

Nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*)

1 Definition

The Nightjar is a summer migrant that utilises heathland and young conifer plantations as nesting and feeding habitat. Its range declined drastically over the last century, but has now begun to increase in numbers. The Nightjar has a very fragmented and localised range.

2 Current status

2.1 National

The Nightjar has been declining in numbers and range for much of this century, reaching a low point of 2,100 (adjusted from 1784) males in 1981, with a decline in range of 52% between 1968-72 and 1992. There was a partial recovery in the population which reached 3,400 (adjusted from 3093) males in 1992. In the national survey of 2004 the total number of males counted was 4131, adjusted to 4606 to account for unsurveyed habitat. The adjusted total represented a 36% increase in 12 years. Nightjars were recorded in 275 10km squares, a 2.6% increase since 1992. However there was evidence of population declines and range contractions in northwest Britain. In 2004 57% of Nightjars were associated with forest plantations (similar to 1992) and 59% with heathland (slightly higher than 1992). The continued increase in the population is probably due to habitat protection, management and restoration of heathland, and the continued availability of clear-fell/young plantations.

2.2 Local

Between 1981 and 1992, the population of males in Suffolk increased by 164% to 317 primarily as a result of increased suitable habitat created by the '87 storm. The number of sites where these individuals were found had also increased at a similar rate (see Appendix for list of known sites). The 2004 survey has revealed that contrary to the national trends the Suffolk population has declined by 11% with only 284 males recorded.
(NB. only unadjusted figures available)

2.3 Natural Areas

Breckland, Suffolk Coast & Heaths.

3 Current factors affecting Nightjars in Suffolk

- The area of heathland in the UK has undergone a dramatic reduction during the course of the last century due to agricultural land claim, afforestation and development. It is estimated that 40% of England's lowland heathland has been destroyed since the 1950s.
- Where heathland lacks appropriate management, it will become unsuitable as nesting habitat due to invasion by bushes and trees.
- Nightjars require extensive areas of suitable feeding habitat, especially uncultivated land. The loss of such habitats within a few kilometres of the nesting area may result in a decline in the number of birds.
- It is possible that a decline in the availability of large insects caused by changes in agriculture (such as the indirect effects of pesticides) and/or climatic change, may have affected Nightjar populations.

The agricultural environment schemes such as the Brecks ESA have been biased towards stone curlew to the detriment of nightjars

- In commercial forests, Nightjars nest in the young stages of plantations, while there is still bare ground between trees. If no other suitable habitat becomes available in other new or young stands, local population declines could occur as the recently planted blocks mature.
- In Thetford Forest, Nightjars declined from 420 males in 1998 to 349 males in 2004, following an earlier peak in the availability of clear-fell areas, but the 2004 total is still a near 10% increase on the 1992 total of 319 males.
- The steady increase in nightjar numbers that occurred in the 1990's now appears to have reversed with the 2004 survey indicating an 11% decline. The losses are most evident in the Sandlings forests where following the replanting after the 87' Storm many of the plantations have reached an age where they are unsuitable for nightjars.
- Research indicates that Nightjars are vulnerable to disturbance by people and particularly dogs. It is likely that Open Access will affect them. New housing developments near to heathlands could be detrimental to Nightjar.

4 Current action

4.1 Protection

The Nightjar is protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, and is listed on Annex 1 of the EC Birds Directive and Appendix II of the Bern Convention.

Both the Sandlings and Breckland strongholds were designated Special Protection Areas in 2002

4.2 Management, research and guidance

- Detailed research into the ecology of Nightjars nesting in Thetford Forest has been carried out by the RSPB with FC help. FC's forestry practice is now aimed at maintaining a constant area of young plantation as good habitat for breeding Nightjars (included in the Thetford Forest Design Plan) and will be incorporated into the Sandlings Forests plans
- Specific work by the Sandlings Group has demonstrated the potential benefit for Nightjars by restoring heathland and managing in ways appropriate to the individual locations.
- Monitoring the effects of Open Access on ground nesting birds will be important to inform visitor management.
- Heathland restoration and re-creation in the Sandlings continues to provide new and improved habitat to maintain and expand local populations.

5 Targets

- 1 *Maintain a local population of minimum 284 churring males (based on 2004 survey) in Suffolk by 2010.*
- 2 *Expand population to 350 by 2010*
- 3 *Maintain the current range of occupation on known sites by 2010 and 2015*

6 Nightjar: Proposed action with lead agencies

Action	Achieve by date	Partners
POLICY AND LEGISLATION		
Ensure that the needs of nightjars are included in agri-environment schemes and land management policies during SSSI and agri-environment reviews.	Annual 2006 - 2010	NE, RSPB, SWT, FWAG
Ensure Nightjar friendly management in the regions Forests by including and implementing specific targets for available habitat in Forest design Plans.	Annual 2006- 2010	FC, NE, RSPB
Ensure all relevant BAP species including nightjar are considered in the AONB management review discussions during 2007.	Annual 2007- 2010	SCHU,FC, NE, RSPB, SWT, SCC, SCDC.
Review open access and its effects on ground nesting birds.	2010	NE
Ensure nightjar as an LBAP species and its habitat, is recognized and protected in Local Development Frameworks in accordance with PPS9.	Annual 2006- 2010	SCC, NE, RSPB, SWT, FC, SCDC, SEBC, IBC and FHDC.
Encourage the creation of new recreational areas, including dog walking facilities, when building new developments to prevent added pressure on sensitive habitats and species.		SCC, NE, RSPB, SWT, FC, SCDC, SEBC, IBC and FHDC.
Further the development of SSSI conservation objectives for the nightjar within the SPA's.	Annual 2006- 2010	NE
SITE SAFEGUARD AND MANAGEMENT		
Ensure existing Nightjar sites are appropriately managed to conservation objectives through condition assessment of SSSI/SPA features, annual counts on heathland, and the next national survey.	Annual 2006- 2010	NE, FC, RSPB, SWT, NT, MOD, SCDC, Brecks Project, BTO.
Ensure nightjar sites are protected from development by monitoring planning permission requests.	Annual 2006- 2010	SCC, SCDC, FHDC, SEBC, SWT, IBC, NE

