



Farmland Seed-eating Birds

Local Biodiversity Action Plan

Ecology

The farmland birds action plan is a grouped plan covering the following species:

Bullfinch (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*)

The bullfinch male has a bright pinkish-red breast and cheeks, grey back, black cap and tail and a white rump. The female is very similar but has much paler pinkish-fawn coloured breast and cheeks. The sizes of the sexes are very similar with both usually around 14-16cm in length with a wingspan of about 22-29cm and usually weigh 27-38g. Bullfinches eat seeds, berries, buds and insects.

Corn bunting (*Miliaria calandra*)

The corn bunting is a small, dumpy brown bird that is most often seen perched on a wire, hedge or post. The body length of the corn bunting is usually around 16-19cm. In summer corn buntings prefer open farmland and in winter can be found in stubble, root crops, weedy fields and farmyards. They eat seeds and insects. Corn buntings tend to fly with their legs 'dangling' down which can aid with identification when in the field. Male corn buntings have been known to mate with as many as 18 different females and play no part in incubating the eggs.

Grey partridge (*Perdix perdix*)

The grey partridge is a medium sized (29-31cm in length), plump, grey coloured gamebird with an orange face and a chestnut tail visible whilst in flight. It is a ground dwelling bird and is usually found in groups of between 6 and 15. These groups are known as coveys. Grey partridges are traditionally found in lowland arable areas but can be found in other areas such as rushy pastures. They eat leaves, seeds and insects.

House sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)

House sparrows are small brown birds about 15cm long. The males are dark brown with pale brown underparts and have a grey crown, a black bib and white cheeks. The females are a very pale brown with slightly paler, buff coloured underparts and a pale band behind the eye. House sparrows have a diverse diet, feeding on buds, seeds, nuts, berries, insects and scraps and are most often found on farmland and cities.



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Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*)

The lapwing is a medium sized bird around 30cm long and has a distinctive black and white appearance which along with its rounded wing shape in flight make it easy to identify. Another identification characteristic is their splendid crest. Lapwings are found mainly on farmland and mudflats but can also be found on wetlands. During the breeding season they prefer areas of spring-sown cereals, root crops, unimproved pasture, meadows and fallow fields. Their main food source is worms and insects.



Linnet (*Carduelis cannabina*)

Linnets are small birds approximately 13.5cm long and feed on seeds and insects. Males are marked with crimson forehead and chest and the females are a duller brown colour. The juveniles are similar to the females but have a paler colouring with bolder streaks. They are mainly found on heathland, orchards, farmland, hedgerows, parks and gardens, saltmarshes and other rough ground.

Reed bunting (*Emberiza schoeniclus*)

Reed buntings are small brown birds (approximately 13-16cm long), with pale/white underparts, with a long, slim, deeply notched tail. The males have a black head and throat and a white collar. However in winter the male has the same streaked head of the female. Reed buntings feed on seeds and insects.

Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*)

Skylarks are small brown birds, usually around 16-18cm long. The rail and the rear edge of the wings are edged with white that is visible in flight. The males have slightly broader wings than the females, which enables the males to hover for longer periods of time. The skylark spends much of its time on the ground foraging for seeds and will supplement this diet with insects, especially during the breeding season.

Song thrush (*Turdus philomelos*)

The song thrush is similar to the mistle thrush but is slightly smaller at 23cm high. It has a similar brown back and pale chest spotted with flecks of chestnut brown to the mistle thrush but is a darker brown and has smaller spots. Song thrushes eat worms, snails, insects and fruit and are commonly seen in woodland, hedgerows, parks and gardens.



Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*)

Starlings are smaller than blackbirds with very short tails and triangular wings. When seen at a glance or from a distance, starlings appear black but they have a rather beautiful glossy, iridescent sheen of greens, blues and purples. The females and males are very similar, however the colour at the base of the bill is different, on the males the base of the bill is a blue colour whereas the females are pink. Starlings can mimic many sounds such as car alarms and telephones. Their diet is extremely diverse, they will eat just about anything including, insects, worms, snails, berries, fruits, seeds, nuts, scraps, suet and even chewing gum.

Tree sparrow (*Passer montanus*)

The tree sparrow is smaller than the house sparrow at 14cm long and has white cheeks and collar with a black cheek-spot, with a chestnut brown head and nape instead of the grey of the house sparrow. They are found in farmland, hedgerows, wetlands and woodlands and feed on seeds, berries, flowers, insects, shoots and buds.

Yellowhammer (*Emberiza citrinella*)

Yellowhammers are small birds and at 15-17cm in length are slightly larger than buntings. The male yellowhammers have bright yellow underparts and head with brown backs streaked with black and a chestnut rump. The white outer tail feathers are visible only during flight. The females and juveniles are duller in colour with grey or black streaks on back and sides.

Current status

This action plan covers granivorous farmland birds, which have suffered severe declines since the mid-seventies. The plan will provide a holistic framework from which the practical elements can be delivered to meet the same objectives.

The group of birds this action plan covers are all listed as UKBAP priorities: Tree Sparrow, House Sparrow, Corn Bunting, Reed Bunting, Yellowhammer, Linnet, Bullfinch, Skylark, Starling, Lapwing, Song Thrush and Grey Partridge. All of which are seed-eaters during the winter months, however the diet changes in Spring and Summer to invertebrates.

Changes from traditional farming methods, loss of key habitat for both nesting and foraging have contributed to the decline of these bird species the following table shows the population trends of the species covered by the action plan.



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Threats

- Changes from traditional farming methods
- Loss of key habitat for both nesting and foraging

How are we helping to conserve farmland birds in the Cheshire region?

- Environmental Stewardship options

Objectives, targets and actions

The objectives, targets and actions to help conserve Farmland birds in the Cheshire region can be found on the [Biodiversity Action Reporting System \(BARS\)](#) along with full details of our progress so far.

How to find out more about farmland birds

Visit the RSPB website for information on the bullfinch, corn bunting, grey partridge, house sparrow, lapwing, linnet, reed bunting, skylark, song thrush, starling, tree sparrow and yellowhammer. For information on the grey partridge visit The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust website at www.gwct.org.uk

How can you get involved?

Become a volunteer partridge counter. For further information please see GWCT website (above) or contact Neville Kingdon, Partridge Count Coordinator at The Game Conservancy Trust, Fordingbridge, SP6 1EF on 01425 651066.

Send your records to the Local Records Centre, rECOrd at <http://www.record-lrc.co.uk/>

More detailed information on the status of these species or changes in population are written up in the annual Bird Report, which is published by CAWOS 12-18 months after the end of the year in question.

If you would like to help in Cheshire to survey the grey partridge contact the Cheshire Green Shoots at <http://www.basc.org.uk/en/conservation/green-shoots/green-shoots-in-cheshire.cfm>



Contact details

Natural England or RSPB

Contact Points - Bullfinch, Corn Bunting, Linnet, Reed Bunting, Skylark, Song Thrush and Tree Sparrow - Andy Evans, RSPB

Corn Bunting - Phil Grice, Natural England 0300 060 6000

Grey Partridge - Dr Nick W Sotherton, Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust

References and Glossary

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