

Bunting bulletin

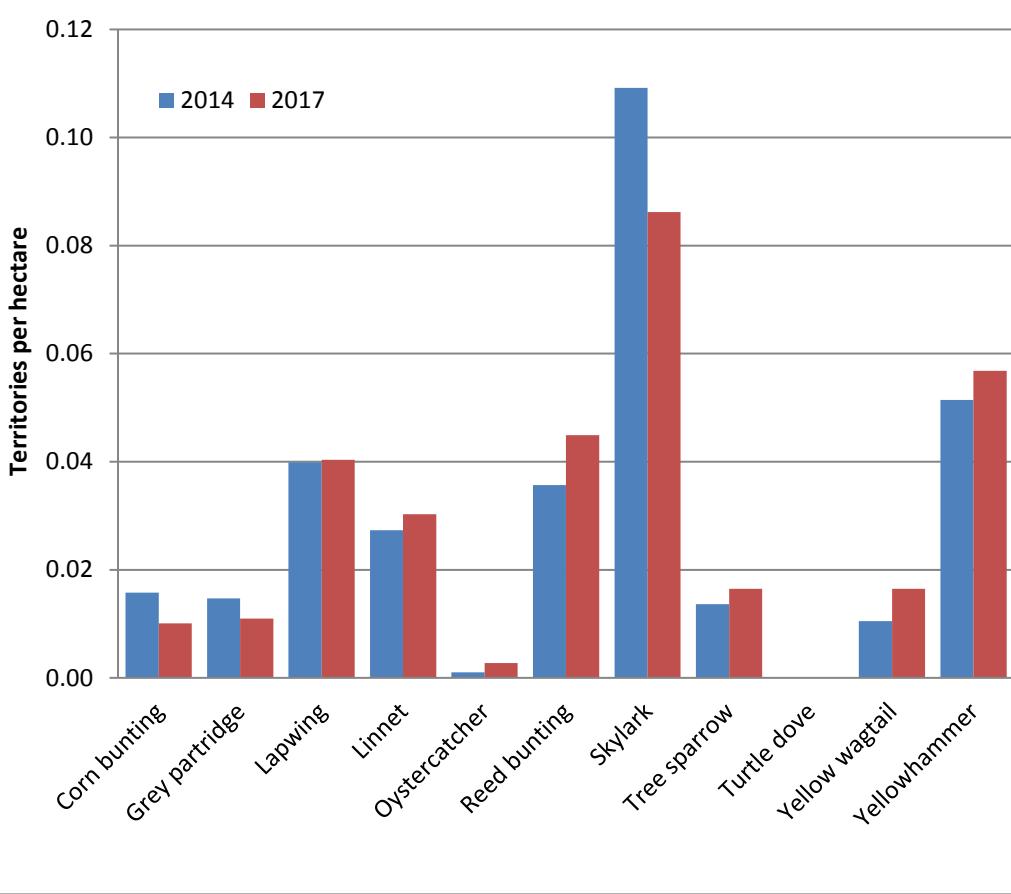
News from the Axholme and Idle farmland bird project

Issue no. 1 Autumn 2017



In this issue...

- Latest results from local bird monitoring
- Farmers give tree sparrows a home
- How to help the fat bird of the barley



Bird monitoring results from sites surveyed in 2014 and 2017

Your countryside, nature's home

Farming is crucial to keeping the Isle of Axholme and Idle valley special for people and wildlife. Centuries of land and water management have shaped its rich, flat landscape. Today it is nationally important for farmland wildlife such as lapwing, grey partridge and brown hare.

The Farmland Bird Project is part of a network of similar initiatives across the UK, each supporting farmers and local communities who want to help these birds thrive. Regular bird monitoring is available to farmers in the area at no cost. Assistance with farm conservation projects and funding applications can also be provided, and is fully subsidised.

Together, we're aiming for 75% of the arable area to be in good condition for farmland birds by 2023.

Key to this is the area of features providing seed in winter, and flowers in spring and summer. So far we've seen farmers providing at least 140 hectares of winter food (ahead of target), and 74 hectares of flower-rich habitat.

If you know of areas with these features that we haven't visited yet, please let us know!

Latest bird trends

At least thirty farmland sites are surveyed once every three years. This year volunteers successfully covered 14 sites – last surveyed in 2014. The most frequently recorded species were blue tit and chaffinch. More unusual sightings included avocet, black-tailed godwit and merlin.

