



# Supporting the colonisation of the European Bee-eater in Britain

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## Abstract

During recent decades there has been an increase both in the total number of European Bee-eaters *Merops apiaster* reported in Britain and in the number of breeding attempts. Although to the end of 2023 there had been only ten confirmed breeding records, six of these have been in the last ten years. The year 2023 was notable, as, for the first time, a site was used for a second consecutive year. In recent decades there has been a northward expansion of the range and an increase in breeding numbers on the near Continent, though years with the highest numbers of migrants in Britain do not necessarily translate into years with breeding attempts. Since 2002, all sites where

breeding has been confirmed have received onsite protection led by the RSPB. In this paper, we summarise the British breeding records and describe the protection measures for each.

## Introduction

In Europe, European Bee-eaters *Merops apiaster* breed widely from the Mediterranean basin as far north as France, Germany and Poland. In Britain, the species was sufficiently rare that records were assessed by BBRC until 1991; in the several decades since then, the species has been monitored in the Scarce Migrants report, though if the trend of increasing numbers continues, this may change (White & Kehoe 2023).

Occasional breeding by the species has taken place in Britain. To the end of 2023, there have been 12 documented cases of breeding by Bee-eaters (table 1). The first recorded instance was in Musselburgh, Lothian, the only breeding record for Scotland (Nash 1920; Forrester *et al.* 2007). In June 1920, a pair built a nest hole in a river bank close to a Sand Martin *Riparia riparia* colony: the birds were found on 3rd June and were occupying the hole by 7th June. The female was found emaciated on 11th June. The bird was put into a greenhouse, where it laid an egg, which was broken. The bird was supplied with breadcrumbs but, perhaps not surprisingly, soon died. The male was apparently caught and killed by a cat a few days later. A second attempt 35 years later was, however, successful: three pairs attempted to breed in a Sand Martin colony at Streat in Sussex in 1955; two of the pairs fledged a total of seven young (Brown & Grice 2005).

**Table 1.** Breeding records of European Bee-eaters *Merops apiaster* in Britain. \* Denotes sites where protection was led by the RSPB as documented in this paper.

year	county	site	total no. pairs	no. confirmed breeding pairs	no. young fledged
1920	Lothian	Musselburgh	1	1	0
1955	Sussex	Streat	3	3	7
2002	Co. Durham	Bishop Middleham*	1	1	3
2002	Yorkshire	Newton Kyme	1	0	0
2005	Herefordshire	Hampton Bishop*	1	1	0
2006	Dorset	Lulworth	1	0	0
2014	Isle of Wight	Niton*	2	2	9
2015	Cumbria	Brampton*	2	2	1
2017	Nottinghamshire	East Leake*	3	3	0
2022	Norfolk	Trimingham*	2	2	4
2023	Greater Manchester	undisclosed site	1	1	0
2023	Norfolk	Trimingham*	1	1	0
		<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>24</b>

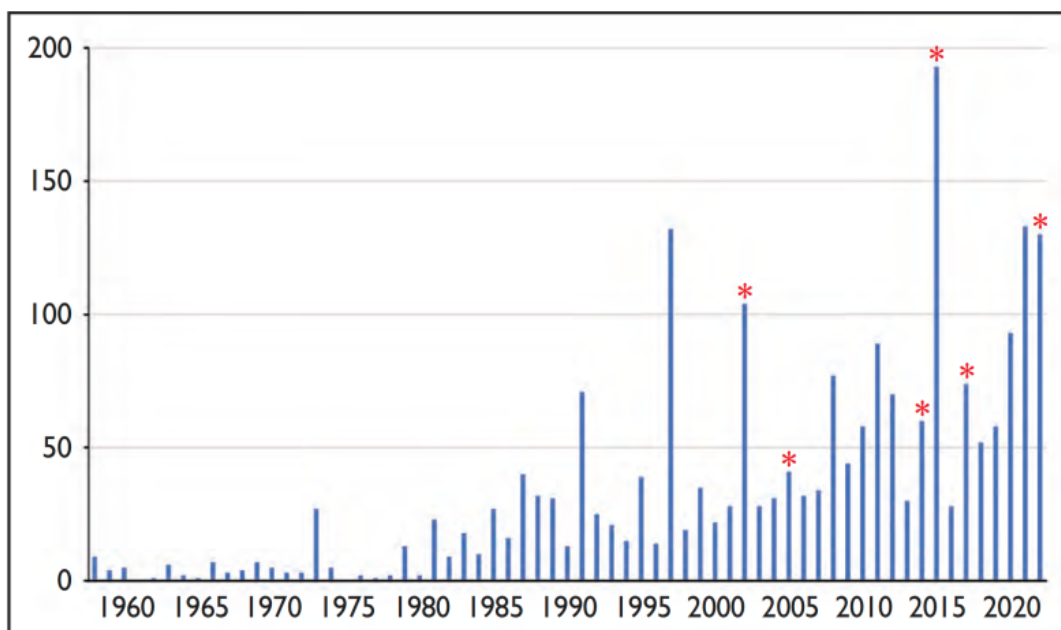
It was then to be almost 50 years before the next recorded breeding attempt, at Bishop Middleham in Co. Durham (Ogilvie *et al.* 2004). In the 21 years

