



SONG THRUSH

Turdus philomelos

1. INTRODUCTION

The song thrush is one of our better known song birds, occurring in woodlands, hedgerows with abundant trees, parks and gardens throughout the sub-region. The song, which usually involves the repetition of phrases three times, gives a good indication of breeding densities and allows easy distinction from the rather similar mistle thrush. It is a partial migrant, with some UK birds moving further south in

Europe for the winter, while many Continental birds winter in Britain. Earthworms and snails are important components of its diet. The song thrush is a good indicator of gardens that support abundant wildlife and now have a relatively large proportion of their populations in urban and suburban areas.



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2. OUR OBJECTIVES & TARGETS

	Target
A. To increase the breeding range to its 1988-91 extent .	2004
B. To increase the size of the breeding population to its estimated 1990 level.	2007
C. To raise awareness of the song thrush and threats to the species.	2008

ASSOCIATED HABITAT PLANS

- Field Margins
- Woodlands
- Gardens
- Scrub & Carr
- Parks & Public Open Spaces
- Traditional Orchards

ASSOCIATED SPECIES PLANS

- Farmland Birds

3. NATIONAL BAP OBJECTIVES & TARGETS

- *To halt decline in UK numbers by 2000.*
- *To maintain the range at the 1995 level as measured by the frequency of occupation of BBS squares and population levels at or above the 1995 level as measured by the BBS index*
- *By 2010, increase the geographical range at least to the 1968/72 range*
- *By 2010, increase the population size at least to the 1970 level as measured by the CBC/BBS index.*

Note: The Common Bird Census (CBC), now replaced by the Breeding Bird Census (BBS), are random sample surveys undertaken across the UK under the aegis of the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO).

4. CURRENT STATUS

Over 75% of the world's song thrushes breed and winter within Europe, where the species is protected under the EC Birds Directive. Between 4% and 10% of these are believed to be in Britain.

Within the UK, it is a *red-listed* species, whose numbers have declined by more than 50% over the past 25 years (Gregory et al 2002). BTO data show a national decline of 57% during 1973-98, though the latest regional data show an increase for the West Midlands of almost 60% between 1994 and 2000 (Raven, 2001). Recent national BBS and CBC trends suggest that the decline has levelled off (BTO).

In Warwickshire, the breeding bird surveys of 1966-68, 1968-72 and 1988-91 all revealed song thrushes in every 10-km, with an estimated population around 1990 of 7,000-15,000 pairs. The Tetrad Breeding Survey currently being undertaken will update the situation, but early indications are that, following the recovery mentioned above, birds are still widespread across the county.

4.1 Legal and Policy Status

The song thrush is protected under the EC Birds Directive and the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981.

4.2 Current Factors Affecting The Species

On intensive arable land, there is evidence that the nesting attempts made are insufficient to maintain a stable population. BTO data from the Nest Record Scheme indicate that breeding performance since the 1970s has improved; it was more likely that overwinter survival of juveniles was poor and resulted in the observed decline (Thompson et al 1997; Siriwardena et al 1998). The reasons for the decline are still only partially understood, but recent research has identified some likely factors, including:

- **lack of food supply (especially earthworms) and available nest sites** as result of changes in farming practice, particularly the drainage, fertiliser

application and switch to silage production on grassland, the conversion of grassland to arable land, and possibly the use of molluscides on crops such as oil seed rape (although no research has been done to establish this yet) ;

- **climate change and unfavourable weather conditions**, particularly dry soil conditions during the breeding season, which restrict the availability of earthworms and snails. (The recent population recovery has coincided with the respite given by a run of wet summers.)
- **fewer damp woods with developed shrub layers and wet ditches** in which to feed when fields are dry, excessive deer grazing in woodland may reduce the amount of nesting habitat available, poor-quality hedgerows may also reduce the amount of nesting habitat available;
- **predation by cats, sparrowhawks and corvids** - may be limiting the density of song thrushes in some areas, but research to establish this is still ongoing (GCT).

In the sub-region there is still plenty of suitable nesting habitat and it seems more likely that the population is limited by food availability rather than a scarcity of nest sites (pers obs.). The public could aid recovery of the song thrush by planting more shrubs in their gardens to provide cover, by reducing their use of insecticides and by ensuring that those they do use are not toxic to birds. It is important that the agencies concerned convey this message through the proposed local actions listed in Section Six below.

5. CURRENT LOCAL ACTION

- Current survey work nationally includes sample plots within Warwickshire. The Warwickshire Breeding Bird Tetrads Atlas will provide a good baseline for future monitoring of range.
- The RSPB has produced advisory sheets in association with FWAG and GCT for farmers, land-managers and advisors providing research-based information on the ecological needs of song thrush; practical methods of farming that will benefit them.

