department has organised national waterbird monitoring schemes for over 50 years.

Chris Gomersall (rspb-images.com)

Redshank

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We would like to thank *Birdwatch* for assisting in the distribution of this report. *Birdwatch* is an independent monthly magazine dedicated to serving the interests of keen birders and amateur ornithologists in Britain and more than 30 countries worldwide. Visit www.birdwatch.co.uk for more details.

Front cover: puffin by Andy Hay (rspb-images.com) 21-1382-03-04

THE STATE OF THE UK'S **BIRDS** 2003

for birds
for people
for ever

Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

Numbers of corn buntings are still declining

THE STATE OF THE UK'S BIRDS 2003

- The UK wild bird indicator has been updated for the first time in two years. The indicator for all species showed a slight decline between 2000 and 2002, but has stayed relatively stable since the early 1980s. The two habitat-specific indicators are still well down on their 1970 starting points; that for farmland birds by 42% and that for woodland birds by 15%. The latter fell by 4% since it was last updated, which reflects continuing decreases in species such as the **lesser spotted woodpecker**, **willow tit** and **wood warbler**.

- Encouraging progress has been made towards meeting species' targets in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. Concerted conservation action has resulted in increases in numbers of **bitterns**, **corncrakes**, **stone-curlews** and **cirl buntings** – all species that were at serious risk of extinction as recently as the mid-1990s – and have been subject to species recovery programmes. However, there is a long way to go for other species such as **red-necked phalaropes**, **roseate terns** and **capercaillie**, and real concern for **common scoters**, **black grouse** and **marsh warblers**. **Red-backed shrikes** and **wrynecks** are virtually extinct as breeding birds in the UK.

- The update of trends in commoner breeding birds shows a considerable mix of fortunes. As well as declines in some woodland species, farmland birds such as **turtle doves** and **corn buntings** continue to decline, as do some urban specialists such as **house sparrows** and **starlings**. Short-term trends reveal encouraging upturns in other farmland specialists such as **tree sparrows**. We hope that the roll-out of Environmental Stewardship in farmland will help such species further. There have been remarkable short-term increases in a number of other species, such as the **stonechat** and **kingfisher**.

- Concerted conservation work, including re-introduction schemes, has produced encouraging results for several raptor species, including the **osprey**, **red kite** and **white-tailed eagle**. National surveys for **peregrines** and **golden eagles**, both repeats of those 11 years previously, showed little change overall, although there are declines in some regions. Disappointingly, illegal persecution remains a problem for **golden eagles**, **red kites**, **hen harriers** and other birds of prey.

- A re-survey of breeding wading birds in wet lowland meadows in England and Wales revealed large declines in **lapwings**, **redshanks**, **curlews** and **snipe** over the last 20 years, linked to habitat deterioration and loss.

- The results of the first complete census of seabirds in the UK for 15 years have been published. There is good news for a number of species, such as **gannets**, **cormorants**, **great skuas** and auks, but declines of others such as **shags**, **kittiwakes** and several tern species. New survey techniques allowed the first accurate estimates of **Leach's petrels**, **storm petrels** and **Manx shearwaters** to be made.

- The wintering waterbird indicator shows a steady increase from 1970 through to the 1990s, but more recently a slight decline. Most of the internationally important populations of geese that winter in the UK continue to show increases. The results of new and extensive aerial surveys of nearshore waters are presented, including the identification of previously unknown concentrations of wintering waterbirds such as **common scoters**.

- A new IUCN (World Conservation Union) red list of globally threatened species has highlighted the threats to species in UK Overseas Territories. The impact of long-line fisheries may drive species such as the **spectacled petrel** and **sooty albatross** to extinction very shortly.

Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

Corncrake numbers are up

Introduction

The state of the UK's birds 2003 is the fifth in a series of annual reports providing an overview of the fortunes of wild birds in the United Kingdom. It draws together the most recent data from a range of reliable sources up to 2003, and presents trends for some species since 1970. The UK has one of the best programmes of bird monitoring in the world, from familiar and common species to rare and local breeders and winter visitors. This report summarises the most important results from annual, periodically repeated and one-off surveys. In many cases, due to the inevitable time lag in the collation and reporting of survey results, the most recently available data are from 2002 or even 2001. Importantly, this report contains the first update of trends in two years for many common breeding species, after the interruption to monitoring caused by the foot and mouth disease outbreak in 2001.

This report starts with updated trends in the breeding bird species covered by UK Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs). As these include some of the highest priorities of the Government and non-governmental organisations, this is a vital check on whether the conservation targets set by UK BAPs are likely to be met. Trends for common and widespread species monitored by the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), and its predecessor, the Common Birds Census (CBC), are similarly updated. The UK wild bird indicator, a barometer of the fortunes of breeding birds in the UK, is also updated, allowing us to check on progress since 2000, in particular for farmland and woodland birds that are the focus of current conservation attention.

We then report on the recent performances of our birds of prey, the subjects of much monitoring effort throughout the UK. Other recent surveys, such as of breeding waders in wet grassland, are also summarised.

This year sees the publication of the results of Seabird 2000, a major project to conduct complete censuses of breeding seabird populations in the UK, many of which are of international importance. We include the new population estimates from this project, the first for 15 years and, for some species, the first accurate estimates ever, and discuss what these tell us about the UK's seabirds.

As well as trends in breeding birds, we report on the fortunes of the waterbirds that spend the winter in the UK, many of which migrate here from breeding grounds overseas. Our wetlands and coastlines hold massive numbers of wintering swans, geese, ducks and wading birds of many species, some of which are present in internationally important numbers, such as the goose populations we highlight in this report.

Recent research has focused on the large numbers of birds found wintering offshore around the UK, particularly with regards to potential wind farm developments in these areas.

Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

We show some results from this work, which has revealed previously unknown concentrations of seaducks in our nearshore waters.

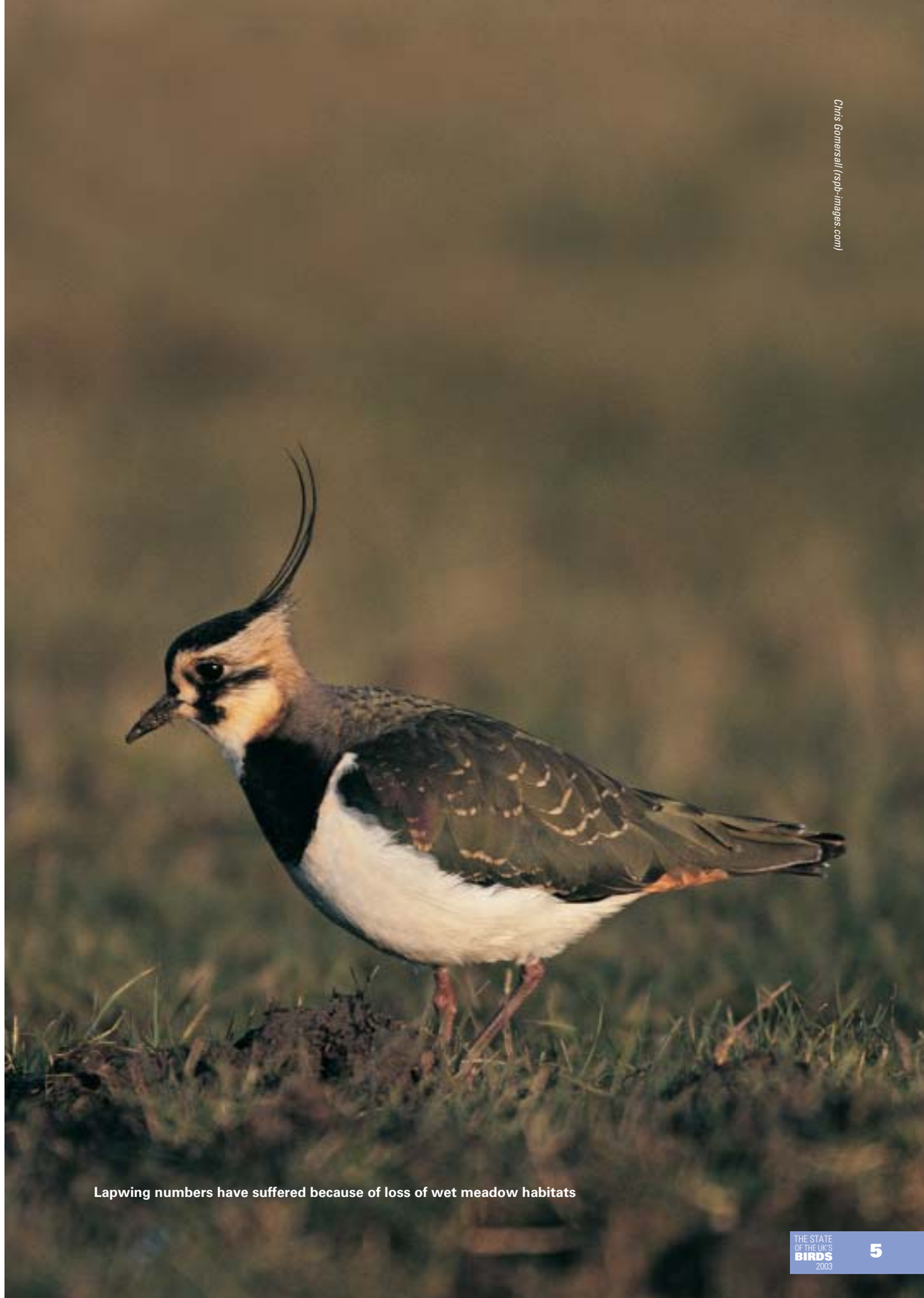
Finally, for the second year running, we report on the status of the important populations of birds that are found in the UK's Overseas Territories. The release of an updated IUCN red list of globally threatened bird species allows us to highlight the vulnerability of some of the bird populations for which the UK has special responsibility.