since then, breeding has become more frequent. Since the beginning of this century, there have been ten breeding attempts involving a total of 15 pairs, of which 13 were known to have laid eggs (i.e. confirmed breeding). The frequency of breeding records has also increased, with six of the ten coming from the last decade.

Of the 15 nesting pairs this century, only six (at four sites) have successfully fledged young. In total, 16 chicks have fledged in Britain between 2002 and 2023 (table 1).

## Migrant Bee-eaters in Britain

There has been a clear and consistent increase in the number of migrant Bee-eaters in Britain, particularly over the last 40 years (fig. 1), though there is much annual variation. In the last 20 years, only four years have recorded over 100 birds: 2002 (104 birds), 2015 (193), 2021 (133) and 2022 (130). Breeding in Britain occurred in all but one of these years, but there is not a direct relationship between high migrant numbers and breeding. For instance, migrant numbers were low in 2005 and 2006, yet breeding attempts occurred.



**Fig. 1.** Annual totals of European Bee-eaters in Britain, 1958–2022.

\* Years where breeding attempts detailed in this paper took place.

## Breeding attempts monitored by RSPB

Each nesting attempt came with its own unique safeguarding challenges:

such a rare species is vulnerable to disturbance, deliberately, by means of egg-collecting, or passively from photographers and birders who come to view the birds. Additionally, many nest sites are susceptible to predation.

In seven cases since 2002 (table 1), RSPB has set up measures to both protect nesting sites and allow managed viewing of the birds. Although Bee-eaters in Britain are currently on the edge of their breeding range, and nesting is still sporadic, it is expected that the species will breed more frequently in the future owing to a shift in distribution caused by climate change.

Consequently, safeguarding the nesting attempts of these pioneering pairs not only act as a short-term conservation measure but also ensures that the species is able to successfully spread north in the longer term.

Such safeguarding operations take considerable planning and rely on a wide network of people – from RSPB staff and volunteers to local landowners. They also include logistical measures, such as ensuring there is sufficient car parking, providing viewing areas and interpretation for visitors, while maintaining sufficient distance from the nesting sites to prevent undue disturbance and mounting a 24-hour watch on the nest to deter egg-collectors and monitor any predation threats.

In this paper, we give details of the monitored breeding attempts as well as the (often unseen and typically complex) networking and planning that happens in order to ensure a safe nesting attempt for the birds and a pleasant, accessible visitor experience for the public.

## **Bishop Middleham, Co. Durham, 2002**

After a gap of 47 years since the last breeding attempt in Britain, it came as a surprise that two Bee-eaters present near Bishop Middleham, Co. Durham, were seen exhibiting courtship behaviour in early June 2002. The pair was then observed nest-excavating in the nearby disused quarry, which is managed by Durham Wildlife Trust.

The pair had been found by Mike Hunter, an Investigations Officer with RSPB at the time, on 2nd June and was seen again on 3rd June. Mark Thomas (MT) returned a few days later, together with a tent and his dog, and guarded the nest until a more permanent provision could be put in place. A partnership project involving RSPB, Durham Wildlife Trust, the local farmer, Durham Constabulary, Durham Bird Club and local birders was rapidly set up.

In the first days of the operation, there was some panic and worry, since known egg-collectors had been seen on the site. This was soon countered by the police leaving an old police vehicle parked on the site, which was moved each day by the wardens.

RSPB managed the operation from their regional office in Newcastle, with MT

organising the recruitment of five paid wardens (including Simon Tonkin, Sam Woods and Mark Speck), who temporarily moved into a farmhouse owned by the landowner. A car park was established and a viewing point was set up at a safe distance, giving good views of the two birds, which regularly perched on overhead cables. A small fee was charged for parking, with half of this going to the landowner and half towards the cost of the wardening.

