SUFFOLK LOCAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

Spotted flycatcher
(*Muscicapa striata*)

1 Definition

The spotted flycatcher is an insectivorous summer migrant which utilises open wooded habitats, large gardens and parks as nesting habitat. It has suffered a large decline in numbers, especially being seen less and less on farmland, in recent decades.

Preferred habitats are mature broad-leaved woodland (although it will also use mature conifers), hedgerows with mature trees, parkland and large gardens. Spotted flycatchers feed on invertebrates, either from the tops of trees or flying insects.

2 Current status

National:

The species has been in decline since the early 1960s. Common Bird Census data show a 62% decline in spotted flycatcher populations in woodland habitats and a 70% decline on farmland between 1968 and 1991, although the range had reduced by only 6.6% between the two breeding atlases (1968-72 and 1988-91). The UK population estimate derived from the New Breeding Bird Atlas is 120,000 territories which represents only a quarter of the estimate in the first Atlas.

The long term national trend (1970 – 2004) shows an 83% decline in spotted flycatcher numbers.

Regional:

Spotted Flycatcher has declined by 67% in the East of England between 1994 and 2005 (based on a mean number of 33 Breeding Bird Survey squares per year).

Local:

The Provisional Suffolk Breeding Bird Atlas (1993) shows that the spotted flycatcher is found in around 50% of 2 km tetrads within the county. There is evidence of a local decline in numbers, particularly in the west of the county (Suffolk Birds, 1997).

3 Current factors affecting spotted flycatchers

These are not well known, but may include one or more of the following:

Weather effects. These appear to be important and could have population impacts if long-term climate change occurs. The key factor appears to be summer weather conditions as more birds breed early if temperatures are warmer, and one study found that clutch sizes are larger when there is more sunshine.

Drought in the Sahel region. This has been implicated in the declines of a number of trans-Saharan migrants. The spotted flycatcher passes through the Sahel region en route to wintering grounds in southern Africa. Changes in conditions in the Sahel or the wintering areas could be a factor in the species' decline but no clear link has been established.

Changes in agriculture. Firm data on the importance of this for spotted flycatcher is lacking, but there is growing evidence that a range of birds found on lowland farmland are affected by low invertebrate availability during the summer.

Loss of nest sites. Many spotted flycatchers nest in large trees and there has been a large-scale loss of these in woodland, parks and hedgerows (especially following Dutch elm disease), which are favoured habitats. However, there are no quantitative data on the effect of these losses.

4 Current action

Until recently the spotted flycatcher was not regarded as a species of conservation concern, so little action has been carried out. However, some aspects of broad-leaved woodland management, particularly the creation and maintenance of clearings and wide rides, will have benefited the species.

Provision of nest-boxes (usually for other species) may also have helped spotted flycatchers, particularly in areas with few natural nest sites.

ELS options that will help to provide suitable spotted flycatcher habitat include buffering woodland edges, grass margins and very low input grasslands.

5 Targets

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

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

6 Actions

Action	Date	Partners
Policy & Legislation		
Protect and enhance through planning process – e.g. tree protection orders and appropriate survey.	Annual 2006-2010	**LAs**, SCC, NE, SWT, RSPB
Ensure spotted flycatcher as an LBAP species is recognised and protected in LDFs in accordance with PPS9.	Annual 2006-2010	**LAs, NE,** SWT, RSPB
Species management and protection		
Consider the nesting requirements of the spotted flycatcher when providing nest boxes in areas where this species is found (e.g. country parks, nature reserves)	Annual 2006-2010	**SCC**, LAs, RSPB, SWT, National Trust
Undertake a survey involving the public for spotted flycatchers, instigate community engagement and provide conservation advise to landowners for this species.	2007	**SWT**.
Ensure data from survey is sent to SBRC to enhance county data.	2007	**SWT**, SBRC.
Explore and implement new nest boxes on other sites such as school/parish/common grounds where suitable habitat exists.	2007-2008	**SCC,** LAs, PCs, RSPB, NT, SWT.
Establish spotted flycatcher in the new built environment plan.	2007	**SCC**, SWT, RSPB, LAs.
Promote the importance of farmland ponds as a source of flying insect food for spotted flycatcher.	Annual 2006-2010	**FWAG,** SWT, RSPB
Consider further action when RSPB research has reported back later in 2007	2007	**RSPB**
Research and monitoring		
Encourage local research and continued support of long-term surveys such as the Breeding Bird Survey		**BTO**, SOG, RSPB, NT, 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
Advisory		
Encourage uptake of agri-environment schemes to provide suitable habitat for spotted flycatcher.		**FWAG**, SWT, RSPB, NE
Produce a Suffolk focused fact sheet for	2007	**SWT,** SOG.

spotted flycather to promote to a range of land managers.		
Discuss with Woodland HWG how spotted flycatcher needs can be incorporated and opportunities in the woodland grant scheme.	2007	**BAP officer.**
Communications and publicity		
Promote the spotted flycatcher as a species in need of conservation assistance.		**SWT**, RSPB, SOG, LAs, NE
Produce at least one LBAP press release per year that draws attention BAP species.	Annual 2006-2010	**RSPB**, SOG, 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 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
National Trust Stuart Warrington

Published February 2007 Final Version