The names of species are colour-coded throughout the report, according to their conservation status as assigned by the UK government and non-governmental organisations in *The population status of birds in the UK: birds of conservation concern*. The 40 red-listed species appear in **red** (highest concern), the 121 amber-listed species in **amber** (medium concern), and the 86 green-listed species in **green** (lowest concern).

This report is a collaboration between three NGOs – the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT). Bird monitoring in the UK is undertaken by NGOs such as these three, in collaboration with the Government, notably the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and the four national conservation agencies: English Nature, Scottish Natural Heritage, the Countryside Council for Wales and the Environment Heritage Service (Northern Ireland).

Special thanks to volunteer observers

Our detailed knowledge of the state of UK bird populations results from the tremendous efforts of volunteers, working in collaboration through the BTO, WWT, the RSPB, bird clubs, raptor study groups and other bird-related networks. If you are one of these volunteers, we offer a big thank you for all your hard work and dedication, without which this report, and many others, would not be possible. If you are thinking of ways to help the cause of bird conservation, more volunteers are always needed. Please contact the appropriate organisation (details on the back page) if you would like to participate in any surveys.



Chris Gomersall (rspb-images.com)

Lapwing numbers have suffered because of loss of wet meadow habitats

The UK *'Quality of Life'* wild bird indicator

The UK Government uses an indicator based on trends in bird species as one of its 15 headline indicators of progress towards sustainable development. Since its first publication by DEFRA five years ago, this annually updated wild bird indicator has become recognised as a valuable tool to communicate the status of bird populations in the UK to a wide audience, and as a measure of the health of the wider environment.

This 'headline' indicator is generated by combining the trends of 106 widespread breeding bird species across the UK, for which annual or periodically collected data on numbers are available. For the first time, the 2002 indicator has been produced using data gathered by the Breeding Bird Survey (which started in 1994). For species originally monitored by the Common Birds Census (which was in operation from 1962 until 2000), trends are generated by combining data from the BBS and the CBC. The indicators start from a value of 100 in 1970. If an index rises to 200 then, on average, populations of species in that indicator have doubled; if it falls to 50 then they have halved on average.

The 2002 headline wild bird indicator showed a slight decline (1.4%) from the last update in 2000, maintaining the overall stability it has shown since the early 1980s and up by 10% from the 1970 starting value. Species showing substantial increases include scarce breeders with mainly southern distributions, such as **woodlarks** and **Dartford warblers**, which are benefiting from habitat restoration, and perhaps also from climate change, and species such as **woodpigeons** and **stock doves**, which may be profiting from current agricultural practices.

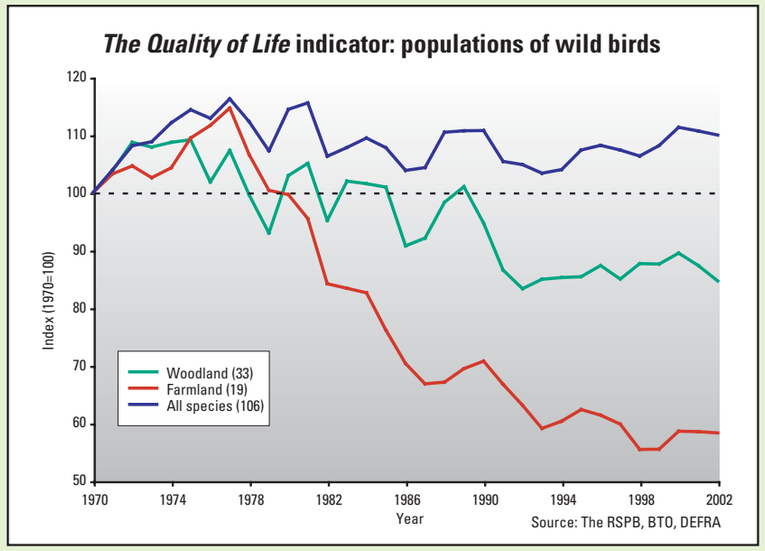
Despite this relative overall stability, there are major differences in the trends shown by different groups of species. Although there are encouraging signs of recovery among some of the farmland species that have undergone large declines since the 1970s, this is not true for all species and the farmland indicator remains at a level less than 60% of its 1970 value. The rate of decline has slowed in recent years and the 2002 farmland bird indicator is virtually unchanged since the last update in 2000. Within this overall stability, there are still continuing declines for some species, such as **corn buntings**, **lapwings**, **yellow wagtails** and **turtle doves**, but also encouraging increases in others, eg **tree sparrows**. The UK Government is committed to a Public Service Agreement target of reversing the long-term decline in farmland birds as measured by this indicator by 2020.

The woodland bird indicator remains depressed at a level 15% lower than that in 1970, and fell by nearly 5% between 2000 and 2002. Many of the birds showing the most alarming declines in the UK are woodland species such as **lesser spotted woodpeckers**, **tree pipits**, **spotted flycatchers** and **willow tits**. Through extensive survey and research, we are trying to reveal the cause of these declines and hence allow action to be taken.

Work continues, in collaboration with DEFRA, on developing new indicators focusing on the individual nations and on English regions, as well as for other groups of species such as coastal and sea birds, water and wetland birds and town and garden birds. An equivalent indicator for wintering waterbirds is presented on page 18.

Woodlarks: red-listed, but increasing

Mike Lane (rspb-images.com)



Turtle dove

Paul Doherty (rspb-images.com)

The status of UK Biodiversity Action Plan species

Species	Long-term trend %	Short-term trend %	Population	Year
Song thrush	-52[1]	13[1]	1,100,000[1]	1988–91
Skylark	-54[1]	-14[1]	1,000,000[1]	1997
Linnet	-51[1]	-4[1]	540,000[1]	1988–91
Reed bunting	-48[1]	3[1]	240,000[1]	1988–91
Bullfinch	-57[1]	-26[1]	200,000[1]	1988–91
Grey partridge	-86[1]	-18[1]	150,000[1]	1988–91
Spotted flycatcher	-82[1]	-42[1]	130,000[1]	1988–91
Tree sparrow	-94[1]	55[1]	110,000[1]	1988–91
Turtle dove	-77[1]	-42[1]	75,000[1]	1988–91
Corn bunting	-89[1]	-41[1]	19,800[1]	1993
Black grouse	decline[n/a]	-74[2]	6,500[2]	1995–96
Nightjar	62[2]	not known	3,400[1]	1992
Woodlark	704[3]	83[3]	1,552[1]	1997
Capercaillie	decline[n/a]	-51[4]	1,070[3]	1998–99
Corncrake	14[4]	27[5]	821[2,4]	2003
Cirl bunting	119[4]	54[6]	697[1]	2003
Stone-curlew	-15[5]	54[8]	254[1]	2000
Roseate tern	-90[4]	89[5]	101[1,4]	2003
Common scoter	-29[6]	not known	95[1]	1995
Bittern	-40[4]	291[5]	43[2]	2003
Red-necked phalarope	11[4]	-26[5]	31[2]	2003
Marsh warbler	-86[7]	-65[7]	11[1]	2003
Wryneck	decline[n/a]	verge of extinction	0	2003
Red-backed shrike	decline[n/a]	verge of extinction	0	2003

