

Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

STATUS

Widespread and common finch of woodlands and mature hedgerows, National red list (RSPB 1996), UK Steering Group Medium List B



WHAT IS THE BULLFINCH ?

Bullfinches show the typical small but bulky frame of all finches. Whilst male bullfinches are brightly coloured the species has a subdued song and a tendency not to display itself, making the species difficult to census accurately. The bullfinch is a fairly common and widespread species found in woodland, orchards and to a lesser extent farmland. The species shows similar summer and winter distributions, ringing recoveries showing that they rarely move more than a few kilometres.

Bullfinches are predominantly seed-eaters, in reality 'seed predators' but their habit of eating tree buds means they are considered pests in fruit-growing areas. The species requires dense bushes or trees for nesting.

WHERE ARE THEY FOUND IN THE UK?

Bullfinches are found throughout most of the UK, the major gaps coincide with those areas of treeless habitat such as the Fens. Numbers of bullfinch in Britain have decreased from 300,000-350,000 pairs in 1984 to 190,000 pairs in 1988-1991. The species is common and widespread across much of mainland Europe and may be expanding in the north and west of its range.

WHY IS THE BULLFINCH OF CONSERVATION IMPORTANCE?

The Common Bird Census estimated that there were declines in bullfinch populations of 75% on farmland and 47% in woodland between 1968 and 1991.

The bullfinch is one of a number of lowland birds that have undergone serious declines in population in the latter half of the twentieth century.

THE BULLFINCH IN THE DURHAM AREA

HOW HEALTHY ARE THE POPULATIONS OF THE BULLFINCH ?

Bullfinches remain common in the Durham area, though some local decline may have occurred in recent years.

HOW MUCH DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE BULLFINCH IN THE DURHAM AREA ?

Within the Plan area relatively high numbers occur in the area between Durham City and Consett. The density in the rest of the area is lower with only negligible numbers in the west, which has seen a significant contraction in range.

WHERE HAS IT BEEN FOUND IN THE DURHAM AREA ?

The species is widespread across lowland parts of the Plan area and few woodlands, deciduous or coniferous do not play host to it. It is less common in the west, although it does penetrate into the uplands along the wooded dales of our main river systems.

BULLFINCHS ARE AT RISK FROM:

Removal of trees and hedgerows – removing suitable nesting habitat and food sources.

Inappropriate management of hedgerows – bullfinches require dense hedges.

Loss of mature woodland.

Agricultural intensification including increased herbicides removing available weed seeds, and loss of field margins – bullfinches normally forage close to hedgerows.

Loss of winter food supplies.

BULLFINCHS BENEFIT FROM:

Improved hedgerow management.

Maintenance and management of mature woodland.

The biodiversity-friendly maintenance of field margins and areas of semi-natural habitat in farmed land.

IMPORTANT HABITATS FOR THE BULLFINCH:

Broad-leaved woodland
Hedgerows
Orchards

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OTHER SPECIES ACTION PLANS COVERING ISSUES RELEVANT TO BULLFINCH

Spotted flycatcher
Lemon slug
Ash black slug

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N.B. ** indicates action plan produced in 1998

* indicates action plan produced in 2000

THE BULLFINCH AND THE LAW:

The Bullfinch is protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981).

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TARGETS FOR THE CONSERVATION OF BULLFINCH IN THE DURHAM AREA:

DATE

Target 1 *Maintain and enhance the breeding population of bullfinch.* **ONGOING**

Target 2 *Protect and maintain the wintering and passage populations of bullfinch.* **ONGOING**

Target 3 *Monitor both breeding and wintering numbers of bullfinch.* **2004**

BULLFINCH ACTIONS

ACTION	DATE	POSSIBLE PARTNERS	MEETS TARGET NO.
<u>POLICY AND LEGISLATION</u>			
1. Seek designation for important breeding sites as County Wildlife Sites.	2009	EN, DWT, LAs	1, 2
<u>RESEARCH AND MONITORING</u>			
2. Develop monitoring scheme for breeding bullfinch	2004	DBC, RSPB, DBAP	3
<u>ADVISORY</u>			
3. Ensure woodlands with good populations of bullfinch are appropriately managed.	2004	EN, RSPB, DBAP	1
4. Ensure appropriate management of hedgerows	2004	EN, RSPB, DBAP, FC, Site managers, Land owners	1