Continue management of restored habitat on 300ha of Thetford forest to maintain its ecological value as potential feeding and nesting areas for Nightjar.	Annual 2006- 2010	FC, NE, RSPB
Manage rotational clearfell in the Sandlings and Thetford Forests to optimize habitat for Nightjars within SPA's	Annual 2006- 2010	FC
Seek opportunities to recreate heathland on forestry, arable and ex-mineral working sites, especially to extend or link existing sites using SBRC opportunity mapping data, Living Landscape initiative and agri-environment schemes.	Annual 2006- 2010	FC, SWT, RSPB, NT, NE, SBRC, Brecks Project
RESEARCH AND MONITORING		
Ensure the impact of any changes in forest management practice, which could affect nightjar populations detrimentally are assessed before implementation.	Annual 2006-10	FC, NE.
Continue annual monitoring on heathland sites (see appendix 1). RSPB annual sample survey in Suffolk Brecks Forests, 6 yearly SPA survey and at least 3 yearly interim surveys in Sandlings Forests.	Annual 2006-10	RSPB, SWT, NE, SOG, FC, NT, SCDC, Brecks Project
Collate research on the effects of open access/human disturbance on ground nesting birds.	2010	NE, RSPB, BTO.
Monitor the effects of Open Access on ground nesting birds by logging visitor behaviour on Access land.	Annual 2006- 2010	NE, SCC, RSPB, NT, SWT
Monitor the effects of habitat management and potential conflicts between the requirements for different species on populations of Nightjars.	Annual 2006- 2010	NE
Encourage research into the use of habitat outside breeding areas for feeding and the effects of agricultural management on breeding and feeding sites.	2010	NE, SWT, RSPB, BTO
ADVISORY		
Provide advice to landowners and managers on management of sites for the benefit of nightjars.	Annual 2006-10	RSPB, SWT, NE, Brecks project, FWAG

Encourage the support of low intensity agricultural systems using Defra funded schemes in the wider countryside	2006-10	NE, SWT, RSPB, FWAG
COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLICITY		
Use the nightjar as a flagship species to publicise the conservation and the sympathetic management of heathland to benefit all associated species. Undertake at least two press releases raising the profile of this BAP species each year. Produce a heathland leaflet and publicise on websites.	2006-10	SCHU, Brecks Project, SWT, RSPB, NT, FC, NE.
Engage with dog walkers and groups: distribute SCC Dogs and Access Land leaflet; include restrictions on signage; hold an awareness event for dog walkers.		SCC, NE, FC, SWT, NT, RSPB, Brecks Project, SCHU

References:

Conway, G et al 2005, The status and distribution of European Nightjars *Caprimulgus europaeus* in the UK in 2004. Bird Study (submitted)

Monitoring of progress:

Reported annually on the UK BAP reporting system BARS Biodiversity ActionReporting system.

Objectives outside current action plan:

Encourage the creation of recreation areas, including dog walking facilities, near existing centres of population.	Annual 2006- 2010	SCC, SCDC, FHDC, SEBC, IBC, SWT, NE
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List of organisations that have been consulted regarding this plan and have agreed to deliver their organisations commitments:

Brecks Project, Abbigail Stancliffe-Vaughan
Forestry Commission (FC), Neal Armour-chelu
Farming Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG), Phil Watson
Ministry of Defence (MOD), Piers Chantry
National Trust (NT), Stuart Warrington and Grant Lohoar
Natural England (NE), Bill Nickson, Monica O' Donnell, Nick Sibbet
Sandlings Group and RSPB Rob Macklin
Suffolk Wildlife Trust (SWT), David Mason

Suffolk Coastal District Council (SCDC), John Davies
Forest Heath District Council (FHDC), Guy Belcher
Suffolk County Council (SCC), Sue Hooton
Ipswich Borough Council (IBC) Steve Hunt
St. Edmundsbury Borough Council John Smithson
Suffolk Coasts and Heaths AONB Simon Hooton
British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) Mick Wright
Suffolk BAP officer Mary Norden

Appendix 1:

Sandlings Sites
Aldringham Walks
Blaxhall Common
Dunwich Forest
Dunwich Heath
Minsmere
Rendlesham Forest
Tunstall Common
Tunstall Forest
Sutton and Hollesley Heaths
Snape Warren
Walberswick
Westleton Heath

Brecks sites
Brandon
Cavenham Heath
High Lodge
Ickworth Park
Kings Forest
Knettishall Heath
Mildenhall Wood
Santon Downham
Thetford Heath
Thetford Warren
Wangford Warren