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

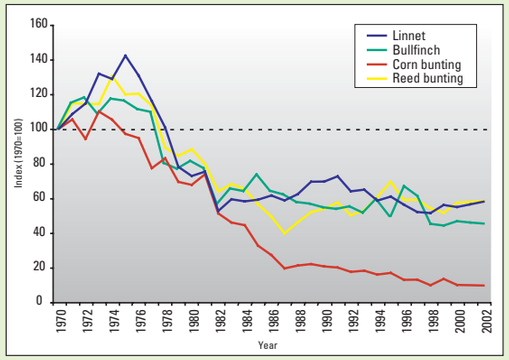
Long-term trends
1 = 1970–2001
2 = 1981–1992
3 = 1970–1997
4 = 1970–2003
5 = 1970–2000
6 = 1973–1995
7 = 1973–2000

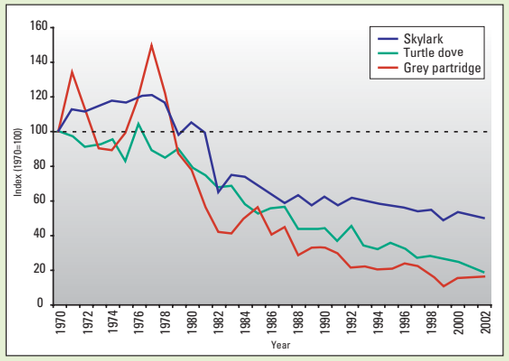
Short-term trends
1 = 1994–2002
2 = 1991/92–1995/96
3 = 1995–1997
4 = 1992/94–1998/99
5 = 1997–2003
6 = 1998–2003
7 = 1995–2003
8 = 1995–2000

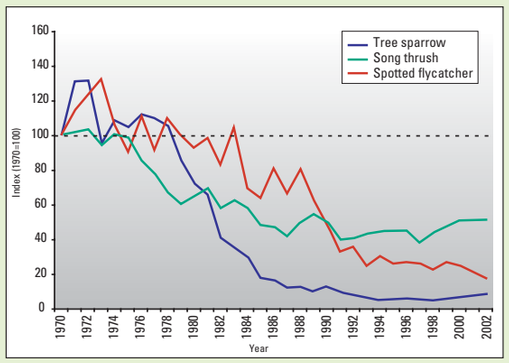
Population units
1 = Breeding pairs
2 = Singing, displaying or breeding males
3 = Individuals
4 = Minimum number

Trends in UK Biodiversity Action Plan species

The UK Government's Biodiversity Action Plan includes targeted action plans for 26 species of the highest conservation concern. With the exception of the globally threatened **aquatic warbler**, which is an autumn visitor, these are all species that breed in the UK. The trends and most recent population estimates for 24 of the breeding species are shown on the previous page. The **Scottish crossbill** is not included because little is known on status because of uncertainty over its taxonomy and field identification. Current research aims to remove this uncertainty.







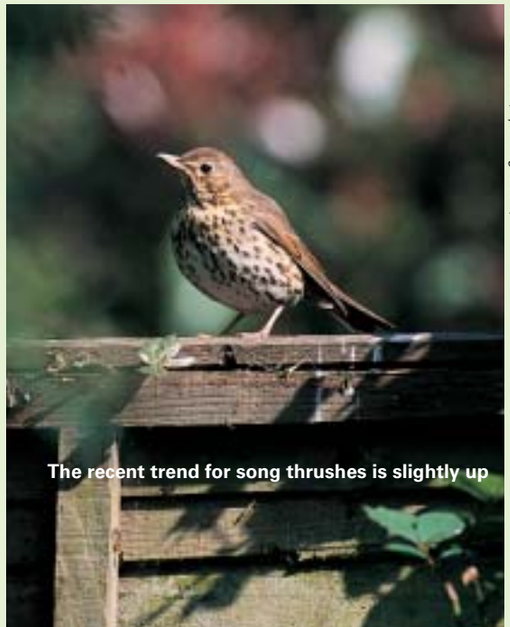

Aquatic warblers visit the UK in autumn

Mike Lane (rspb-images.com)

Common and widespread UK BAP species

There are 10 UK BAP species that are still relatively abundant and widespread and for which long-term and short-term trends can be calculated from CBC and BBS data respectively (see graphs left). Since the mid-1970s, all 10 have declined dramatically, but there are welcome indications that the fortunes of some of these species may be improving in the short-term.

The short-term trends from 1994 to 2002 for **song thrushes** and **reed buntings** have shown slight increases, whereas the trend for **tree sparrows** has increased by 55% since 1994, which is very welcome news. The trend for **linnets** has decreased by less than 10%, but six other species have declined more severely. The greatest short-term declines have been shown by **turtle doves**, **spotted flycatchers** and **corn buntings**, and these declines have continued since the last update from 2000. Seven of these species are primarily farmland birds whose decline since the mid-1970s has now been well-documented. Considerable effort is being exerted to reverse these declines. However, **song thrushes, spotted flycatchers** and **bullfinches** are predominantly woodland species, with the latter two being among the three UK BAP species showing the steepest declines.


The recent trend for song thrushes is slightly up

Chris Gomersall (rspb-images.com)

Scarce and rare BAP species

There was an encouraging jump in the number of booming **bitterns** in 2003, with 43 recorded, compared to 31 in 2002. The management of existing reedbeds for **bitterns** and the creation of new reedbeds have been instrumental in this increase. Further habitat creation, funded by the EU LIFE Bittern Project, as well as an increasing knowledge of what makes reedbeds suitable for **bitterns**, will put us well on the road to reaching the UK BAP target of 50 booming males by 2010.

A full UK survey of **corncrakes** in 2003 showed a continuing recovery in numbers, with over 820 calling males recorded. The core areas in Scotland were found to hold around 97% of the population. **Corncrakes** have been helped by a combination of management on nature reserves and the assistance given to crofters, which provides funding to support corncrake-friendly land management. The full impact of the switch of the main conservation delivery mechanism for the species from the Corncrake Initiative and the Environmentally Sensitive Area Scheme to the Special Protection Area Natural Care management schemes and the Rural Stewardship Scheme is not yet known, however. Despite the encouraging increase in numbers, this has not been accompanied by an expansion in range, although **corncrakes** were recorded in Northern Ireland for the first time since 1997. A project in Cambridgeshire may prove successful in re-establishing **corncrakes** well away from the core range. **Red-necked phalarope** numbers were also up from 28 to 31 males, with an increase in Shetland, but well short of the 2003 UK BAP target for Shetland of 55–60 males.

There was a further increase in **roseate terns**, with numbers at the main UK colony on Coquet Island, Northumberland, up from 57 in 2002 to 70 pairs in 2003. There was also an increase in Northern Ireland, with numbers up to 19 pairs in 2003.

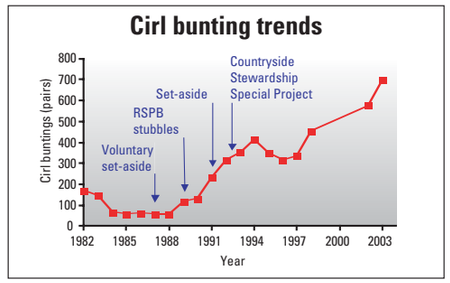
Woodlarks have shown localised fluctuations in recent years, so the next national survey for this species, planned for 2006, is needed to determine whether the UK BAP target of maintaining a population of at least 1,500 breeding pairs has been met. A national **nightjar** survey in 2004 will similarly determine if its target of 4,000 churring males has been met. There are, however, real concerns regarding **common scoters** and **black grouse** and UK BAP targets are likely to be missed for both species, although encouraging increases have been recorded for **black grouse** in the North Pennines and Wales priority recovery areas. The status of **capercaillie** will become apparent following the full survey undertaken during the 2003/04 winter. We hope that the concerted effort on managing habitat in its core range may have at least halted the precipitous decline in this charismatic species.

There were no known breeding records of either **red-backed shrikes** or **wrynecks** in the UK in 2003. There has only been sporadic breeding in recent years, and both species have been lost as regular breeding birds in the UK. The **marsh warbler** had shown signs of a recovery in the 1990s, following the establishment of a small colony in south-east England, but appears to have declined substantially in the last two years. This is thought to be due to illegal persecution by egg collectors and disturbance at the main colony. There was a slight recovery in numbers in 2003.

Chris Gomersall (rspb-images.com)

Cirl buntings – BAP territory targets met

A full **cirl bunting** survey in 2003 found 697 territories, all in south Devon, surpassing the UK BAP target of 550 territories by 2003. This is an encouraging increase from 118 pairs in 1989 and 453 pairs from the last full survey in 1998. No birds were found, however, at former sites in Cornwall and on Jersey. There is still little evidence of an increase in range, and the target on range expansion was not met; steps are being taken to aid range expansion. Research has shown that low intensity mixed farming provides **cirl buntings** with two key foraging habitats, with rough or semi-improved grassland as a source of invertebrate prey in summer and weedy cereal stubbles as a source of seed in winter. Since the early 1990s, farmers in Devon have been encouraged to enter the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, which offers weedy spring-sown barley and low-intensity grazed grassland aimed specifically at **cirl buntings**. Much of the population increase since the early 1990s has been on land managed by farmers through the Countryside Stewardship Scheme.



