

# Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*



Image: Andy Hay (rspb-images.co.uk)

## How to identify a turtle dove

- Smaller than any other UK pigeon or dove.
- Orange eyes
- Black & white striped patch on neck
- Black tail with thin white edge
- Chestnut & black diamonds on wings
- Pale grey-lilac head & breast

## Habitat and requirements

- Summer migrant to UK, from April-September
- Mainly found in east and south-east England
- Sunny, warm and dry arable areas
- Feed on small seeds of arable plants
- Nest in mature scrub and hedgerow (over 4m tall and wide)
- Water source

## National Status

The population of breeding turtle dove in the UK is currently halving in number every six years. They have suffered a 96% UK population decline since 1970 and a 74% decline across Europe since 1980. A bird that was once common across much of England is now retreating into an ever shrinking patch of East Anglia and South East of England, with Bird Atlas data revealing that their range shrank by 52% between 1970 and 2010. The UK population was estimated to consist of 14,000 breeding territories in 2009, however this is now likely to be much lower and the current population is estimated to be between 6-7000 territories.

## Suffolk Status

Turtle doves are found throughout Suffolk. Estimates from the latest BTO Bird Atlas (2007-2011) indicate that the county supports almost 17% of the UK population. From public sighting records 2012-2013, turtle doves were reported from 89% of the 10km grid squares in Suffolk.

There are records from: Aldringham, Flatford, Hadleigh, Hindeclay, Icklingham Plains, Kelsale-cum-Carlton, Lackford Lakes, Landguard, Minsmere, North Warren, Snape, South Elmham, Stour Estuary, Stutton and Westhorpe

## THREATS TO TURTLE DOVES IN SUFFOLK

- ⇒ Loss of suitable foraging habitat.
- ⇒ Loss of suitable nesting habitat.
- ⇒ Possibly disease - research is currently underway to determine how large an impact it is having.

# ASSOCIATED HABITAT FACTSHEETS

Arable field margins, Wood Pasture and Parkland, Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland, Traditional Orchards, Hedgerows

## CONSERVATION ACTIONS

### Landowners/ managers:

- ◆ Create cultivated plots or margins to allow natural regeneration of arable plants on lighter soils.
- ◆ Establish a bespoke nectar-flower seed mix developed to provide food for turtle doves throughout the breeding season.
- ◆ Maintain areas of mature scrub and hedgerow by managing on 3 year rotation. Do not undertake management between 1st March to 31 August.

These options can be included as part of agri-environment schemes.

### In the garden:

- ◆ Ensure a variety of small seeds are available: white millet, wheat, canary, rape and mustard seed.
- ◆ Clean feeding areas- essential to prevent disease transmission.
- ◆ Provide a source of clean, shallow water for drinking.
- ◆ Fit cats with a collar and bell to alert vulnerable birds.
- ◆ Provide a source of clean shallow water for drinking.
- ◆ Report sightings to Suffolk Biological Record Centre BRC to enhance county and national data of turtle dove distributions ([www.suffolkbrc.org.uk/](http://www.suffolkbrc.org.uk/))

## WHERE TO FIND FURTHER INFORMATION

- ◆ Operation Turtle Dove [www.operationturtledove.org](http://www.operationturtledove.org). *For advice contact Samantha Lee - Turtle Dove Conservation Adviser*. RSPB Stour Estuary Reserves Office, Manningtree. Tel: 01206 391153, 07894802267
- ◆ RSPB Discover and Enjoy Nature  
[www.rspb.org.uk/discoverandenjoynature/discoverandlearn/birdguide/name/t/turtledove](http://www.rspb.org.uk/discoverandenjoynature/discoverandlearn/birdguide/name/t/turtledove)
- ◆ JNCC Priority Species [http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/\\_speciespages/589.pdf](http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/_speciespages/589.pdf)

## SPECIES DESIGNATIONS

Birds Directive, Annex 2.2

NERC Act 2006 Sec 41

Red Data Book 2009, Birds of Conservation Concern – Red

CITES, Annex A

Biodiversity Action Plan UK list of priority species - Priority species

**Contact :** Gen Broad, Biodiversity Officer, Suffolk Biodiversity Partnership

Tel: 01473 264308, Mobile: 078948 85337, email: [gen.broad@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:gen.broad@suffolk.gov.uk)

[www.suffolkbiodiversity.org](http://www.suffolkbiodiversity.org)



Suffolk Biodiversity  
Partnership

*Priority species and habitats factsheets published thanks to SBP partners*