



MSc Project

Closing date: 31-Jan-24

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Ring ouzel breeding site suitability

Timescale: April-July inclusive

Location: Dove Stone (Peak District) and Geltsdale (North Pennines) RSPB reserves

Resources available: training, access to RSPB reserves, equipment, travel, accommodation (Access to shared accommodation and transport is subject to project external funding)

Limitations: Access to university laboratory essential. Sample sizes of occupied territories on project sites in 2021 were modest and may limit the scope for comparison. Travel between reserves would need to be funded by the student. An understanding of common statistical techniques is needed.

Background

The Ring ouzel is a thrush-sized bird of high ground that breeds in Europe and winters in North Africa. The species is Red-listed in the UK owing to a long-term population decline, with low first-year survival, re-nesting rate and early-season productivity implicated as the demographic drivers of decline. These parameters are likely influenced by the availability of suitable habitat mosaics on the breeding grounds, which provide safe nest sites, abundant foraging areas and concealment from predators for post-fledging young.

Trial management to improve habitat conditions has been deployed on two RSPB reserves in northern England since 2014 to encourage ouzels to re-occupy former breeding areas and to increase breeding numbers through improved productivity and/or first-year survival, with habitat management left unchanged in nearby control sites.

While monitoring is being undertaken to evaluate the overall bird and vegetation responses to management, further work is required to investigate the selection of habitat characteristics within occupied territories to give a better understanding of breeding site suitability and help inform future management.

Brief Aims and Methods

The aim of this project is compare the habitat and environmental characteristics of occupied and unoccupied breeding territories between 2021 and 2024.

The student will collect new field data on territory size, habitat composition and structure, covariates of invertebrate food availability (e.g. soil moisture) and berry abundance. The student will use GLMs to investigate which habitat and environmental variables best explain differences between occupied and unoccupied territories.