Richard Revels (rspb-images.com)

The spotted flycatcher has shown a steep decline

Trends in widespread and common birds

Around 100 widespread, mainly terrestrial, species are monitored annually by either the Common Birds Census, the Breeding Bird Survey or both (see table). This is the first time that trends based on joint modelling of the historical CBC data from the 1960s to 2000 and the more current BBS data from 1994 to 2002 have been presented. For five waterways species, long-term population trends are based on the Waterways Bird Survey (WBS). All short-term trends (1994 to 2002) are based solely on the BBS.

Population trends for common and widespread species in the UK

Species	Long-term trend (1970–2001)	Short-term trend (1994–2002)
Tree sparrow	-94[1]	55
Lesser redpoll	-89[1]	18
Corn bunting	-89[2]	-41
Woodcock	-87[1]	n/a
Grey partridge	-86	-18
Willow tit	-85	-72
Spotted flycatcher	-82	-42
Turtle dove	-77	-42
Lesser spotted woodpecker	-77[1,2]	n/a
Tree pipit	-68[1]	1
Starling	-66[1]	-13
House sparrow	-65[2]	-7
Yellow wagtail	-59[2]	-14
Bullfinch	-57	-26
Marsh tit	-56	34
Skylark	-54	-14
Song thrush	-52	13
Yellowhammer	-52	-13
Linnet	-51	-4
Curlew	-49[1]	-20
Reed bunting	-48	3
Cuckoo	-43[1]	-25
Lapwing	-41[1]	-18
Willow warbler	-40[1]	-8
Kestrel	-37[1]	-30
Mistle thrush	-36	1
Dunnock	-36	13
House martin	-32[1]	18
Meadow pipit	-31[1]	-5
Grey wagtail	-30	52
Red-legged partridge	-24	21
Common sandpiper	-24	-25
Tawny owl	-19[1]	-35
Blackbird	-19	16
Whitethroat	-18	30
Treecreeper	-17	19
Dipper	-13	n/a
Goldcrest	-12[1,3]	65
Moorhen	-5	22
Little owl	-5	26
Lesser whitethroat	2	-27
Sedge warbler	4	30
Garden warbler	4	-13
Jay	6	16
Kingfisher	7	76
Chiffchaff	8	21
Swallow	11	10
Blue tit	19	9
Greenfinch	22	31
Coal tit	23[1]	28
Redstart	27[1,2]	34
Chaffinch	29	5
Goldfinch	35	18
Pheasant	45[1,4]	16
Robin	43	16
Tufted duck	41	36
Great tit	51	19
Pied wagtail	52	23
Long-tailed tit	52[3]	-3
Wren	54[3]	14
Coot	77[1]	51
Jackdaw	83	12
Carrion crow	84	15
Woodpigeon	87[2]	5
Stock dove	87[1,4]	15
Sparrowhawk	103[1]	-13
Shelduck	107[1]	-34
Magpie	109	2
Mallard	115	39
Green woodpecker	115	18
Nuthatch	115	44
Little grebe	118[1]	47
Reed warbler	123[1,2]	29
Blackcap	126	46
Great spotted woodpecker	185	72
Mute swan	192[1]	22
Buzzard	318[1,2,4]	51
Collared dove	345[1]	26
Wood warbler	n/a	-54
Swift	n/a	-30
Siskin	n/a	-18
Whinchat	n/a	-15
Pied flycatcher	n/a	-7
Feral pigeon	n/a	-6
Red grouse	n/a	5
Wheatear	n/a	10
Great crested grebe	n/a	23
Raven	n/a	56
Stonechat	n/a	153

Data are derived from Common Bird Census (CBC) plots from 1966 up to 2000 and Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) plots from 1994 to 2002, except long-term trends for tufted duck, grey wagtail, dipper, kingfisher and common sandpiper, which come from the Waterways Bird Survey (WBS 1974-2002). For long-term trends, counts were modelled using a full site by year log-linear Poisson regression model with post-hoc smoothing of the annual indices. Reported long-term population changes are the differences in smoothed annual indices in joint CBC-BBS models from 1970 to 2001 – the year prior to the last available data, except for the five species covered by the WBS (from 1975) and for sparrowhawk (from 1974), collared dove (from 1971) and house sparrow (from 1976). However, for species where there is evidence of substantial and statistically significant differences in trends within and outside England, the overall trends are based solely on the CBC prior to 1994 and solely on the BBS from 1974 to 2002. Further caveats related to unrepresentative habitat coverage, small sample sizes, or fluctuating populations are listed below. Short-term trends were derived from counts on BBS squares analysed using a full site by year log-linear Poisson regression model, and cover the period 1994 to 2002.

1 The trend during the period covered solely by the CBC (prior to 1994) may be unrepresentative of the UK due to geographical or habitat-related bias towards populations with low densities.
2. Small sample size during some part of the survey period.
3 The species shows large natural fluctuations from year to year.
4 Long-term trend may be biased by differences in BBS and CBC methodologies.

Long-term trends

Nineteen species showed red-list-magnitude declines of more than 50% between 1970 and 2002. Of these, seven showed declines of 80% or more with **tree sparrows** still leading the list, followed by **lesser redpolls**, **corn buntings**, **woodcocks**, **grey partridges**, **willow tits** and **spotted flycatchers**. A further 12 species show long-term declines of over 50%. The status of two species has changed substantially since last reported: **lesser spotted woodpeckers** are continuing to disappear from the UK and the decline for the **yellow wagtail** is greater than that which led to its becoming amber-listed in the last UK conservation status assessment: future red-listing is a possibility. One red-listed species – the **reed bunting** – has improved in status, reflecting its recent relative stability.

At the other end of the spectrum, **buzzards**, **collared doves** and **mute swans** continue to increase most rapidly, with a further 10 species having at least doubled since 1970.

Short-term trends

The BBS was introduced in 1994 as a replacement for CBC, in order to increase the number of sites and habitats covered. The short-term trends listed in the table are for the period from 1994 to 2002. **Willow tits** have shown the most dramatic decline – 72% in just eight years – while **wood warblers** appear to be heading for future red-listing on the basis of a 54% decline. A number of other species show declines in line with their trends over the longer period. The species showing the most rapid increase over this period was the **stonechat** (with a staggering 153% increase), followed by **kingfishers**, **great spotted woodpeckers**, **goldcrests**, **ravens**, **grey wagtails**, **buzzards**, **coots** and, encouragingly, **tree sparrows**.

There are clearly identifiable patterns in the trends in common birds in both the long and short-term. As the *Quality of Life* indicators (page 6) show, both farmland and woodland birds in general have declined since 1970.

Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

Tree sparrows – down 94% since 1970 but recovering

There are many potential causes for the dramatic declines recorded in some woodland birds, which have been particularly severe for woodland specialists (many woodland generalists are faring well, eg **chaffinches**, **robins** and **wrens**). Some of these specialists, including **spotted flycatchers**, **tree pipits**, **wood warblers** and **willow warblers**, are long-distance migrants, so factors on the wintering grounds or during migration may be important, although that is not to discount factors within the UK. For resident species, such as **lesser spotted woodpeckers** and **willow tits**, there is a range of possible contributors to declines, including a reduction in woodland management, falls in invertebrate resources, the impacts of agriculture on woodland edges, climate change, intensified pressure from deer and increases in predation. It is likely that the reasons vary between species, and that a combination of influences is at work. An additional complication is that, although most woodland specialists have declined, others, such as **great spotted woodpeckers** and **nuthatches**, have shown significant increases over both the long- and short-term.

Although most farmland specialists remain at considerably lower population levels than in the 1970s, recent results show encouraging signs of an increase for **tree sparrows** (principally away from southern England), and stability for **reed buntings**. **Stock dove** and **woodpigeon** numbers continue to increase and most corvid populations have been relatively stable since the start of the BBS. However, **corn buntings** and **turtle doves** continue to decline at an alarming rate, and numbers of **yellowhammers**, **skylarks** and **lapwings** remain depressed at levels well down on 1970.

