

# SUFFOLK LOCAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

## Turtle Dove

### *(Streptopelia turtur)*

#### 1 Definition

The turtle dove is a summer migrant to the UK with its national stronghold in the south east of England. It is a bird of warm, dry arable areas, but like many other farmland birds, it has suffered a large decline in recent decades. It generally occurs below 350 m in a variety of fairly dry, sunny, sheltered habitats. Turtle doves need sources of seed as food from late April until August, as well as tall thorny hedges or scrub for nesting.

#### 2 Current status

##### **National:**

The UK population of turtle doves has fallen by 81% between 1970 and 2004. The turtle dove population was at a high at the time of the first breeding atlas (1968-72). However, the Common Bird Census index has indicated a fall of around 60% in the population since this time, and the New Breeding Atlas (1988-91) shows a marked decrease in range of around 25%. The latest population estimate, taken from the new atlas, is approximately 75,000 territories.

##### **Regional:**

In the East of England region, the population of turtle doves declined by 46% between 1994 and 2005.

##### **Local:**

Between 1968-72 and 1988-91, this species disappeared from one 10 km square in Suffolk. The turtle dove is found throughout Suffolk and has been consistently found in over 50% of the squares surveyed by the Breeding Bird Survey.

#### 3 Current factors affecting turtle doves

The decline of the turtle dove has occurred at the same time as decreases in the numbers and/or range of other farmland birds which share its diet of grass and weed seeds. It is therefore likely that its decline may be due, at least in part, to changes in agricultural practice such as the increased use of herbicides and fertilisers, which have reduced the quantity and variety of wildflowers on arable land.

Turtle doves nest in large hedges and mature scrub, and retreat to the safety of this dense vegetation when disturbed. The loss of features such as overgrown hedgerows and hawthorn thickets on farmland is likely to have had an adverse effect on the population.

As a long-distance migrant, the turtle dove faces threats, particularly from hunting, outside the UK. It is heavily shot in France and the Iberian peninsula. Tens of thousands of birds are also shot in their wintering areas, mainly Senegal, and many more are killed on migration through Morocco.

In the UK, turtle doves are associated with light soils in the drier parts of the country and the decrease in range of the species has been most marked in the north and west. Declines are probably driven by intensification of management and a loss of mixed farming.

Little is known of the effects of habitat or climatic changes in the wintering grounds of the species. Turtle doves spend part of the year, particularly February and March, in acacia scrub in the Sahel region, and recent drought conditions and habitat destruction there have coincided with a steep decline in numbers.

#### **4 Current action**

Until recently the turtle dove was not regarded to be a species of conservation concern, so little action for it has been carried out. However, turtle dove has been a target species for some agri-environment schemes in England for a number of years. The original National BAP plan was published in 1998.

However when arable options were added into the Countryside Stewardship Scheme in 2000 (following on from the Arable Stewardship Scheme pilot which ran in parts of western Suffolk) turtle dove was one of the 7 main target species and where the species was present, Agreements could be tailored to include suitable arable and hedge/trees options. Rotational set-aside will have benefited the species, although this has been significantly reduced in area in recent years.

ELS options that can benefit turtle dove include conservation headlands, uncropped cultivated field margins and fallow plots.

Turtle dove is a key target species within the Higher Level Stewardship opportunities for the Joint Character Areas of Suffolk Coast and Heaths, The Broads, south Suffolk and North Essex Claylands, and the South Norfolk and High Suffolk Claylands.

#### **5 Targets**

As a minimum, maintain existing 2007 population and the existing range of turtle dove which will be derived from the survey planned for 2007/2008.

Expansion targets to be set after the first year of the survey is complete in 2007.

## 6 Actions

Action	Date	Partners
<b>Policy &amp; Legislation</b>		
Ensure turtle dove, as an LBAP species, is recognised and protected in LDFs in accordance with PPS9.	Annual 2006- 2010	NE, LAs, SWT, RSPB
Ensure understanding and compliance with the Hedgerow regulations.	Annual 2006- 2010	NE, LAs, FWAG, SWT.
<b>Species management and protection</b>		
Promote the uptake of agri-environment schemes which benefit this species and consider the habitat and food requirements of this species when deciding the scheme options to be taken up.	Annual 2006- 2010	NE, FWAG, RSPB, SWT
<b>Research and monitoring</b>		
Undertake a survey involving the public for turtle dove, instigate community engagement and provide conservation advice to landowners for this species.	2007	SWT.
Ensure data from survey is sent to SBRC to enhance county data.	2007	SWT, SBRC.
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
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 turtle dove.	2008	SOG, SBRC.
<b>Advisory</b>		
Promote the uptake of boundary and infield options, such as uncropped cultivated margins and conservation headlands through the summer period.	Annual 2006- 2010.	FWAG, RSPB, NE, SWT
Promote the gapping up of hedgerows with hawthorn/blackthorn, rotational coppicing of hedgerows with a complete hedge structure (avoid trimming), promote scrub and copses and cultivated uncropped	Annual 2006 - 2010	FWAG, RSPB, NE, SWT.

margins (to provide food source).		
Ensure that all LBAP partners have copies of the RSPB Farming for Birds and Farming for Wildlife leaflets which include turtle dove.	2006	<b>RSPB</b>
Produce a Suffolk focused fact sheet for turtle dove to promote to a range of land managers.	2007	<b>SWT, SOG.</b>
<b>Communications and publicity</b>		
Promote the turtle dove 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	<b>SWT, FWAG, NE, RSPB and SCC.</b>

**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

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