Durham Wildlife Trust appointed Kevin Spindloe as their warden and most decisions were taken jointly between RSPB/DWT. All visitors had to sign in, in the hope that egg-collectors would be detected and then deterred through the protection measures in place. A hide was constructed near to the nest hole and two wardens took it in turns to occupy the hide 24 hours a day, noting all observed behaviour. It was a huge privilege to see the birds up close and just reward for the fantastic local volunteer birders who were steadfast in their support of the project.

Five eggs were laid, with one failing to hatch. The four viable eggs hatched on 24th July and the news, which had been kept relatively under wraps until that point, went public, creating a buzz both regionally and nationally. The landowner was staggered by the whirlwind of activity and national media interest; an image of the birds even featured on the front page of the *Daily Telegraph* and regional television gave frequent updates on progress of the pair.

This publicity swelled visitor numbers – the birds had the ‘wow factor’ needed to draw in the public, and the combination of wardening, public viewing and media coverage meant that many people left having seen Bee-eaters for the first time ever.

One chick died before fledging but three chicks successfully left the nest. Of these, one immediately vanished but the other two were frequently seen being fed by their parents.

Behind the scenes, the hard work was ongoing, including hours of sitting and watching from the hide. This paid off when a Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* came in, took one of the adult birds at the nest hole and pinned it to the ground. One of the wardens ran out of the hide, scaring the Sparrowhawk off its prey – and the Bee-eater survived.

On 28th August, the two adults and two juveniles were seen in flight over the quarry with Barn Swallows *Hirundo rustica*. The final sighting of the birds came on 2nd September.

It is thought that 15,000 people visited the site. In many ways, the response to this pair of birds has set the tone for most other modern-day protection schemes, including other pairs of Bee-eaters in the following two decades.

## Hampton Bishop, Herefordshire, 2005

In contrast to the Co. Durham breeding record, a nesting attempt at Hampton Bishop, Herefordshire, was not successful. A pair of Bee-eaters was found nesting in a natural riverbank along a stretch of the River Wye, two miles southeast of Hereford. RSPB negotiated access with one landowner at Colcombe Coach Farm, situated on the opposite bank from the nest, and an 'Aren't Birds Brilliant' viewpoint was set up, giving unrestricted views of the nest. Unfortunately, access could not be gained to the land that contained the nest, and the nest was predated by a mammal – presumably a Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes* – which dug into the nest some time on the night of 8th August. Evidence showed that the chicks had been only days away from fledging.

It is estimated that 4,000 people visited the viewing scheme before its untimely closure.

## Niton, Isle of Wight, 2014

On around 17th July 2014, three Bee-eaters were reported near Niton, on the southern tip of the Isle of Wight. National Trust ranger Ian Ridett informed RSPB and sent photographs of a possible nest hole, which was located on the National Trust Wydcombe Estate. Keith Ballard, the RSPB Brading Marshes warden, visited the site with IR on 18th July and a Bee-eater entered a nest hole, which was situated at ground level in a small depression in a cow field. A few local birdwatchers had been aware of the nesting attempt, but the news had largely been contained.

Mark Thomas was contacted and, as a result, Mick Turton was rapidly employed by RSPB and despatched as a rapid-response warden, having just finished a contract protecting Montagu's Harriers *Circus pygargus* on the Humber Estuary.

It was clear that one active Bee-eater nest was present on the site and that four adult birds were in residence. Owing to the high likelihood of predation of the ground-level nest, an electric fence was hastily erected by the RSPB on 23rd July. The local police were informed and 'Operation Bee-eater' was up and running. Volunteers were sought and a protection rota was soon in place, with help from volunteers from the National Trust, Isle of Wight Natural History & Archaeological Society and Isle of Wight Ornithological Group..





241. Adult and juvenile European Bee-eaters *Merops apiaster*, Niton, Isle of Wight, August 2014.



242. Juvenile European Bee-eaters, Niton, Isle of Wight, August 2014.

In an internal memo, Keith Ballard wrote: 'It's the stuff of dreams to have a rare nesting event like this on the Isle of Wight and it's looking like the initiative by the National Trust rangers to make the nest site safe is going to lead to success for these birds. It has been a pleasure for the RSPB staff and volunteers to help with this operation. There was a very real threat that these nesting birds could have been targeted by egg thieves, so it's been quite a nervous period over the last 12 days.'

