

MORE THAN A MILLION BIRDS COUNTED

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Over 2,600 participants covered a record number of survey squares in 2006. Here, *Mike Raven* and *David Noble* report on the results of the Breeding Bird Survey: 1994–2006.

MAS DE UN MILLON DE AVES CONTADAS

Más de 2.600 participantes cubrieron un número récord de parcelas de conteo en 2006. *Mike Raven* y *David Noble* informan sobre los resultados del Conteo de Aves Reproductoras (BBS): 1994-2006.

The BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) is the main survey that tracks changes in numbers of widespread terrestrial bird species across the UK. Good information on the status of bird populations is fundamental to their conservation and BBS results are already being used in a variety of ways, from wild bird indicators to identifying species of conservation concern to developing action plans, by both Governments and non-governmental organizations

2006 – A RECORD YEAR

This carefully designed and popular survey attracted more than 2,600 participants in 2006, who managed to count more than one million individual birds on a record 3,295 1-km squares across the UK. Record coverage was also achieved in England (2,172), Scotland (333) and Wales (271) and in all nine English Government Office Regions.

A total of 223 species was recorded, including 103 species recorded on enough squares for UK population trends to be calculated (nearly half of those that regularly breed in the UK). Of these, 29 species declined significantly and 45 species increased significantly between 1994 and 2006.

Table 1 shows the longer-term trends for some of the species at risk. Separate trends are also produced for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and the English regions allowing us to see how species are faring in different parts of the country. For a complete list of the latest BBS results, please visit: www.bto.org/bbs/trends/index.htm.

SOME OF THE HIGHLIGHTS :

Turtle Dove: Wood Pigeon and Collared Dove may be everywhere today, but numbers of the closely related Turtle Dove have declined by 61% in just 12 years, according to the latest BBS results. Not only has the Turtle Dove disappeared from many parts of the country, such as southwest and northern England, it has become increasingly hard to find in its arable stronghold of East Anglia. In common with many long-distance migrants, numbers returning to our shores each spring are heavily influenced by conditions along their migratory routes and on the wintering grounds in Sub-Saharan Africa. Hunting during migration and changes in agricultural practice at home may all be contributing to the decline. In particular, reductions in the quantity of weed seeds during the breeding

TABLE 1. UK population changes for Red and Amber Listed species that appear in Birds of Conservation Concern.

Species	% Change 1994-2006 ¹	Species	% Change 1994-2006 ¹
RED LISTED SPECIES			
Willow Tit	-69%*	Yellowhammer	-16%*
Turtle Dove	-61%*	Skylark	-15%*
Corn Bunting	-39%*	Marsh Tit	-10%
Grey Partridge	-37%*	House Sparrow	-6%*
Spotted Flycatcher	-29%*	Song Thrush	17%*
Bullfinch	-28%*	Reed Bunting	39%*
Starling	-27%*	Grasshopper Warbler	49%*
Linnet	-24%*	Tree Sparrow	97%*
AMBER LISTED SPECIES			
Wood Warbler	-66%*	Stock Dove	5%
Curlew	-37%*	Mute Swan	8%
Cuckoo	-30%*	Snipe	14%
Yellow Wagtail	-29%*	Cormorant	14%
Kestrel	-25%*	House Martin	19%*
Redshank	-21%	Grey Wagtail	20%
Tree Pipit	-21%*	Kingfisher	24%
Red Grouse	-18%	Duncock	25%*
Lapwing	-17%*	Redstart	30%*
Meadow Pipit	-16%*	Swallow	36%*
Mistle Thrush	-13%*	Goldcrest	37%*
Oystercatcher	-10%	Green Woodpecker	44%*
Willow Warbler	-7%*	Sand Martin	115%*
Shelduck	0%	Stonechat	177%*
Lesser Redpoll	4%		

¹The figures presented are the percentage change in abundance between 1994 and 2006.

*Results marked with an asterisk are significant.

season may have led to a much shorter period of time in which to raise their young.

Reed Bunting: Numbers of Reed Bunting increased by 9% between 2005 and 2006 and are now up by 39% since 1994. This is a marked improvement on the situation between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s when this species underwent a period of steep decline and numbers more than halved. In common with other seed-eating birds, these declines were largely driven by reductions in winter food availability caused by agricultural intensification. Recent changes in land management encouraged by Government funded schemes, such as set-aside, may have benefited this species. It is hoped that new agri-environment schemes will improve conditions for other farmland species that have undergone similar declines.