Of the target species for the project, linnet, oystercatcher, reed bunting, tree sparrow, yellow wagtail and yellowhammer have all increased on the sites compared to three years ago.

Unfortunately, this year's surveys also showed corn bunting, grey partridge and skylark have decreased since 2014, and lapwing remain at similar levels. All these trends are roughly in line with national trends over a similar time period.

Skyers Farm recorded the highest total of breeding pairs of target species, at 47 pairs of nine of the eleven target species. Congratulations!

For further details about getting involved in bird monitoring in 2018 contact: **Anna Broszkiewicz**



Wildlife success – on the farm and online

Nature Friendly Farming Network

There are many farmers across the UK who choose to farm in sustainable ways that benefit nature. The newly-formed Nature Friendly Farmer Network aims to help share insights and experiences, raise public awareness of nature friendly farming, and help farmers work together to influence agriculture policy.

The network is being led by farmers across the UK.

Chair Martin Lines said 'The Nature Friendly Farming Network provides a platform for members of the farming community to share their knowledge, attend training and events, and spread the benefits of nature friendly farming at a national level.'

'The community of like-minded farmers can shape policy, take advantage of social media

promotion and increase support for sustainable farming techniques.'

Find out more online at www.nffn.org.uk



Festival of the Plough

Every September sees us join hundreds of others at the Festival of the Plough in Epsom. This vintage ploughing match has been running for over thirty years, and is a highlight of the local calendar.

This autumn, visitors to the RSPB marquee had the chance to win

either a sack of winter bird food mix or garden wildlife kit. Farmer Mrs Fox won the winter bird food mix, and we wish them well growing a feast for their farmland birds. Mrs Ellison won the garden wildlife kit.

Last year's winners, the Thornton family, won a selection of nest boxes and feeding station. They installed the nest boxes around a newly restored farm pond, and this summer project adviser Jim Lennon found nests full of tree sparrow chicks in two of the boxes. Fantastic!



Tree sparrow chick

Making a difference

Surveying – Bob and Mary's story

"It's 6 a.m. in late April. The sun has just risen. We are in open country. In front, a ragged hawthorn hedge stretches into clearing mist. Time to start the survey – pencil out, binocular strap over the head, tick sheet ticked! Ahead, three hours of recording farmland birds. Just them, us and any other wild creature that wanders across our path.

Tiring? Yes. Rewarding? Definitely! Uplifting? Undoubtedly.

Want to improve your identification skills and help make a difference to the lives of our farmland birds? Age is no barrier – volunteering is for you!"

Using bird data – Pollybell Farm's story

"The farmland bird survey has been undertaken across the farm for a few years now, and this has enabled us to monitor the diversity of birds and better understand their habits. We've been able to adapt the environment to benefit them, such as targeting certain areas for supplementary feeding in winter.

The RSPB team have been able to lend advice on managing the non-cropped areas for biodiversity, and on our agri-environment agreements.

We see this as increasingly important in making our business environmentally as well as financially sustainable."

Farewell Jim

Your Conservation Adviser, Jim Lennon, will be leaving us after Christmas. Jim has worked on the project since it began in 2013, and has been a familiar face in many fields and on many farms.

We wish him all the best in his new adventures, and will let you know who will be taking up the challenge in the New Year.



Jim Lennon



Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

Corn buntings like to sing from prominent perches

Species spotlight: corn bunting

Easily overlooked, but with a song that is the sound of summer, the corn bunting is a large, heavy-looking brown bird with a particularly thick bill.

Corn buntings have declined by 43% across Great Britain and Ireland since 1994. You're most likely to see them in open landscapes, away from woods and trees – especially where there are big fields of weedy or undersown spring barley.

As with many farmland birds, they need lots of insects over spring and summer, and seeds – especially cereal grain – throughout the winter. However, because they nest on the ground throughout the summer, their chicks are also especially vulnerable at harvest time.

One technique that is helping in autumn-sown cereals is double-drilling. Strips, or even blocks, of autumn-sown wheat are drilled at twice the usual rate – usually towards the centre of a suitable

field. Here the extra thick vegetation is especially attractive to nesting corn bunting.

It works particularly well where the strip can be left until the autumn – or even perhaps as a standing supply of winter grain.

For help trying this out, contact **Kirsty Brannan** – 01295 676466 or kirsty.brannan@rspb.org.uk

Further information

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The RSPB is the country's largest nature conservation charity, inspiring everyone to give nature a home.



The RSPB is a member of BirdLife International, a partnership of conservation organisations working to give nature a home around the world.