The eggs were thought to have hatched on around 21st July, with increased nest visits by the adult pair thereafter. RSPB employed a contract warden, Stephanie Peault, who arrived on 31st July – just in time for the public announcement of the birds' presence on the BBC's *The One Show*. As expected, an influx of visitors to the dedicated viewing site followed.

On 2nd August, four adult birds were confirmed at the site. On 15th August, three juvenile birds appeared at the main viewing site – but confusion ensued, as young were still being fed in the nest hole! The following day, a National Trust volunteer located five Bee-eaters in a tree about 1 km away from the nesting site: a family party of two adults and three juveniles. The birds then flew off. The birds were followed and subsequently relocated around a field, where they kept disappearing, seemingly without trace. On closer inspection, a nest hole was found, in the ground, with a juvenile Bee-eater staring out of it! We now had two nests on our hands. The location of the second site was not made public.

Young from the first nest fledged on 20th August, and a grand total of 13 birds were photographed together in the area on 23rd August.

A total of 3,500 people visited the Niton viewing scheme.

## **Brampton, Cumbria, 2015**

On 19th June 2015, aggregate company Hanson UK informed RSPB of the presence of Bee-eaters in their Low Gelt Quarry at Brampton, Cumbria. The birds had been spotted by the quarry foreman as they were flying around amongst Sand Martins which breed at the site.

MT visited the site on 20th June and observed a total of six Bee-eaters, with two pairs digging nest holes in separate parts of the quarry. Thankfully, the nests were high on the sand faces and could not be reached by mammalian predators; however, both sand faces were prone to erosion during periods of rain.

A small caravan was moved into the quarry and used by RSPB protection staff, including Tim Chamberlain, Pete Howard, Jason Moule, Stephanie Peault and Dave Waudby, who were employed to guard the nests and to show the birds to the visitors.



Hatching occurred on 30th July and a national press release was issued by RSPB and Hanson on Friday 31st July, announcing a viewing scheme open from dawn the following day with parking provided for a small charge; the parking area was in an adjacent field, courtesy of landowner Henry Swann, who usually held motocross racing on the site. As part of the protection measures, motocross events were not held during summer 2015.

Road signs were acquired to ensure a manageable flow of traffic to and from the working quarry and a viewing area was set up on a high point along a perimeter path around the quarry. From here, the birds could be watched from above.

One of the nests failed, probably owing to the wet weather, but a single chick successfully fledged from the remaining nest. The last sighting of any Bee-eaters in the quarry was on 8th September.

It is thought that 5,000 people visited the viewing scheme.

## **East Leake, Nottinghamshire, 2017**

Initially, five Bee-eaters were reported to RSPB by the aggregate company Cemex on 26th June. The birds were frequenting a sand quarry on the Nottinghamshire/Leicestershire border, which was, at the time, inactive owing to the operators waiting for planning permission for extended works. The birds had been first seen on the evening of 25th June by David Kirman and, at dawn the following day, many local birders were present at the site.

RSPB Investigations staff Tim Jones and David Hunt attended later that day and observations within the quarry proved that seven birds were actually present, and that copulation and nest-digging was under way.

Positive discussions took place with Cemex, who, as an RSPB business partner, was already engaged in positive conservation measures at a number of sites nationwide. MT met with the assistant quarry manager, who offered much support for the operation throughout.

A public viewing area was designated, overlooking the area where the birds were feeding. The local landowner, Brian Burton, from whom Cemex rented the land, was also contacted and he was delighted to allow RSPB to set up a parking and welcome area in one of his adjacent fields. A parking fee was put in place with proceeds split between the landowner and RSPB for wardening costs – it was rumoured that the farmer paid for his daughter's wedding from his share of the proceeds! RSPB certainly did well from the sales of its Bee-eater pin badge, which became a collector's item.

Cemex kindly contributed towards the cost of the necessary wardens, and Keiran Lawrence and Daniel Branch were employed 'on loan' from Spurn Bird

Observatory. An excellent group of volunteers assisted the wardens, including members of the local RSPB group, local birders and individuals from Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust. The rather mundane but necessary project logistics – such as banking the day's car-parking takings – were ably assisted by RSPB staff based at nearby Langford Lowfields, under the guidance of Michael Copleston.