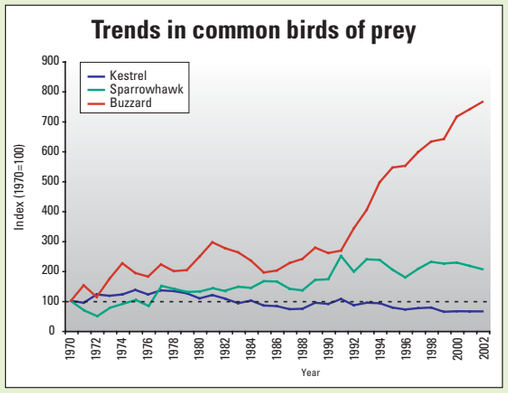
In the aftermath of the Curry report on the future of farming and food, we are beginning to see a change in farming policy in the UK. Detailed research has identified and tested measures for helping birds in farmland, such as the provision of weedy stubbles during the winter, which will provide a food source for granivores such as **tree sparrows** and **corn buntings**, and grass buffer strips that will provide nesting sites and a source of invertebrate prey for breeding **yellowhammers** and **grey partridges**. With a roll-out of such actions on a national scale in 2004 through Environmental Stewardship, we hope that we will see an upturn in the fortunes of farmland birds.

Mike Read (rspb-images.com)

Peregrines – up 9% in 10 years

Birds of prey

Raptors that are widespread, and hence monitored by the CBC and the BBS, show mixed fortunes. The long-term trends highlight the strong increases in **buzzard** and **sparrowhawk** numbers, recovering from the harmful effects of organochlorine pesticides in the 1960s and persecution. **Buzzards** continue to spread into counties in central and eastern Britain from which they were missing for many decades but **sparrowhawks** show evidence of a shallow decline during the 1990s. Numbers of **kestrels**, predominantly farmland birds, have fluctuated since the 1970s, but are currently in a decline (30% since 1994).



The fifth national survey of **peregrines** in the UK and Isle of Man took place in 2002, part of a series of surveys that have taken place every decade since 1962 (see figure right). The main aim of the survey was to visit known and potential nesting sites early in the season to check for site occupancy by pairs or single **peregrines**. The previous survey in 1991 had shown that, although the population as a whole had grown, there had been some worrying declines in the north and west of Scotland. In 2002, the number of breeding pairs was estimated at 1,402, compared with 1,283 in 1991, an increase of 9%. However, there were marked regional differences, with increases in most of England (including some high profile advances into urban areas)

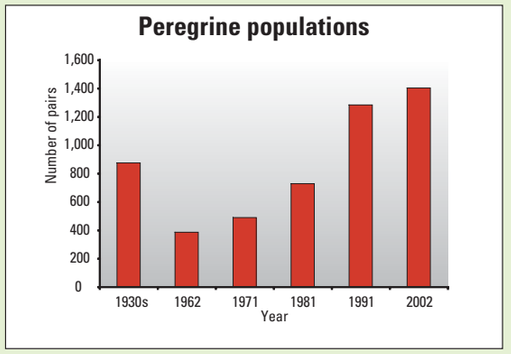
Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

Yellowhammers are still on the red list

Laurie Campbell (rspb-images.com)

There are 435 pairs of golden eagles in Scotland

and southern Wales, but some declines in Northern Ireland (-9%), north Wales (-27%) and further declines in north and west Scotland (-38%). The last continues the trend noted in 1991 but, worryingly, the pattern appears to be spreading eastwards and southwards into Argyll, Central and Tayside. The reasons for the declines in the former strongholds are unknown: they could be associated with declining food supplies in upland areas, but more research is needed.



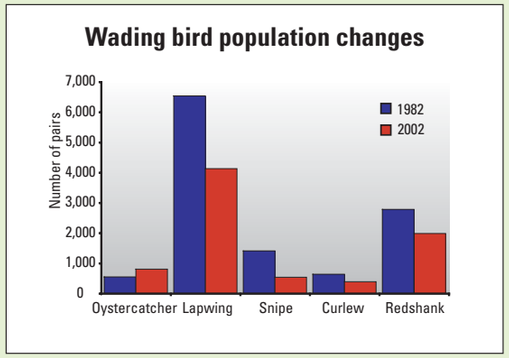
A number of scarce raptor species continue to prosper. **Osprey** numbers have risen steadily over the last two decades, and reached 158 pairs in 2001, the last year for which data are available. Birds have bred successfully in England, both at sites in Cumbria and at the re-introduction site at Rutland Water. **Red kites** continue to increase in Wales and England, with 350–400 and 220 pairs respectively in 2003, but progress is slower in Scotland (47 pairs) at least in part due to illegal persecution. The programme of re-introduction has continued in England and Scotland. The **marsh harrier** was the third species to reach record totals in recent years, and numbers remained high in 2001, with 235–271 pairs, including the first to breed in Orkney. Finally, there were 31 territorial pairs of **white-tailed eagles** in Scotland in 2003, the highest total since the re-introduction scheme began in 1975. These birds fledged 26 young, which is over twice the previous highest total.

The most complete **golden eagle** survey ever was conducted in 2003, finding 436 pairs, all but one of which were in Scotland. This is an increase of 3% since the last survey, which is probably due to increased survey coverage in 2003, with the population remaining stable. This apparent stability masks considerable regional trends; there was a rise in the number of pairs in the Hebrides, particularly the Outer Hebrides, which may reflect a decrease in persecution there. However, a decline to the south and east of the Great Glen is thought to be due to illegal persecution, linked to the management of grouse moors.

Barn owl populations have declined severely over the last century from c12,000 pairs in the mid-1930s to c4,000 pairs in the UK in the mid-1990s. A new annual monitoring programme started in 2000. It has already shown its ability to detect annual changes in breeding occupancy rates, for example a big drop in 2001 (down 20% compared to the previous year) which was associated with reduced brood sizes. This fall was probably due to heavy rains and subsequent flooding in the autumn of 2000, leading to a shortage of small mammals, their staple prey. Such large between-year fluctuations are not uncommon for **barn owls**.

Recent surveys

There was a large-scale loss and deterioration of wet meadows through drainage and agricultural improvement over the decades following the Second World War. These changes had serious consequences for breeding wading bird populations in lowland Britain, which prompted a survey of important lowland grassland sites in 1982. The breeding waders of lowland wet grassland in England and Wales survey was repeated in 2002. During the intervening 20 years, the rate of loss of grassland in lowland Britain had slowed but reduction in habitat quality continued. More than 1,050 grassland sites were surveyed in 2002, covering over 150,000 hectares, of which 860 sites were also surveyed in 1982.



Of the five species of breeding wading birds commonly associated with lowland wet grassland, four decreased significantly between 1982 and 2002 while one, the **oystercatcher**, increased by 47%. The decline in numbers of **snipe** was 62%, while **curlews** declined by 39%, **lapwings** by 37% and **redshanks** by 29%. Much of this crash was attributable to losses in the wider countryside with a high proportion of the remaining populations now found on nature reserves or other specially managed areas. In 1982, only 22% of sites surveyed held no breeding grassland wading birds, but this had increased to 49% in 2002. Another bird that is often associated with lowland wet grassland, the **yellow wagtail**, decreased by 65% on the same sites between 1982 and 2002, mirroring the 59% decline shown by CBC-BBS data.

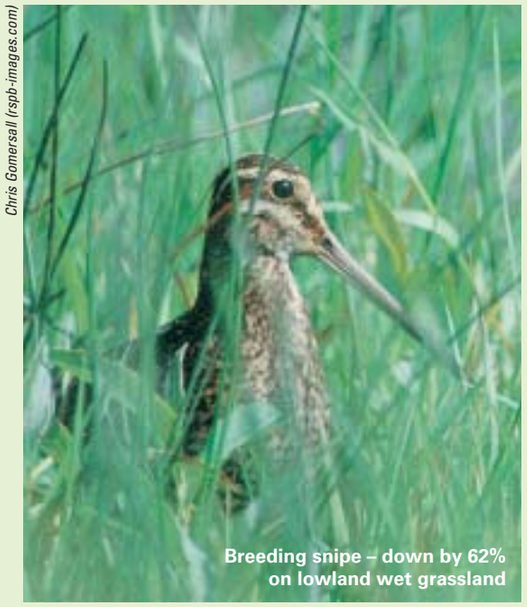
In the first national survey of breeding **woodcocks**, counts of roding (displaying) male **woodcocks** were made at over 930 sites during May and June 2003. Preliminary results based on frequency of occurrence of **woodcocks** suggest a distribution similar to that found in the 1988–91 Breeding Birds Atlas surveys, with strongholds in the Scottish borders and northern England, Lincolnshire and Norfolk, and central southern England. Birds were very sparsely distributed in Wales, south-west England, Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. In northern England, there appeared to be higher breeding densities in eastern counties (Northumberland, Durham, North and South Yorkshire) than in the west (Cumbria and Lancashire). In southern England, by far the highest densities of birds were found in Norfolk and Hampshire.

