

SUFFOLK LOCAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

Tree Sparrow

(*Passer montanus*)

1 Definition

The Tree Sparrow was once a common and widespread species across the UK countryside, found on farmland wherever there is a plentiful supply of seeds throughout the year and insects in the breeding season. Availability of insect food for the young, and a good supply of nesting holes are essential for successful breeding.

2 Current status

National:

Numbers declined by 93% on farmland between 1968 and 1999 (based on data collected as part of the BTO's Common Bird Census). The UK range has undergone marked change between the two Atlas periods, with a contraction in the west and south of England, and has continued subsequently, with many local extinctions occurring during the 1990s. The UK population was estimated at 68,000 territories in 2000 (1988-91 Atlas update using CBC/BBS trend). The long term national trend is a 95% decline 1970 – 1999. BBS trend UK: 1994-2005 is +23% (2004-2005 = -15%), England 1994-2005: +8% (2004-2005 = -18%)

Regional:

The regional population has fluctuated over the course of BBS – 1994-2003: -15%, 1994-2004: +26% (1994-1996 population increased, but 1996-2003 was below 1994 level, 2004 was above 1994 level)

Local:

Results of the 2007 survey in Suffolk will inform this. V&FA data would assist with this but may not be accessible.

3 Current factors affecting Tree Sparrow

The recent decline of the Tree Sparrow has occurred at the same time as decreases in the numbers and/or range of other farmland birds which share its diet of grass, wildflower seeds and some cereal grains. It is likely that the decline in Tree Sparrow may be due to changes in agricultural practice, both in the UK and in their wintering grounds in south-west Europe. These include the increased use of herbicides and fertilisers, the switch from spring-sown to autumn-sown crops and the consequent loss of winter stubble fields, and the general reduction in farmland habitat diversity due to the loss of mixed farming and increased specialisation. Breeding performance has improved substantially as population sizes have decreased, suggesting that decreases in productivity were not responsible for the decline. It is more likely that

survival was the critical demographic measure, although ring-recovery analyses have produced equivocal results because of small sample sizes.

Tree sparrows tend to form loose local colonies and where these are supported with nest boxes and ample seed supplies local populations can be stable and increasing.

4 Current action

The remaining “colonies” of Tree sparrows tend to be concentrated in mixed farming areas with access to at least small wetland patches and artificial nest sites or old/pollard trees. There is usually abundant seed provision including supplementary feeding directly from gardens or indirectly from shooting interests.

Several of these sites have been identified and new sites are being sought. Once identified it is important that the favourable management is maintained, and if possible enhanced using all possible means, both within and beyond the scope of agri- environment schemes.

Key to success is the plentiful supply of seeds throughout the year and this should include supplementary feeding to ensure over winter survival and maintain the condition of adults during the breeding season. There should be supplementary provision of nest sites to allow colonies to expand. New boxes should be in place by the end of the breeding season rather than in early spring, as new nest sites are partially established at the end of the breeding season. [Summers Smith 1995]

5 Targets

As a minimum, maintain existing 2007 colonies and implement all possible means to protect and enhance them which will be derived from the planned 2007/2008 survey. (Expansion targets to be set after the results of the first year surveys (2007) have been analysed).

6 Actions

Action	Date	Partners
Policy & Legislation		
Promote the uptake of agri-environment schemes which benefit this species, and consider the habitat and food requirements of this species within the scheme options.	Annual 2006- 2010	NE, FWAG, RSPB, SWT
Species management and protection		
Encourage the longer retention of game covers and the provision of supplementary feeding in areas where the species is or may be present.	Annual 2006- 2010	FWAG, NE, RSPB, SWT
Visit and survey current and new sites providing information and support to owners/managers	2007	SWT FWAG, RSPB
Promote conservation headlands, buffer strips, wetland features, set-aside, wild bird cover and over-wintered stubbles	Annual 2006- 2010	FWAG, NE, RSPB, SWT, LAs
Encourage the retention and maintenance of pollards and other "hole" trees, as well as bushes and farm buildings that may contain nesting holes by all land managers.	Annual 2006- 2010	FWAG, NE, RSPB, SWT, LAs
Research and monitoring		
Ask the public for information about sitings and breeding of this species in the county	Annual 2006- 2010	SWT,SOG
Contact Shelly Folland at RSPB to discuss options for asking landowners to release Volunteer and Farmer Alliance data relating to tree sparrow.	2007	FWAG, RSPB
Identify the distribution extent and size of colonies across the county during the 2007 breeding season and continue monitoring in future years	2007- 2010	SWT,SOG,RSPB, FWAG
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
Undertake ringing and ringing recovery at known breeding and wintering locations	2007 2008	SOG, SBRC
Advisory		

Focus advice to individual land managers that support colonies of tree sparrow and use survey to inform this.	2007 - 2010	FWAG, SOG, SWT.
Communications and publicity		
Promote the Tree Sparrow as a species in need of conservation assistance and produce at least one LBAP press release per year that draws attention to this species.	Annual 2006-2010	SWT FWAG, NE, RSPB, SWT, LAs
See R & M 1	2007	SWT

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 and Steve Piotrowski

Suffolk Biological Records Centre (SBRC) Martin Sanford