An excellent flow of national media coverage followed, with interest in the birds seemingly undiminished by the now-relatively-frequent recent run of nesting attempts. BBC *Springwatch* visited and, for the first time, social media – especially X (Twitter) – played a huge part in promoting the latest news and visiting instructions; a far cry from the situation in Co. Durham in 2002.

As it happened, the quarry was an excellent place to set up such a viewing scheme, with good facilities for the wardens to assist with overnight protection work. The main problem was that the A6006 – a busy main road – had to be crossed from the car park to reach the viewing area. This aside, many positive comments were received from visitors. One visitor said: 'The atmosphere [on site] was as I have come to expect – very enjoyable – and it was a pleasure to see so many young people with cameras and telescopes, young children with their parents or grandparents, young babies being carried on the backs of their mums. I actually spoke to a young couple with a child and had a laugh with them and suggested that they take a photograph to show them later at their first twitch.'

All was going well, with two nests being incubated, until the weather turned wet for several consecutive days and the two nests failed on 6th August, presumably owing to a sudden lack of available insect prey. The adult birds left the site shortly after, being seen briefly in nearby Leicestershire.

In 2018, six birds were reported back at the quarry on 30th May, but this report could not be substantiated and we can be sure that birds did not attempt to breed again at the quarry.

## Trimingham, Norfolk, 2022 & 2023

On 5th June 2022, Andrew Chamberlain discovered a flock of four Bee-eaters near the coastal radar site at Trimingham, Norfolk. The weather was poor, with cold wind and rain, and it was thought that the flock would move on – but they did not. In fact, it became clear they had intentions to set up home in the adjacent quarry, owned by the Gott family. RSPB was called, and MT made a site visit together with Andrew and another local birder, Simon Chidwick. MT contacted and met the landowner, Dan Gott, and his young son Harry. Dan was fully supportive of protecting the birds and enabling visitors to see them in a controlled manner. The quarry was still part operational, with

occasional lorry activity, which Dan kindly agreed to stop for the duration of the birds' stay.

Two pairs of birds were rapidly excavating nest holes, some 50 m apart, on a south-facing sand face in the lower part of the quarry. Within days, the full Bee-eater circus arrived in town, with three wardens – Darren Oakley-Martin, Josh Fusiara and Fabian Harrison – all employed, the local North-East Norfolk Bird Club fully involved and a visit from a high-ranking officer in the Norfolk Police Force, complete with full officer's uniform. Early problems with bird photographers were short-lived thanks to Norfolk Police, especially the intervention of Wildlife Crime Officer PC Chris Shelley. Although local birders knew of the situation, news had been kept local, so it came as a pleasant shock to many when official news was broadcast via BBC *Springwatch* on the evening of 16th June. By dawn the next morning, the first birders had arrived and over a thousand people had seen the birds in the first week of operation.

As before, a parking charge, split between the owner and RSPB to cover some of the protection costs, was instigated. Trimingham was a perfect site, with ample parking, clear delineation of the quarry to avoid disturbance to the birds, a fantastic local community of willing volunteers and, unlike at the Nottinghamshire site, no busy road to cross.

In the evening, the flock of six Bee-eaters flew to roost away from the quarry. The first signs that incubation had begun was when this flock of six dropped in number, at which 24-hour wardening was put into place. As with all the previous Bee-eater projects, technology helped enormously, and thermal binoculars were a godsend for nightshifts, while the installation of daytime cameras, supported by Viking Optics, allowed the nests to be monitored and saw the footage streamed live online.

As with all the previous projects, the contribution of volunteers was enormous and, without Simon Chidwick and the North-East Norfolk Bird Club, the scheme would not have been possible. Simon was present every single day and acted as an extra but unpaid warden and the bird club, admirably organised by Carol Thornton and Trevor Williams, provided scores of willing volunteers on a daily basis, either watching over the car park or showing the birds to the visitors. A few hardy volunteers went even further and did a night shift or two – including Richard Porter, Mike Lawrence and Peter Dolton. Once again, there was excellent media coverage of the event.

Bee-eater chicks were first spotted in the entrance to one of the nests on 12th August, observed using one of the nest cameras. On 15th August, the first chick fledged.

In total, four chicks fledged, and a flock of six adults and four juveniles were seen flying together on 23rd August. All had departed the quarry by 27th

August, at which point the viewing site officially closed. Over 20,000 people visited the protection scheme in 2022. The birds had benefited from a dry, hot summer – at times, too hot; intense heat forced the site to be shut to visitors on 19th July.