A survey of **bearded tits** in 2002 found evidence of large populations along the east coast of Britain, and breeding stretching along the south coast into Dorset. There was, however, little sign of colonisation of suitable reedbed sites further west and in Wales. The British breeding population was in the region of 650 pairs, an increase of nearly 60% since the last full survey in 1992 and matching the peak numbers recorded in the mid-1970s and early 1980s.

Results from the Seabird 2000 survey

The Seabird 2000 project aimed to achieve a comprehensive census of all seabird colonies in Britain and Ireland, allowing re-assessment of population status and estimation of trends since the 1985–88 Seabird Colony Register Census. Fieldwork was conducted between 1999 and 2002 with almost complete coverage of the UK coasts achieved. The survey also covered most inland and urban colonies of gulls, **cormorants** and common terns, and provided the first quantitative and repeatable national estimates of burrow-nesting petrels. Full details were published in May 2004: details are summarised here (see table to the right).

The status and trends of all seabird species breeding in the UK are presented in the table. Of the petrel species, trends are only known for **fulmars**, which declined slightly over the last 15 years. This decline is in marked contrast to their spectacular increase over the previous century. The declines were mainly in Shetland, and may be the result of reduced productivity linked to reduced availability of sandeels and discarded offal from fishing vessels.



Chris Gomersall (rspb-images.com)

Breeding snipe – down by 62% on lowland wet grassland

Chris Gomersall (rspb-images.com)

Razorbill

Results for the UK from the Seabird 2000 census

Species	Seabird Colony Register coastal birds (1985–88)	Seabird 2000 coastal birds	Seabird 2000 inland birds	% change (coastal birds[1])
Fulmar	519,602	505,073		-2.8
Manx shearwater		299,722		
Storm petrel		25,710		
Leach's petrel		48,047		
Gannet	161,768	226,553		+40
Cormorant	6,825	7,487	1,646	+9.7
Shag	38,294	28,880		-24.6
Arctic skua	3,388	2,136		-37
Great skua	7,645	9,634		+26
Mediterranean gull	1	110		+10,900
Black-headed gull	77,197	77,326	60,688	+0.2
Common gull	15,362	20,889	27,831	+36
Lesser black-backed gull	63,198	89,261	24,547	+41.2
Herring gull	161,810	141,703	1,953	-12.4
Greater black-backed gull	17,971	17,450	20	-2.9
Kittiwake	505,465	379,895		-24.8
Sandwich tern	14,766	12,490		-15.4
Roseate tern	323	56		-82.7
Common tern[1]	13,287	12,012		-9.6
Arctic tern	76,908	53,388		-30.6
Little tern	2,577	1,947		-24.4
Guillemot[2]	1,083,881	1,421,376		+31.1
Razorbill[2]	155,148	188,641		+21.6
Black guillemot[3]	38,048	39,316		+3.3
Puffin	488,925	581,110		+18.8

[1] percentage change is shown for coastal birds only due to differences in inland coverage between Seabird Colony Register and Seabird 2000, except for common tern for which both 'coastal' counts include the small proportion of the population that breed inland.
All numbers are counts of pairs, except for [2] counts of individuals and [3] counts of pre-breeding adults.

Chris Gomersall (rspb-images.com)

Manx shearwater

Burrow-nesting petrels

Seabird 2000 has provided the first quantitative national estimates of burrow-nesting petrels. These were censused by playing taped calls into burrow entrances or over suitable nesting habitat and recording the number of responses. Populations are then estimated using correction factors based on the likelihood of birds responding. This revealed that the UK hosts nearly 300,000 pairs of **Manx shearwaters**. The most important **Manx shearwater** colonies in the UK are Rum in west Scotland and the Pembrokeshire islands. The population of **Manx shearwaters** in the UK is between 70 and 90% of the global total, and so monitoring of their future trends is a high priority, especially on Rum where rat predation has increased. A total of 26,000 pairs of **storm petrels** were counted in the UK, with most of these being on the Northern Isles, Skokholm in Pembrokeshire and the Isles of Scilly. These numbers are small when compared to those in the west coast of Ireland that hosts around 100,000 pairs; a single colony in the Blasket archipelago has comparable numbers to the entire UK population. The population of **Leach's petrels** in the UK was 50,000 pairs, with 95% of these occurring on St Kilda. Here they are subject to high predation rates by **great skuas**, and repeat monitoring there has shown declines since 1999. Further research and monitoring of **Leach's petrels** on St Kilda may be required.

Storm petrel

Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

51% of the global gannet population is in the UK

Gannet numbers and breeding range have increased owing to increased availability of food, and the UK now hosts 51% of the global population. The increase of **cormorants** at inland colonies has been especially rapid (though may now have stabilised), fuelled by immigration from coastal and continental sites and high productivity. An abundant food supply, in the form of densely stocked lakes, has probably helped the increase. The reasons for the **shag** decline is unclear, but reductions at individual sites have been associated with reduced food availability, oil spills, storms, predation by mammals and dinoflagellate poisoning. The decline in numbers is concerning, as over 40% of the global **shag** population occurs in the UK.

Great skuas have increased in the UK, while **Arctic skuas** have declined, contrasting trends which may be inter-related. **Great skuas** outcompete **Arctic skuas** for breeding territory and prey on their fledglings, and so the growth in population and range of the former may be contributing to the decline of the latter. Poor availability of sandeels around Shetland during the late 1980s caused repeated breeding failures of **Arctic skuas**, and this will have further contributed to their decline.

Gulls have experienced varied fortunes in the UK, both among species and habitats. **Common** and **lesser black-backed gulls** have increased, **great black-backed** and **black-headed gulls** have remained broadly stable, while **herring gulls** have declined. **Herring gulls** at coastal colonies have declined by 53% since 1969 and this appears to be a result of outbreaks of botulism and a reduction in availability of waste food from refuse tips and trawlers. Despite the overall decline in the **herring gull** population, numbers in urban areas have increased by 570% since 1976, with nearly 20,000 pairs found nesting on rooftops during Seabird 2000. This has led to conflict with people in some areas. Immigration and high productivity in urban areas (owing to protection from predators and to abundant waste food) have contributed to this rapid increase. The **Mediterranean gull** is a welcome addition to the breeding UK seabird assemblage: 110 pairs bred during the Seabird 2000 census, compared to just one 15 years ago. This is part of a wider colonisation of north-west Europe by this species from its stronghold in the Black Sea.

Terns and **kittiwakes** have declined in the UK and, since these all feed on fish close to the surface, this might be due to a reduction in food availability. This appears to be the case for **kittiwakes** and **Arctic terns**, with declines in abundance of sandeels in Shetland and along the south-eastern Scottish coasts meaning successive years of poor breeding success and reduced adult survival. On Shetland, declines have been exacerbated by **great skua** predation. For other tern species that tend to breed farther south, changes in food supply do not explain the declines. Predation by mammals such as mink and foxes is probably the main cause of the decline in **Sandwich**, **common** and **little terns** in the UK. **Roseate terns** experienced the greatest decline of any seabird in the UK, as birds have moved to the Republic of Ireland and due to higher mortality of immatures, possibly because of trapping in the West African wintering areas. **Roseate tern** numbers in the UK are now recovering slightly, however, with 101 pairs in 2003.

Auk species in the UK have all continued to increase, with **black guillemots** increasing marginally but the other species by 20–30%. The **guillemot** population has now reached approximately 1.5 million birds, making it by far the most common seabird species breeding in the UK. The increases have probably been sustained by long-term increases in availability of their small prey fish and a cessation of persecution over the previous century, but the rates of increase of auks have now slowed, probably due to greater competition and reduced fish stocks.