6. PROPOSED LOCAL ACTIONS **(some dates amended - Core Steering Group - Feb 2008)**

ACTION	Lead	Partners	By	Meets objective
Policy & Legislation				
PL1. Consider management prescriptions under agri-environment schemes (<i>e.g.</i> Environmental Stewardship) which are sympathetic to the song thrush's requirements.	NE	WM FC RSPB FWAG	2003-2015	A, B

PL2. Promote take-up of incentive schemes for sensitive farming options that will benefit song thrushes.	FWAG	NE WWT	Review in 2005	A, B
PL3 . Encourage the adoption of a policy discouraging the use of molluscides on land controlled by local authorities e.g. parks, allotments.	WBRC	WWT LAs NE	2005	A, B, C
Site / Species Safeguard & Management				
SM1. Ensure the results of national research into the decline of song thrushes are taken into account and review this action plan accordingly.	BTO	WWT WMBC	Review in 2004	A, B
SM2. Prepare and implement site management plans for farmland and woodland sites that fulfil the requirements of nesting and wintering song thrushes.	FWAG	FC	Review in 2005	A, B
Advisory				
A1. Encourage more mixed farming and sympathetic management of woodland and areas of scrub.	FWAG	FC	Review in 2005	A, B
A2. Encourage a return to spring sown crops – ideally with low-inputs to create weedy stubble afterwards. Also target sympathetic management of set-aside to benefit song thrush.	FWAG		Review in 2005	A, B
A3. Target allotment holders and gardeners for campaign to discourage use of slug pellets.	WBRC	LAs NE GCs ROG	2005	A, B, C
Research & Monitoring				
RM1. Support the current Breeding Bird Survey, which will provide up-to-date and more detailed distribution data.	WMBC	WM	2005	A, B
RM2. Establish effective monitoring of the range and population of song thrushes through the current Breeding Bird Survey.	WMBC	RSPB BTO	Review in 2004	A, B
Communication, Education & Publicity				
CP1. Raise the profile of the song thrush, its decline and habitat requirements.	BTO	WMBC LA21	Review in 2004	A, B, C

CP2. Seek a champion to promote song thrush recovery in Warwickshire.	LBAPSG	BTO EA NE WM FWAG GC HBA LA LA21 GO RSPB WBRC WWT FC WMBC	2008	A, B, C
CP3. Develop a simple monitoring scheme for song thrushes for implementation by schools and households.	LBAPSG	LA21	Review in 2005	A, B, C
CP4. Use the song thrush as a flag-ship species to promote the value of wildlife gardening.	WWT	LA21	Review in 2004	A, B, C

Abbreviations: BTO – British Trust for Ornithology, EA - Environment Agency, NE – Natural England, FC – Forestry Commission, FWAG – Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group, GC – Gardening Club, HBA – Habitat Biodiversity Audit, LA – Local Authority, LA21 – Local Agenda 21, LBAPSG – Local, Biodiversity Action Plan Steering Group, GO – Garden Organic, RSPB – Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, WBRC – Warwickshire Biological Record Centre, WM – Warwickshire Museum, WMBC - West Midland Bird Club, WWT – Warwickshire Wildlife Trust.

7. REFERENCES (also see LBAP Bibliography web page)

Gregory, R.D., Wilkinson, N.I., Noble, D.G., Robinson, J.A., Brown, A.F., Hughes, J., Proctor D.A., Glibbons, D.W. and Galbraith, C.A. (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: 410-450.

Siriwardena, G.M., Baillie, S.R. & Wilson, J.D. (1998a). *Variation in the survival rates of British farmland passerines with respect to their population trends*. Bird Study 45: 276-292.

Tucker, G.M. and Heath, M.F. (1994). *Birds in Europe: their conservation status*. Cambridge. BirdLife International (BirdLife Conservation Series no.3).

8. FURTHER INFORMATION (see separate Links web page for links to web sites)

UK Biodiversity Action Plan no.621

'Garden Organic' (Henry Doubleday Research Association (HDRA) , Ryton, Coventry, Warwickshire, CV8 3LG. Tel: 024 76 303517 or email: enquiry@hdra.org.uk

West Midlands Bird Club. Tel. 01527 852357 or email: secretary@westmidlandbirdclub.com.

Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group - information on the new Environmental Stewardship agri-environment scheme. Tel.01926 318280 or email:warwickshire@fwag.org.uk

9. CONTACT

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