*Bob Cobbold*

**243.** Adult European Bee-eater, Trimingham, Norfolk, June 2022.



*Bob Cobbold*

**244.** Flock of adult European Bee-eaters, Trimingham, Norfolk, June 2022.



245. Adult European Bee-eater feeding fledged juvenile, Trimingham, Norfolk, August 2022.



246. European Bee-eater nest sites (circled), Trimingham, Norfolk, August 2022.





**247.** European Bee-eater nest site, Trimingham, Norfolk, August 2023. The same nest hole was also used in 2022.



**248.** Juvenile European Bee-eater at nest-hole entrance, Trimingham, Norfolk, August 2022.

In 2023, Bee-eaters returned to Trimingham, with three individuals first being seen on 26th May. Wardening for the first two weeks was largely a volunteer effort, led by Simon Chidwick, who held the fort and kept MT and RSPB informed. It was clear, based on the difficulty of wardening the site in 2022, that more wardens would be needed, so RSPB employed six individuals – Eve Arnoud, Lauren Baker, Myrto Karydi, Nick Mitchell, Rob Mortley and Ali Riza – and head warden Greg Watson. A welfare unit, public toilet and viewing gazebo were deployed and the site became operational once again. Fewer Bee-eaters were present in 2023 than in 2022, although a party of five non-breeding birds was seen briefly in the quarry on 14th June.

Many visitors from the previous year made a repeat visit, and North-East Norfolk Bird Club was essential once again in providing skilled volunteers to man the watchpoint.

Sadly, it was clear from the birds' behaviour on 27th June that the single-pair breeding attempt had failed. Incubation of the eggs had stopped for unknown reasons.

The birds remained in the area over the following weeks and were observed engaging in courtship but, in the end, it became clear they were not going to attempt to breed again. The birds become far less dependent on the quarry, returning for short and unpredictable periods, so the decision was made to close the viewing scheme down.

## Greater Manchester, 2023

At the time of the closure of the viewing area at Trimingham in late June 2023, RSPB was alerted to another Bee-eater breeding attempt taking place 300 km away in Greater Manchester.

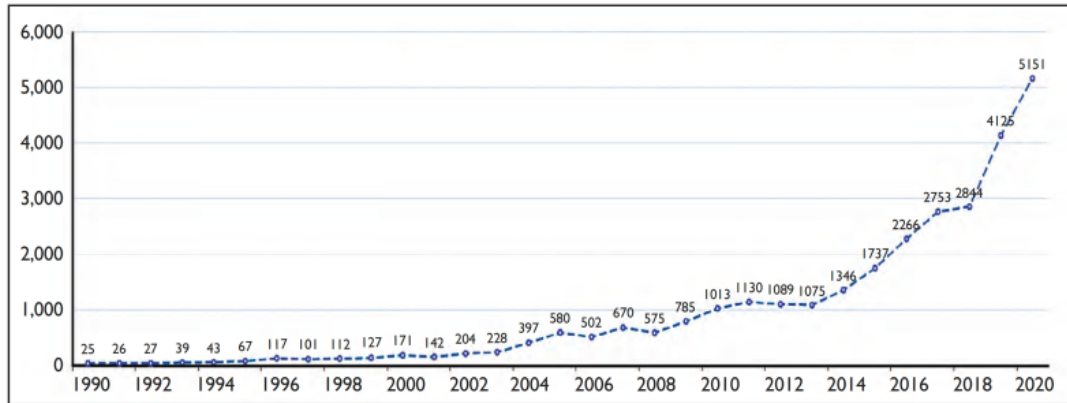
The birds were first seen at the undisclosed location in mid June and quickly began breeding activity. The site was considered unsuitable for large-scale viewing prior to hatching, which would likely have caused disturbance to the birds, and the RSPB Investigations Team suggested that the news be initially suppressed. Further discussions and daytime nest-watching and protection took place by a small team of local observers.

It is thought the first chick(s) hatched around 13th July. At that point, MT had intended to attend the site with the local observation team with a view to plan and potentially implement some form of public viewing. Unfortunately, however, no chicks ever fledged and the birds abandoned the nest and left the site on 20th July, possibly due to predation or some form of internal collapse of the nest burrow.

The site has remained confidential in the hope the birds may return in 2024.

## Expansion of breeding range elsewhere in Europe

The results of the second European Bird Atlas (Keller *et al.* 2020; fig. 4) show a significant northward expansion of the breeding range with birds breeding in, for example, central France, Switzerland, Austria, the Netherlands, Germany and Poland.



