

SUFFOLK LOCAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

Bullfinch

(Pyrrhula pyrrhula)

1 Definition

The Bullfinch is a bird of woodland, orchards and farmland. It is fairly common and quite widespread in the county, but has declined on a national scale in recent years. It uses dense shrubs and tall untrimmed hedges as its preferred habitat. The staple winter food of bullfinches is often ash seeds.

2 Current status

National:

The bullfinch occurs throughout most of the UK, although scarce in the north and west. The long term national trend (1970 – 2005) is a decline of 57%, although this appears to have been most dramatic in the early stages of monitoring as the decline 1994 –2005 is 1% nationally.

Regional:

The East of England contained bullfinch in around 50% of 2km tetrads surveyed in the Provisional Suffolk Bird Atlas (1993), but has declined in Eastern England as a whole by 17% 1994-2005.

Local:

3 Current factors affecting bullfinch

Recent analyses of long-term data sets by BTO and RSPB have not pinpointed definite causes of the bullfinch decline. An analysis of CBC data has not found a correlation between the decline and the increase in the populations of sparrowhawk and magpie. Nor has ongoing work on ringing recoveries and nest record card data found strong evidence for a link between the decline and variations in breeding performance or survival. The bullfinch decline is likely instead to involve one or more of the following:

Habitat Loss:

Removal of farmland trees and hedgerows, and a reduction in the quality of remaining hedges due to frequent trimming. This impacts on bullfinches through loss of nesting habitat, particularly hedges and thickets, and loss of food source (buds, seeds and fruit).

Food supply:

Loss of winter food sources through the use of herbicides and loss of winter stubble fields (in common with other declining seed-eating farmland birds). However, the bullfinch does not forage far from hedgerows and woods, and so is much more confined to field margins than other farmland species.

4 Current action

Practical actions that may help to protect habitat for bullfinches include retention of hedgerows and infield trees. ELS options that may be beneficial include enhanced hedgerow management options, buffering woodland edges and hedges and retention and buffering of infield trees.

Bullfinch is a key target species within the Higher Level Stewardship opportunities for the Joint Character Area of Breckland.

Single farm payment cross compliance requirements for hedgerow management including margins and reinforcement of the Hedgerow regulations, may help to provide habitat for this species.

5 Targets

As a minimum, maintain existing 2007 population and range of bullfinch which will be derived from the survey planned for 2007/8.

Expansion targets to be set after the results of the first year surveys (2007) have been received.

6 Actions

Action	Date	Partners
Policy & Legislation		
Ensure Bullfinch, as an LBAP species, is recognised and protected in LDFs in accordance with PPS9.	Annual 2006- 2010	LAs, NE, RSPB, SWT
Ensure understanding and compliance with the Hedgerow Regulations	Annual 2006- 2010	NE, LAs, FWAG, SWT
Species management and protection		
Promote the uptake of agri-environment schemes which benefit this species including where appropriate hedge restoration and creation, gapping hedges with fruit trees/blackthorn, encouraging wide and tall (>4m) hedges and good trimming practise, encouraging hedgerow trees, especially ash.	Annual 2006- 2010	NE, FWAG, RSPB, SWT

Develop a new BAP for traditional orchards, incorporate bullfinch specific needs where suitable.	2007	FWAG, SWT, RSPB, NE.
Research and monitoring		
Encourage local research and continued support of long-term surveys such as the Breeding Bird Survey	Annual 2006- 2010	BTO, SOG, RSPB, NE
Further determine Suffolk bird population by undertaking detailed winter and breeding surveys of 10km squares, 8 tetrads in each to develop detailed baseline data in Suffolk.	2007 and 2008	SOG, BTO
Take all opportunities to feed the information into revision of the targeting of Environmental Stewardship	2007	SOG, NE, FWAG, SWT, RSPB, SCC.
Use hedgerow mapping project when complete to identify significant gaps in hedgerow distribution and combine this with above survey to identify target areas for new hedgerows that are strongholds for bullfinch.	2008	SOG, SBRC.
Advisory		
Promote the sympathetic management of hedgerows and farmland scrub - gapping up hedgerows with fruit trees/blackthorn, wide and tall hedgerows >4m high, good hedge trimming practice, the retention and planting of hedgerow trees especially ash as a winter food source.	Annual 2006- 2010	FWAG, RSPB, SWT, NE.
Produce a Suffolk focused leaflet (one of a series of farmland bird leaflets from Suffolk BAP partners) for promotion to land managers/farmers.	2007	Farmland HWG.
Communications and publicity		
Promote the bullfinch as a species in need of conservation assistance and promote as part of new orchard BAP plan to lever new action.	2007	FWAG, SWT, RSPB, SOG, BTO.
Produce at least one LBAP press release per year that draws attention BAP species.	Annual 2006- 2010	FWAG, RSPB, SWT, LAs

Monitoring of progress:

Reported annually on the UK BAP reporting system BARS Biodiversity Action Reporting system.

Consultation:

Organisations that have been consulted regarding this plan and have agreed to aim to deliver their organisations commitments:

RSPB Kirsty Coutts

FWAG Phil Watson

Natural England Monica O'Donnell, Ian Johnson and Alison Collins

Suffolk County Council Andrew Murray-Wood

SWT Dorothy Casey

Suffolk Biological Records Centre (SBRC) Martin Sanford

Suffolk Ornithologists Group SOG Steve Piotrowski