

EUROPEAN BIRD INDICATORS

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David Noble reports on the development of wild bird indices across Europe.

INDICADORES DE AVES EUROPEAS

David Noble informa sobre el desarrollo de índices de aves silvestres en toda Europa.

In November 2004, the European Commission adopted six new structural indicators for assessing progress towards its policy targets. In their 'long list', alongside such measures as 'high tech exports' and 'life expectancy' is the 'Farmland Bird Index' — based on population changes in a suite of farmland bird species monitored across Europe since 1990. The EU has set an objective to halt loss of biodiversity by 2010 and this index, if it progresses to the 'short list', will be used as a proxy for overall biodiversity with which to assess progress towards that goal. This is an important milestone for the Pan European Common Bird Monitoring (PECBM) project because it raises the profile of the plight of farmland birds across Europe (which have declined by almost 30% since 1980, see Figure 1) and increases the pressure for individual countries to support their bird monitoring programmes. We also hope that funds might be raised from European sources to initiate some level of bird monitoring in countries without such schemes, such as many of the countries recently joining the EU (e.g. Slovenia) or in line for accession (e.g. Romania).

THE NEW INDICES

Producing habitat-based European-scale indicators is a complex process. First, national

trends for bird species typical of the habitat are aggregated into a supranational index for each species, using methods that take into account the relative population size in each country. Where the species is absent or rare, such as Redbacked Shrike in the UK, it does not contribute to the trend. The supranational species indices are then combined in the same way as the UK Quality of Life wild bird indicators to produce multi-species indices for Europe — such as the Farmland Bird Index and the Woodland Bird Index shown in Figure 1. In contrast to the declining Farmland Bird Index, the Woodland version shows surprisingly little evidence of decline. Disaggregation of this index

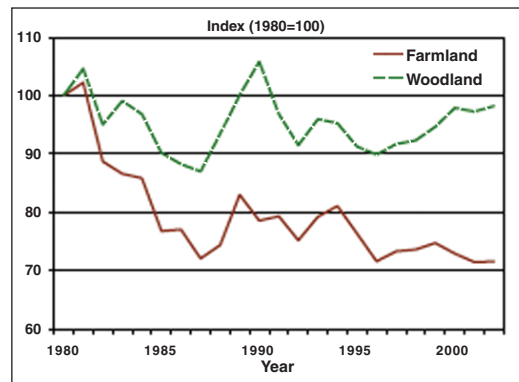


FIGURE 1. European bird indices.

suggests a decline in forest specialists and an increase in more generalist species associated with woodlands, parks and gardens, and work is to continue to explore this issue. The start year for European bird indicators is usually set to 1980 but because countries differ in the duration of their long-term bird monitoring schemes, trends for missing country-year combinations have to be interpolated from trends in adjacent countries within the same geographic region. Details and plots of all the supranational species trends (for 47 species) can be viewed on the EBCC website (www.ebcc.info).

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

Those involved with the PECBM project are extremely pleased with this development, but there are plans to continue to develop these indicators further, to re-assess species inclusion across countries, to consider the use of other landscape classifications and to constantly

improve methods for calculating the population trends. Workshops are planned where national bird monitoring coordinators can discuss the protocols for species selection and potential outputs of the project.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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SPECIES IN THE EUROPEAN INDICES

FARMLAND

Kestrel	Yellow Wagtail	Tree Sparrow	Hobby
Whinchat	Greenfinch	Lapwing	Whitethroat
Goldfinch	Woodpigeon	Red-backed Shrike	Linnet
Turtle Dove	Magpie	Yellowhammer	Little Owl
Jackdaw	Reed Bunting	Skylark	Carrion Crow
Corn Bunting	Swallow	Starling	

WOODLAND

Sparrowhawk	Redstart	Willow Warbler	Buzzard
Blackbird	Chiffchaff	Gr Sp Woodpecker	Song Thrush
Goldcrest	Wryneck	Mistle Thrush	Long-tailed Tit
Tree Pipit	Wren	Great Tit	Jay
Spotted Flycatcher	Blue Tit	Dunnock	Blackcap
Coal Tit	Robin	Garden Warbler	Chaffinch