Chris Gomersall (rspb-images.com)

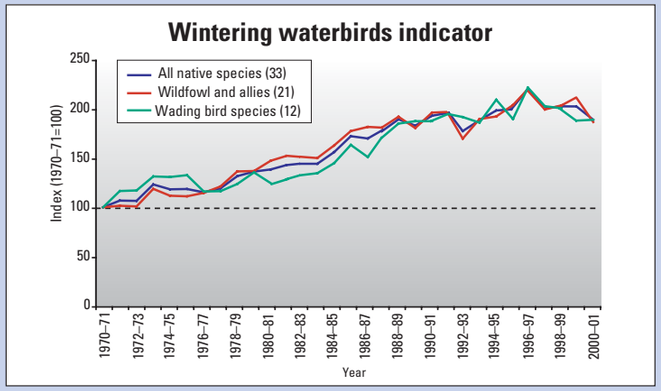
Roseate terns have suffered the greatest declines of all the seabirds

Wintering waterbirds

An indicator for wintering waterbirds

The UK sits in a pivotal position for waterbirds that breed across Arctic regions from central Canada to central Siberia and which migrate in search of extensive wetlands and milder conditions to spend the winter in northwest Europe and parts of Africa. Large estuaries and inland wetlands, coupled with extensive agriculture, are favoured by a wide range of waterbirds. The UK supports considerable numbers of many species – in some cases entire or near-entire populations – during both passage and winter periods. In view of the UK's considerable international importance, the approach used to produce the Government's *Quality of Life* indicator has been applied also to these wintering species to produce a waterbird indicator for 33 species or populations. The graph below shows trends in overall numbers using the most recently available data. The indices start with a value of 100 in winter 1970–71 and if, for example, an index rises to a value of 200, then on average the populations will have doubled since 1970–71.

Overall, the indicator suggests a general increase in both wildfowl and wading birds between 1970–71 and 2000–01. The designation and subsequent protection of internationally important wetlands in this country and abroad, the enhanced regulation of hunting practices, and for some species the improved feeding opportunities provided by agriculture – and more recently the appropriate management of some areas for both farming interests and the birds – have contributed to these increases. In the last few winters, however, the indicator suggests a decline in both groups. Further research is needed to understand what is driving this change. Various reasons have been suggested, such as an eastward movement in the wintering range of some wading birds and wildfowl associated with milder winters on the continents, or more species-specific factors such as hunting pressure on the breeding grounds for some geese, eg Icelandic greylag geese.



Trends in populations of geese wintering in the UK

Species/population	2001–02 total	Long-term trend %	Short-term trend %
Icelandic greylag goose	88,009	32	-14
Greenland barnacle goose	47,352[1]	130	69
Pink-footed goose	265,817	244	20
Svalbard barnacle goose	23,550	541	97
Greenland white-fronted goose	18,600	n/a	32

Long-term trends are the percentage change over 31 years between the winters 1970–71 and 2001–02.
Short-term trends are between 1991–92 and 2001–02.
[1]Figure from spring 2003 census

Long- and short-term changes in wintering goose populations

Data for 2001–02 are not yet available from the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS), meaning we have no update for wading birds and most wildfowl. The table gives figures from long-term goose surveys, including data from the 2001–02 winter. UK–wide monitoring of Greenland white-fronted geese started later than for the other species, so only short-term trends are shown.

These geese are species for which the UK has a special obligation: Britain alone plays host to the entire populations of Svalbard barnacle geese, pink-footed geese and Icelandic greylag geese during winter, while the other two are restricted to Britain and Ireland. These populations also have generally restricted breeding grounds and a very limited number of staging grounds on migration. Consequently, their fortunes lie in the hands of just a few countries.

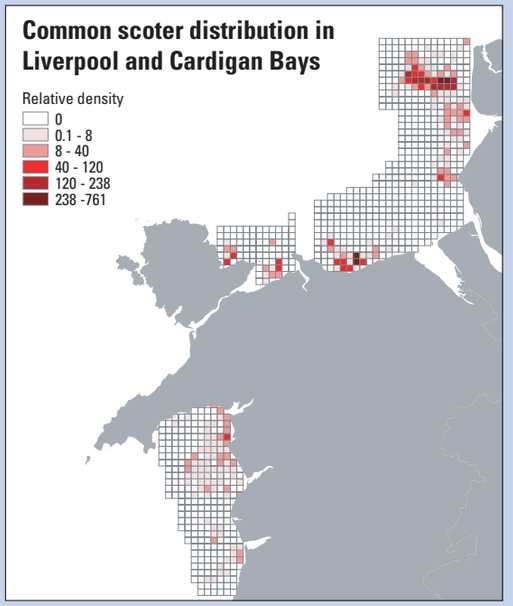
Many species of geese in Britain are subject to long-term monitoring, assessing not only total numbers of birds, but also productivity (the numbers of young produced each year – particularly important since this may vary considerably between years for some Arctic-nesting species) and survival (calculated using data from long-term ringing and marking programmes). These demographic parameters are especially useful in explaining changes in population size.

Most of these populations have fared well over the long-term, for reasons outlined previously. Nevertheless, many of these populations use relatively restricted site networks, and their concentration at few sites leaves them vulnerable to chance events or even local changes in agricultural practices. A recent sharp decline in the numbers of Greenland white-fronted geese, apparently driven by a decline in breeding success over the last 10–15 years, is of particular concern.


Mike Lane (rspb-images.com)

Greenland barnacle geese

This population of barnacle geese breeds in Greenland and winters along the 'Celtic fringe' of Britain and Ireland, favouring islands off the west coast of Scotland and Ireland from Orkney to County Kerry. The principal site is Islay, supporting some 35,000 geese – around two-thirds of the total population. A large proportion of the remainder is found on small, often remote and inaccessible islands that are monitored in spring once every five years. The most recent census in March 2003 recorded just over 56,000 geese; the largest total to date, continuing the increase since the 1960s. There has been a concentration of the population onto Islay – perhaps an indication of the success of conservation management measures there – and adjacent islands, but this has meant an apparent abandonment of the smaller islands, particularly at the edges of the range. This change has been linked to the loss of sheep grazing on these small sites which promoted a close-cropped sward and good feeding for the geese.




Common scoter – a UK BAP species
Mark Hamblin (rspb-images.com)

Surveys of divers and seaducks

Many waterbirds on wetlands in the UK are well monitored by long-established schemes. By contrast, information on the numbers and distribution of wintering divers and seaducks remains a large gap in our knowledge: land-based observations are simply inadequate.

A new aerial survey technique was used to cover waterbirds in nearshore areas in winter 2001–02. This standardised method provides robust estimates and will enable direct comparisons between years, an essential requirement for monitoring of divers and seaducks. This new information is crucial to three major initiatives: to determine the numbers and distribution of these birds (particularly common scoters in relation to activities under the UK BAP for this species) in UK waters; to identify areas for potential designation as marine Special Protection Areas under the EU Birds Directive; and to provide information for the environmental assessment of the effects of offshore wind farms. The UK Government's commitment to a reduction in greenhouse gases has seen a growth in renewable energy production and the letting of large areas of UK waters for potential wind farm development. It is therefore important to have accurate information on the birds using these areas. Effort has been concentrated initially on nearshore waters in the Irish Sea, on east coast Scottish Firths, and on areas off north Norfolk and the Greater Thames.

The results of this new survey have been revealing (see figure left). Numbers of common scoters in Liverpool Bay in recent winters have regularly exceeded the level for international importance (16,000 birds) and on occasion surpassed 50,000. Core areas, used consistently during and between winters, have already been identified and the largest concentration of common scoters was located off the Lancashire coast, stretching up to 15 km from shore. This is contrary to received wisdom that most seaducks around British coasts were close inshore – and all the more remarkable given that this flock was unknown prior to the survey in winter 2000–01. An aerial survey of Carmarthen Bay, a site already known to be of considerable importance for common scoters, provided precise information on the location of birds and has enabled the designation of this site as the first marine SPA in UK waters.

Peter Ryan

Spectacled petrel – critically endangered

The changing status of birds in the UK Overseas Territories

The UK Overseas Territories (OTs) hold significant populations of many bird species of global conservation concern. In 2004, a major revision of the IUCN global red list of threatened species was released, providing a timely opportunity to assess the changing status of these birds. Here, we review changes in the number of globally threatened bird species in the OTs since the last assessment in 2000, and the reasons for these changes, taking only those species for which the UK OTs are thought to hold a significant part (over 20%) of the world population.

Measures of population size, trend and range are used to ascertain the threat of extinction faced by a species. Globally threatened species are assigned, in ascending order of threat, to the categories Vulnerable (VU), Endangered (EN), Critically Endangered (CR) or Extinct in the Wild (EW). In addition, Near Threatened (NT) species are those close to qualifying as globally threatened.

The 2004 global red list reveals that the UK OTs hold significant populations of two Critically Endangered, six Endangered, 21 Vulnerable and nine Near Threatened bird species. In comparison, the metropolitan UK holds just one Vulnerable and one Near Threatened species. The table shows how the number of species in each threatened category has changed since 2000. A further nine species of global concern have smaller but still regularly occurring populations in UK OTs.