**Fig. 2.** Number of breeding pairs of European Bee-eaters in Germany, 1990–2020 (from <https://www.dda-web.de/voegel/voegel-in-deutschland/Bienenfresser/brutbestandsentwicklung>).

In the Netherlands, breeding has occurred in every year since 2005, with a maximum of 12 pairs in 2015 (de Jong *et al.* 2022; fig. 3). The population in Germany was estimated at 5,151 breeding pairs in 2020 and growth appears to be proceeding exponentially (Dachverband Deutscher Avifaunisten 2022; fig. 4). These increases in northern Europe are offset by some range contraction south of the Alps (Keller *et al.* 2020).



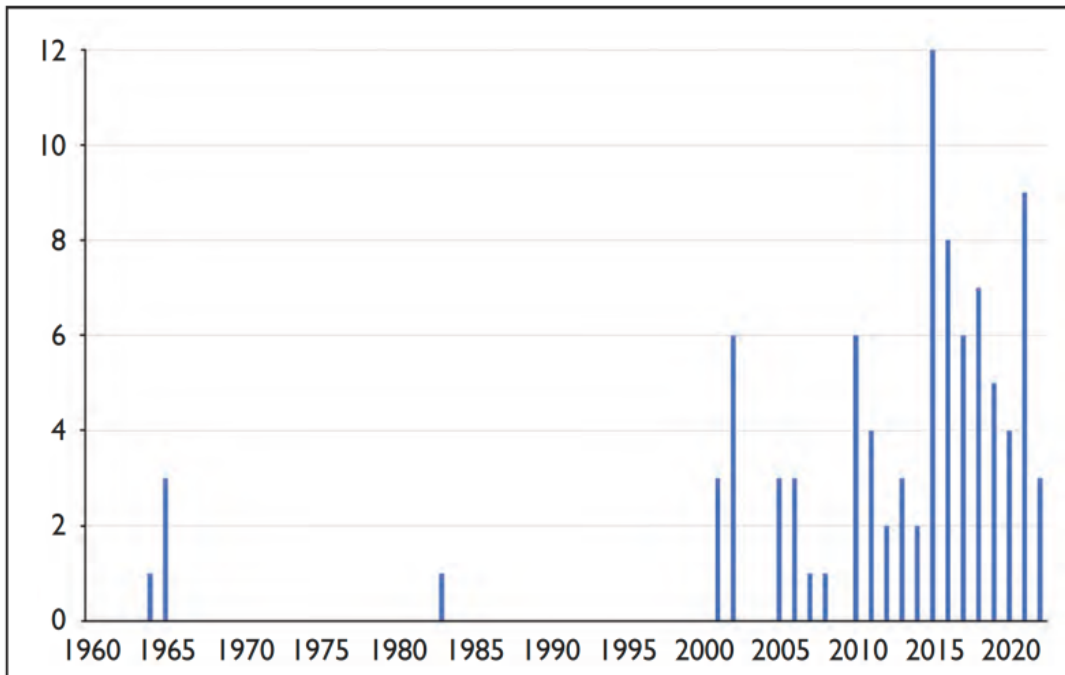


Fig. 3. Number of breeding pairs of European Bee-eaters in the Netherlands, 1960–2022.