Ring-necked Parakeet: Originating from birds that escaped from captivity, the Ring-necked Parakeet became established in the Greater London area during the 1970s and was

added to the official British List in 1983. Numbers have now increased to such an extent, that for the first time, we are able to monitor the population using the Breeding Bird Survey. From its heartland in Surrey and Kent, birds have gradually spread westwards along the Thames Valley. The Ringnecked Parakeet was recorded on 87 BBS squares in the UK in 2006, compared to only four at the start of the survey in 1994, with numbers increasing on these survey sites by more than four-fold. There are serious concerns that this gregarious and aggressive species is competing with other hole-nesting birds that are native to the UK. See Table 2 for the trends of other similar species.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE COUNTRIES

In Scotland, of 54 species monitored by BBS, the Kestrel underwent the greatest decline, with numbers down by 65% since 1994. Kestrels

TABLE 2. Non-native and managed species.

Species	% Change 1994-2006 ¹	Species	% Change 1994-2006 ¹
Greylag Goose	235%*	Grey Partridge	-37%*
[Canada Goose]	161%*	[Pheasant]	38%*
Mallard	20%*	Feral Pigeon	-12%*
Red Grouse	-18%	[Ring-necked Parakeet]	302%*
[Red-legged Partridge]	36%*	[Little Owl]	0%

¹The figures presented are the percentage change in abundance between 1994 and 2006.

*Results marked with an asterisk are significant.

NB: species in parenthesis are not native to the UK. The populations of species not in parenthesis are native, but largely derived from escaped birds (Feral Pigeon), partly derived from escaped birds (Greylag Goose and Mallard) or artificially maintained in some areas through restocking (Grey Partridge) or habitat management for commercial activity (Red Grouse).

were seen on only 12% of Scottish squares visited in 2006, compared to more than 40% for Buzzard. In Wales, the once common Starling headed the list of declining species, with numbers down by 51% since the start of the survey (see Figure 1). This matches the pattern in England, where numbers are down by 38%. Of the 26 species for which trends could be calculated in Northern Ireland, two open country species, Meadow Pipit and Hooded Crow, are faring well in comparison to populations elsewhere in Britain.

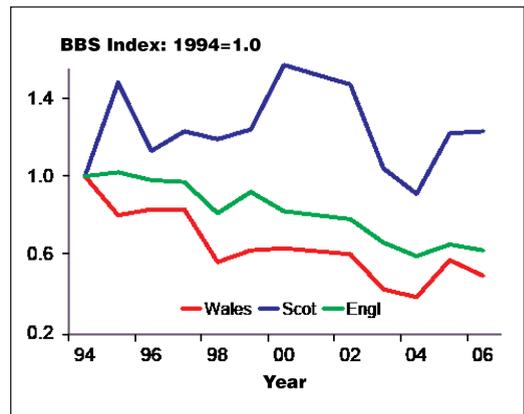


FIGURE 1. The BBS population indices for Starling between 1994 and 2006 in England, Scotland and Wales.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are extremely grateful to all the ROs, observers and BTO members who took part in the BBS last year. The BBS is organised by the BTO on behalf of a partnership between the BTO, JNCC and RSPB.

FIND OUT MORE

Baillie, et al. (2007) *Breeding Birds in the Wider Countryside: their conservation status 2006*. BTO Research Report No. 470. BTO, Thetford. (www.bto.org/birdtrends)

Raven, M J, Noble, D G & Baillie, S R. (2007). *The Breeding Bird Survey 2006*. BTO Research Report 471. BTO, Thetford.

If you would like to take part in the scheme, please contact your local RO, or Mike Raven at BTO HQ (e-mail: bbs@bto.org).

WHY NOT TAKE PART?

The BBS survey is very straightforward, requiring only a little time each year. It is an annual survey with randomly selected 1-km grid-squares allocated to participants within each BTO Region by volunteer Regional Organisers (ROs). It uses line-transect methods, with each observer visiting their square on two occasions between April and June to count all the birds they see and hear along a 2-km route. A third visit may be required to record the habitat. That's all!