Number of globally red listed species in UK Overseas Territories

Threat category	Number of species in 2000	Number of species in 2004
Critically Endangered	2	2
Endangered	4	6
Vulnerable	21	21
Near-threatened	11	9

Tony Palliser (BirdLife International)

Black-browed albatross

Globally threatened species for which the UK Overseas Territories hold important populations

Critically Endangered:	
Spectacled petrel	*Montserrat oriole*
Endangered:	
Tristan albatross	Black-browed albatross
Sooty albatross	Atlantic yellow-nosed albatross
Henderson petrel	*Cahow*
Vulnerable:	
Rockhopper penguin	Macaroni penguin
Wandering albatross	Grey-headed albatross
Southern giant-petrel	*Atlantic petrel*
White-chinned petrel	*Ascension frigatebird*
Inaccessible rail	*Henderson crake*
Gough moorhen	*St Helena plover*
Henderson fruit-dove	*Henderson lorikeet*
Cobb's wren	*Forest thrush*
Pitcairn reed-warbler	*Henderson reed-warbler*
Gough bunting	*Tristan bunting*
Grosbeak bunting	

Species in *italic* type are endemic to UK Overseas Territories.

There were few changes in threatened status between the 2000 and 2004 assessments. Three albatross species were moved to higher threat categories; the **black-browed** and **Atlantic yellow-nosed albatross** jumped from Near Threatened to Endangered, while the **sooty albatross** moved from Vulnerable to Endangered. The **Atlantic yellow-nosed albatross** was only recognised as a unique species in 1998, and is endemic to the Tristan da Cunha group. Long-term monitoring of study colonies on Gough Island indicates that the population is declining at a rate of c58% every three generations; this may even be an under-estimate. The population is now estimated at 32,200–46,200 breeding pairs. The situation for **sooty albatrosses** appears to be even more severe, with declines of c75% over three generations, and a total population of 12,500–19,000 pairs. The population on Gough Island is thought to have halved between the early 1970s and 2000. Around 80% of the world's **black-browed albatrosses** breed on the Falkland Islands where the population is crashing at the rate of 65% in three generations, with over 80,000 breeding pairs lost in the last five years alone.

Only one species was moved to a lower threat category in 2004: the **St Helena plover**, which moved from Endangered to Vulnerable. Major declines in the 1970s and 1990s left the population of this, the last surviving endemic bird species of St Helena, at only a few hundred individuals. However, the population stabilised at this lower level in the late 1990s.

The most threatened bird species in the UK OTs (those classified as EN and CR) comprise four albatross species, three petrels and the **Montserrat oriole**. The oriole is endemic to Montserrat, where it lost most of its range during the volcanic eruptions that began in 1996. Rapid declines in the last remaining stronghold in the north of the island led to its designation as Critically Endangered. Research is underway to determine why the remaining forest patches appear unable to sustain the species at present. The **Henderson petrel** and **cahow** are both known to breed on a single island only. The breeding site of the **Henderson petrel** is Henderson Island in the Pitcairn group, where it is thought likely to be in decline due to predation by Pacific rats, although there are no recent population estimates or data to indicate population trends. The **cahow,** or Bermuda petrel, is endemic to Bermuda, where the population was massively reduced and confined to a single tiny islet by introduced predators, but is now increasing steadily.

The Critically Endangered **spectacled petrel** nests only on the high plateau of Inaccessible Island in the Tristan da Cunha group. The population was estimated at a few thousand pairs in 2000, but there are no precise estimates and no trend information for this obscure bird. However, a very rapid decline has been inferred because the species is caught in large numbers as bycatch by long-line fishing vessels, particularly off the coast of Brazil.

The longlining issue was first identified in the mid-1980s; OTs now have 12 species of global concern for which long-line fishing is a significant threat, including all four of the Endangered albatrosses found in OTs. Of these 12 species, three are endemic to Tristan da Cunha, and OTs hold the majority of the world population for another five of them. Some species are approaching the point where extinction is a realistic possibility. The **spectacled petrel** in particular may be in imminent danger. Clearly, reducing long-line mortality is the most important single conservation action needed for birds in the OTs.

Another group of species that gives cause for concern is the penguins – **rockhopper**, **macaroni**, **gentoo** and **Magellanic** – that occur in the South Atlantic Territories of Falkland Islands, South Georgia and the Sandwich Islands, and Tristan da Cunha. All have declined in parts of their range, for reasons that are poorly understood, but which may be related to large-scale ecosystem shifts in the southern ocean.

Although only one species has improved its red list status, there are reasons for optimism for a number of others that have not yet had their threat status changed. The range of **Cobb's wren** is increasing, following rat eradications on offshore islands in the Falklands. The status of the **Ascension frigatebird** may improve dramatically now that Ascension is believed cat-free and, as stated previously, **cahows** are faring well. All these species have small breeding ranges, and respond to management at their terrestrial breeding sites. Population recoveries may be harder to achieve for those species that are faced with large-scale, at-sea problems – the longline-affected species and the penguins.

Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

Barn owl

Current and planned surveys

The information summarised in this report is drawn from the annual and periodic monitoring programmes described briefly below and from the work of numerous 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 populations 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) [contact BTO].

Goose data are collected by the WWT **Goose Monitoring Programme**, funded under the WWT/JNCC partnership [contact WWT].

The national **Winter Gull Roost Survey** (WinGS), funded by JNCC, EN, SNH, CCW, EHS and Northumbrian Water, is running from 2003–04 to 2005–06 [contact BTO].

The **Waterways Bird Survey** (WBS) and the **Waterways Breeding Bird Survey** (WBBS) have been running since 1974 and 1998 respectively. These schemes aim to monitor riverside breeding birds, particularly waterway specialists, across the UK [contact BTO].

The **Barn Owl Monitoring Programme** was started in 2000 to monitor populations, through standardised recording at a set of **barn owl** sites representative of the distribution in the UK [contact BTO].

The 75th **Heronries Survey**, a nationwide count of occupied heron and egret nests, intended to validate the annual Heronries Census, was largely completed in 2003, but remaining sites will be covered in 2004 [contact BTO].

The RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch is the largest wildlife survey in the world – a simple design (one hour watching birds in the garden each January) means up to 400,000 people have taken part each year. The data provide an excellent snapshot of garden bird numbers across the UK [contact the RSPB].

BTO/CJ 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 [contact BTO].

BirdTrack is a year-round online bird-recording system, launched by the BTO, the RSPB and BirdWatch Ireland in 2004. The web collection of species list data from a large number of observers will enable the fulfilment of a range of national research and monitoring objectives, such as filling gaps in existing species monitoring and describing and monitoring movement patterns [contact BTO/the RSPB/BirdWatch Ireland].

An advance programme of UK-wide surveys of other priority breeding species has been established under the Statutory Conservation Agencies and RSPB Breeding Bird Scheme (SCARABBS) Agreement. **Nightjars** [contact BTO] and **hen harriers** are being surveyed in 2004 [contact the RSPB].

Further reading

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***The state of the UK's birds 2003* is also available online on the websites of the BTO, the RSPB and WWT (see addresses on the back cover).**

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Hen harrier

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Acknowledgements

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

Anglian Water; Birds Eye Wall's; BirdWatch Ireland; *British Birds*; British Sugar; British Trust for Ornithology; British Waterways; Broads Authority; Cambridge University; Centre for Ecology and Hydrology; CJ WildBird Foods; Countryside Council for Wales (CCW); Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA); Department of Trade and Industry; English Nature (EN); Environment Agency; Environment and Heritage Service (Northern Ireland) (EHS); Environment Wales; Esmee Fairbairn Foundation; Essex and Suffolk Water; European Bird Census Council; European Union Life Programme; Falklands Conservation; Foreign & Commonwealth Office; Forest Enterprise; Forestry Commission; Game Conservancy Trust; Greenland White-fronted Goose study group; Hawk and Owl Trust; Hyder; Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC); Lake District National Park Authority; Manx Bird Atlas; Manx Chough Project; Ministry of Defence; National Trust; National Trust for Scotland; Norfolk Wildlife Trust; Northumbrian Water; Raptor Study Groups; Rare Breeding Birds Panel; the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB); Scottish Chough Study Group; Scottish Crofter's Foundation; Scottish Executive Rural Affairs Department; Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH); Scottish Ornithologists' Club; Scottish Raptor Monitoring Group; Seabird Group; Severn Trent Water; Sheepdrove Trust; Shetland Oil Terminal Environmental Advisory Group; Suffolk Wildlife Trust; Thames Water; Wales Raptor Study Group; Welsh Kite Trust; the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust; the Wildlife Trusts; Woodland Trust.

In particular, we thank the landowners and their agents, tenants and employees who have allowed surveyors to visit their land to count birds.

Finally, we would like to thank all the companies and other organisations that have sponsored or taken part in work on priority bird species through the UK in support of the Biodiversity Action Plan process.