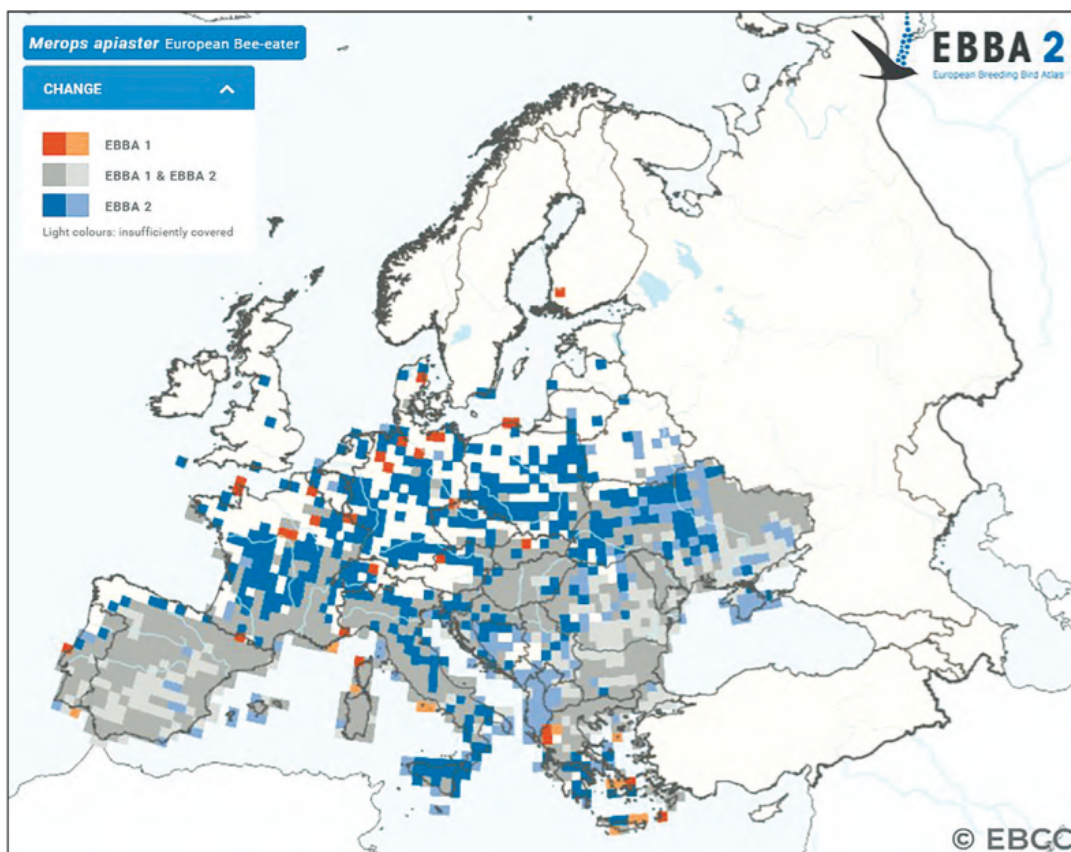


Fig. 4. Change in distribution of breeding pairs of European Bee-eaters in Europe between the first European Bird Atlas (EBBA1 1972–95) and the second (EBBA2 2013–2017). Orange squares denote areas where breeding no longer occurs; grey squares areas where birds were breeding during both periods; and blue squares formerly unoccupied areas where breeding

The main cause of the range expansion in Europe is believed to be climate change. Arbeiter *et al.* (2016) analysed the effect of local weather conditions on the availability of airborne insects against variation in brood size and nestling condition of Bee-eaters at the northern edge of their range where years with adverse weather frequently occur. The availability of food increased with air temperatures and duration of sunshine and they found a positive correlation between higher food availability and the productivity of the breeding birds. Annual breeding success was up to 32% higher in drier and hotter summers.

## Conclusion

It is likely that, as populations on the near Continent expand and increase, more Bee-eaters will reach our shores and, if birds pair up and find a suitable nest site, breeding in Britain will occur more frequently. The return of a pair to Trimingham in Norfolk in 2023, following successful breeding in 2022, hints that a British breeding population may become established, although the success of pioneering pairs will be dependent on suitable weather during the stage when chicks are being fed in the nest.

In Britain, breeding Bee-eaters capture the imagination arguably more than any other species and it is estimated that over 50,000 people have visited the seven viewing schemes that have been set up since 2002. A project of the scale set up at Trimingham, with multiple paid wardens, provision of public toilets, accommodation and transport costs, quickly added up to around J35,000 for just two months of protection. Financial contingency planning for these events is tricky, as no conservation organisation is able to hold back that amount of money 'just in case'.

While Bee-eaters may not be globally threatened, it is clear that, without proper wardening, breeding in Britain would almost certainly fail owing to human interference and disturbance or predation. Colonising species therefore remain a conservation target until populations have expanded to self-managing levels. Bee-eater projects have an unmeasurable wider conservation benefit from empowering people around a common cause, arguably more so in recent years when the double spectre of the climate and nature crisis looms ever large.

If you are lucky enough to discover breeding Bee-eaters or Bee-eaters in suitable habitat during the breeding season, please think carefully about who the sighting is reported to and please let RSPB Investigations know. With birds having now returned to the same breeding site and pairs occurring in



two different places in one year, this species looks set to continue its colonisation of Britain.

## Acknowledgments

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Huge gratitude must go to the numerous people who have helped with their time, dedication and efforts to assist in the protection projects over the past 22 years – thank you!

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## Supporting the colonisation of the European Bee-eater in Britain

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